

Introduction:

This is life invented. Invent the life you want to lead. Invent the life you want to lead. Be compassionate, be creative, the possibilities are limitless. Go Broncos.

(Intro music)

j:

Doing anything for the very first time can sometimes be a little nerve-racking. Make the experience being the first in your family to go to college and well it could feel like you're entering a whole new world. In this episode of Life Invented, we step into the shoes of first generation college students. Whether you've experienced it or not, hear from a few students, alumni, and the director of the LEAD Scholars program to gain a little insight and inspiration. Let's go!

Okay, in way of introduction we'd like to get a few details from each of you, so as we like to say: Please dish yo' deets.

Isaac Marcia (IM):

My name is Isaac Marcia from Los Angeles, California, born and raised there. My family are all immigrants which makes me a first generation American, so my mom's side of the family is from Guatemala, and my dad's side of the family is from El Salvador. Throughout my experience here I've been involved in a lot of leadership roles, specifically one that I took, like, a really large portion of my life was, uh, SHPE which is the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. It's, like, really oriented to empowerment of Latinos in engineering and as, like, a professional national organization as well. I felt, like, really reaching out to people like me and, like, communities with low socioeconomic status and stuff like that. I felt like that really had an effect on me and something I've done in, like, all my four years here at Santa Clara. Yeah, I've just kind of been an active member of my community in that way.

Trevor Romele (TR):

I am Trevor Romele, graduated in 2015 from Santa Clara with a degree in Marketing and a minor in OMIS. My tribe is from Santa Cruz mountains but now I consider my tribe in San Francisco. Most days you can find me at work; I work at Adobe as a program manager. Most days on the weekend you can find me hanging with friends, golfing, skydiving, doing some activity I enjoy. Um, being a first-gen college student I think, uh, three words I'd describe it as: opportunity, challenging, and I think rewarding.

Beau Scott (BS):

Hi, I'm Beau. I'm a junior Poli-Sci and Philosophy double-major with an emphasis in Pre-Law. Originally from all over the place, but these days you can pretty much find most of my family in the East Bay so we're kinda close. Really, really passionate about public policy, again, as it pertains to social justice, kind of looking more at housing policy and the disparities in that, kind of examining that a little more.

Dr. Erin Kimura (EK):

I'm Dr. Erin Kimura-Welsh, Director of the LEAD Scholars program. My tribe is from Seattle and from Hawaii. Most days you can find me in the LEAD Scholars Program office. I'm the director of the LEAD Scholars Program. I'm most passionate about helping first generation college students become successful here at Santa Clara University and more broadly an advocate for educational equity.

Raylene Hernandez (RH):

My name is Raylene Hernandez. My tribe, I would say, ethnically is from Spain, Mexico, Germany, and Ireland, but locally San Jose. On most days you can probably find me in San Filipino or Xavier RLC. I'm a Community Facilitator there, so a lot of my time there is spent with residents and just enjoying life with them. I intern at Planned Parenthood so you can see me there a few hours a week, I babysit and do private tutoring. I also work in housing and I also work in Malley, so recreation sports. I'm a Women's and Gender Studies major, so for me, inclusivity and diversity is a big part of my life and a big part of what I would like to do with my life. Women's reproductive rights are a big thing for me; I see that a lot in Planned Parenthood and activism surrounding that.

j:

Trevor, you mentioned many years ago receiving an email in your inbox. Tell us about that email and what did that ignite.

TR:

I was originally gonna be going to college in San Diego and ended up getting into Santa Clara and then received this email and it was kind of, you know, "We have this program at Santa Clara called LEAD and we're interested if you wanted to join." And, you know, she listed out some information about the program, you know, first generation and then, you know, some benefits behind it and one of them that stood out to me was, like, priority registration and you get to move in early. And so, I remember thinking to myself "Well, what does that even mean? What does priority registration mean? Why is it good to move in early? You know, what's the catch? What do I have to give in order to get this?" And frankly there wasn't anyone I could ask so I remember, you know, going on Google and looking up all the stuff and trying to figure out what it meant, one, and these are benefits but, again, what do I need to give, how do I get these. And so, but I ended up saying yes. I was like, alright I'll take a risk, I'll try it out. I ended up saying yes. And in retrospect, it was one of the best pre-college decisions I made.

j:

Isaac, like you know, what was your first impression? How did you get introduced to LEAD?

