[00:00:03]

You are listening to tell me your story where we connect to HLS staff on a personal level.

[00:00:15]

Hello everyone. This is Edgar Kley Filho from HLS [MUSIC]. Human Resources Department. My pronouns are he him, his. Today we're talking to Armando Olea Romero from CEEB, who will tell us about his life, how long he is in this position at HLS and the work he does. Thank you for joining us, Armando, and please tell me a story. Hey Edgar, thank you for having me, my name is Armando. My pronouns are he, him, his. I work in HLS, CEEB. CEEB stands for the Office of Community Engagement, Equity and Belonging. We're a brand new department on campus, relatively new. I work there as a program administrator.

[00:00:56]

How did we start at Harvard? How did you found out that there was a position here? Tell us a little bit about that.

[00:01:02]