IM:

The way I got introduced was through the email, and I remember when I first saw it, I was like "Oh I have no idea what this is. Like, as a first generation college student, I didn't really realize that being a first generation college student would be anything specific or particular to like be

notified about. So I was just like “Oh someone’s done their research and, uh, knows that I don’t know what I’m doing.” So I was just like “I’ll take the help, thank you very much!”

j:

Raylene, what about you?

RH:

Getting that email I just remember telling my parents, “Oh, like, this is so cool. Like there’s a program that can help me in any way. I’m not gonna know anybody going to Santa Clara and none of my family went to college and like why not try it?” I just thought, if somebody is offering an opportunity to be in a program, whatever program that may be, priority registration I assumed had to do with classes and I was like, “Okay, well, why not.”

j:

Love it. Beau, what, uh, do you have a similar story. Like what was your experience and what was going on at that time when you probably received that email?

BS:

I actually got something in the actual mail. I remember it pretty vividly because it was my mom and I. We were sitting in her car, it’s just us. She opens up the letter and she sees it and she reads it and she’s saying “Beau you have to do this.” And I read it and I’m like “I don’t know what this is”. And, uh, originally we thought it was like honors program type thing and so I was like “I don’t know, I’m not that smart, I can’t really do that.” Just further reading and further research we just found out more about it, and of course the priority registration was big. But, uh, she just kept on pushing me and eventually she just says “Beau, you know, I didn’t go to college. I’m not going to be able to help you with really, any of this, so you really need to accept all the help you really can get.” And so I don’t know if I went quite to the last day, but it was getting there and getting there and ‘cause I wasn’t even sure if I was going to go to Santa Clara. Once I found out that I was, you know, I hopped on and it was the best decision I’ve made

j:

Thank you mom! Did you thank your mom?

BS:

Oh every day.

j:

(Laughing) So uh, Erin, as the department and one of the folks who developed this, why was LEAD created? What was the need and, uh, what’s the intent behind these invitations?

EK:

The LEAD Scholars Program started back in 2003 and we really identified at the University, a need to serve underrepresented students and try to figure out what that was going to look like.

And really identify first generation college students as a group who could really benefit from, um, additional support. Really this, kind of, meets this intersection of many students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We have a number of commuter students who participate in the program. But this all-encompassing experience as first generation college students.

j:

Can you talk about, in more detail, like what Santa Clara observed about and why they felt this was a need that needed to be filled?

EK:

In general, the university as a whole is a hard place to navigate. You know, a lot of different departments, a lot of different processes and policies. So, you know, I think for us it was really realizing that first-generation college students, you know, they didn't have parents to help them navigate, of course, the University. And so really wanting to provide the support that would help them develop a community with each other, so they could connect with each other. And they support each other in so many big and small ways, that I, some I hear about and some ways I don't. But just the way in which they walk through this experience together, um, support each other through challenges, feed each other on dining points, you know, that they're giving each other. You know, all the little and big ways they support each other. So really, you know, systemically helping them navigate the University but also creating a community for them as well that they can rely on--both the staff and advisors, but also, you know, each other.

j:

There are students out there that will be listening to this that will be in similar positions as all of you. Still even today, you know, lots of first generation college students. What was going on in your senior year that especially allowed you to look at this invitation in a positive way to say, "Sure, yes I'd love to accept that invitation"?

RH:

I actually didn't want to originally go to Santa Clara because my family ended settling in Santa Clara and technically my family's house is about 3 miles away from the University campus. And so I wanted to go far away. Eventually the solution was that Santa Clara gave me all the financial aid I needed to go here. And I think in some ways I didn't get much of a choice in the sense of being able to decide "What school do I want to go to?" It's more like "What school can you afford to go to? And therefore here is your decision." I'm thankful that I have enjoyed both the challenges and the benefits from going to Santa Clara and it's taught me a lot. I'm glad that I am happy here. However, I wonder what my decision would have been if I had the financial means to decide. I was warned coming in that it was going to be a majority white school, um, because they, my teachers and my counselors, had explained to me that it was going to be a really big shock, especially coming from both communities and schools that weren't majority white. That was a big part of my decision of wanting to go into LEAD and then to stay in LEAD. And again, I echo that it was probably one of the best decisions I've made.

BS:

So kind of going off of that I come from a single parent Black mom with two sisters. So she's a single mom with three kids, and so financially, college was never really feasible per se. That being said, it was never really something to be factored in until after I had applied, until after I had found out where I'd gotten in to. Um, and so, like Raylene said, that, you know, Santa Clara's financial aid is what really sealed the decision for me. That being said, I've loved Santa Clara and I've really loved my opportunities here.

j:

Your mom indicated that she didn't go to college and that there was going to be some challenges. Did you notice that while in high school? Did you notice the differences, maybe, between other friends who did have parents that went to college? And if so, what did you observe?

BS:

Growing up, kind of all through my life, my mom was a waitress. So a lot of the times, she had to work that graveyard shift, and so it was a lot more difficult. And so I would notice that, you know, people around me, okay, they have their parents, they're here helping them with homework and what not. I don't necessarily have that, and it's not out of malice or ill will. Not that my mom doesn't want to right? She just can't because she has to put food on the table. And so I had my older sister for that, so already looking around and seeing that difference and that disparity, it kind of makes you think. It's like, "Okay, am I qualified? Is my fourteen-year-old sister teaching me the same things that these forty-year-old parents can teach their kids? And am I going to be able to keep up with this world?" So that kind of thought sticks with you all through childhood and all through high school. And then when it comes time to actually apply, it's like, man, okay it's here. Here it is, here is where I actually see if I can keep up with those people. And so, you know, luckily I could.

j:

(laughs) Um, Trevor, now you have some distance because you are alumni. Can you do a bit of contrast of the before? And then, you know, when you had the support of the LEAD community, what did that look like, you know, on a day-to-day basis throughout your college career?

TR:

College, for me, was a strict economic, like, which school can I get the most money from, and that's where I'm gonna go. And I said it was going to be between San Jose State and Santa Clara and it was essentially like "I'm going to get 4 years of scholarship from the government on top of what a school's offering me. And if I go to a big school like San Jose State, that's a state school, I might have to do more than 4 years there which is gonna come straight out of my pocket. Um, and so, I was like I know that with a private university I'll be able to get the classes that I want and I'll be done in 4 years. And so, in retrospect, socio-economic level, I think, is the biggest gap here and was the biggest eye-opener for me. It wasn't necessarily race, it wasn't

anything else besides just that huge gap that exists between me and most of my, the majority of other students that I knew, and the majority of my network here. And the fact that I was making more money interning as a sophomore in college than the most money my mother ever made in her entire life on her hourly wage.

j:

Wow, wow.

TR:

And so little things like that really kind of open your eyes to just this huge gap that I, I never knew anything else growing up. Where LEAD comes into it and this great opportunity that LEAD is, is you can be as engaged in this community and as involved that you want and need.

j:

Kind of having a home away from home.

TR:

Absolutely.

j:

Um, Isaac, I want to come back to you but, uh, before we do, Erin, I'd love, you know, finances has come up now around the table. How does Santa Clara approach that? I mean clearly college is not cheap anywhere around the country. And how does the LEAD program really help to fill those gaps that were mentioned?

EK:

You know, the LEAD Scholars Program, um, has grown, a great deal in the past couple years and a few of our newer initiatives include micro-grants. These are grants for students who, you know, have either some sort of emergency expense, living expense, education related expense. So, a lot of students who, you know, need to maybe travel home for a family emergency and need money right away, right? Students whose laptops break in the middle of the quarter and they are struggling to just keep up with the quarter, so we're able to help them with laptops and things like that.

j:

And is that, it sounds like also there's different programs here on campus and those cost money too and, I think, that's a gap that gets filled right?

EK:

Yeah, definitely. So, there's been housing deposits too, right. Financial aid does not come through until the quarter starts but your deposit to get that off-campus house is due when it's due. So we've been able to help students with that funding as well. Within LEAD we also have a new fellowship program so students can apply for funding to do study abroad, to do an unpaid

internship, to do undergraduate research. As you can tell from many of our students, most of the times they need to find some sort of paying job. And so, a lot of these opportunities may not be available to them because of finances, so with the fellowship we are able to fund that as well. And we have a brand new scholarship, it's a small scholarship program primarily for students who face financial challenges while they're here.

j:

That's great. I see a lot of nodding heads around the table so if you were helped financially in some way, shape, or form by the LEAD program say "amen".

Guests:

Amen!. (Laughs)

j:

(Laughs) So Isaac, what was going on, what was your experience like senior year? And then, um, juxtapose that for us for LEAD week, like your experience during LEAD week.

IM:

I went to high school at a predominantly white institution and so I had the interesting culture shock of going to LEAD week and meeting people that looked like me, and come from similar backgrounds like me, and people who I can identify with. And I just, kind of, like exploded. At first I was like, I didn't know how to react, I was like "oh my gosh." But then once I realized we're all like, I don't know, it's kind of this all, like, "hey we're on this same boat together, like, let's just rock and have a good time." I really felt like that was like a great experience for me, my LEAD week. I really felt like I connected really, like, across different peoples and people within, without of my major. And just like living in the dorms I felt like really, was a really good experience for me. Like I said, it was just, I felt like I found my home. And ever since that did LEAD week, I started a family and that family has just kept with me since.

j:

Are you guys like the same? Like, are you guys hanging out with a lot of people you met during LEAD week?

IM:

I live with them. (Laughs)

j:

(laughs) You live with them? What other experiences did you guys have during LEAD week?

RH:

Because I live so close, what I chose to do was put that I was going to be living off-campus, so then I commuted for my first year of college, which was an interesting experience in itself. And I was really afraid that I just wasn't going to have as many friends or be as involved because I

was a commuter, and I had been told that, like, the experience of commuters, especially at Santa Clara, hasn't been the best and still isn't. And so, I was really worried about that and then I kind of, just as I was going through LEAD week, like, it was so fun. Um, and then going into school I was like "Wow I have, like, 76 friends!" or however many people were in LEAD week going off right into the school year, and that made it so much more bearable.

j:

Beau, what are some of the things that you guys did in LEAD week? Like, what's the purpose and what do you experience during that week?

BS:

It's the first ever interaction that, you know, you get in college as a LEAD student. It's the first thing that isn't high school and it's so essential because it's an entire week before classes are started, and so you have time to figure out where you are, orient yourself and of course getting into the dorms early is just, amazing, you get to meet your roommate. And it just puts you on to the game in a way. And you kind of see how it all works and you get to know where the classes are so you're not some lost ant in the middle of a whole bunch of people. And like Raylene said, 76 friends just straight out of the bat makes it so much more bearable and you're just so much more confident. And being able to be a college student in general, and that confidence really manifests itself in your ability to work well and to get things done. And so LEAD week, you know, it's a good time and it's tiring and it's long. But it's a great time where you're building all these relationships which are just so invaluable for the near future and the far future.

j:

Yeah. And speaking of the future, Trevor, you're in the future that all of these students will have in a couple years. You're in the working world. What's that takeaway, what do you appreciate most about LEAD and even if you're utilizing some of those learnings in your world today?

TR:

I wouldn't say that I necessarily had just the community of people I met during LEAD week or LEAD students. I would say it's actually opposite. Whereas, people that I lived with in years to come throughout my college, none of them were a part of LEAD. But it wasn't to say I wasn't very good friends with them or I wouldn't see them or interact with them on a regular basis. It was just I kind of almost had my LEAD community and then my separate community. And so, I found that very beneficial to me and kind of the environment and how I wanted my college experience to go. You know, there's so many benefits that come from it and then you could take from that what you will and what makes sense for you and carry that on through your four years and even post-college. So, it is what you make it.

j:

Yeah, yeah. And you are giving back. You're coming back as alumni. You're working with students.

TR:

I try to do it, and you know I try to give back in all the ways that I'm capable of, not just donating money 'cause I did work in the call center for two years so God bless their souls, it's so challenging. (Laughs) So I do that as well, but trying to give back in other ways than monetary, um, I think is important.

j:

Alright, Isaac, complete this sentence for me please: If it wasn't for LEAD...

IM:

Okay, I'm gonna be honest, if it wasn't for LEAD I don't know where I'd be right now. I mean just figuring out how to get to college was super impossible. You know, just really hard, like I don't even know how the system works and it's like, you know, coming from an immigrant family, like if they can even read what you're trying to explain to them. How do you even explain the concept of that to them? You know, I was really like, I took them by the hand and like "Hey, this is how you college." And I'm just like "ugh."

j:

This is how you college. (Laughs) I love it. That's a t-shirt. Raylene what about you?

RH:

Uh yeah, when you said that I was like "oh God," like, I felt very upset almost, at the thought of not having LEAD. It would've been very challenging for me to do without people of color by my side. And granted I wouldn't have met all of my closest friends. I continually find myself with LEAD people, no matter what. Even in classes I'll tend to be the one LEAD person, I'm like "oh hello!" and I'll just go sit with them. Even incoming first years, it's like an automatic "oh you're in LEAD? Okay, I love you" kind of thing.

j:

And Beau as a special shout out to your mother as well for the great advice she gave you, if it wasn't for LEAD...

BS:

If there wasn't for LEAD, man, I don't think I'd be at Santa Clara. I know I would've been homeless at least twice. I would've gone hungry for months, so man, yeah. (Laughs)

j:

Well, Erin, you've heard some of the results of the team's work. If you were out there talking to potential students and they happen to be from a family where they are first-time generational college students, what would you like to say to them? How would you, they're gonna get the email probably if they decide to come to the school. But what also would you like to say?

EK:

I would just tell potential LEAD Scholars that there's a space for them here, that there's a community for them here, that there's support here in the LEAD Scholars Program. And it can be scary to reach out for help, but once you do, we'll be here in any way that you need us.

j:

Awesome, alright.

RH:

Awesome.

j:

(Laughs) I know, I feel like that was a, uh, wonderful group hug.

Guests:

(Laughing) An emotional group hug.

j:

Shout-out man, congratulations to you guys. You guys have made it through a variety of challenges and from all aspects it looks like you're very successful at it. Still got some ways to go. Trevor, thanks for coming back to Santa Clara, thanks for giving back and thank you guys for your time. I appreciate it. Go Broncos!

Guests:

Thank you. Thanks for having us.

(Outro music)

Narrator:

You've just listened to the Life Invented podcast presented by Santa Clara University, and there so much more to explore. Visit us at scu.edu/podcasts and learn more about Santa Clara's commitment to innovation and inspiring opportunities.

Eva Blanco-Masias:

Hi, I'm Eva Blanco-Masias and we are excited to have you on campus, and we hope that Santa Clara is the place where you decide to attend so that we can be part of you inventing the life that you want to lead.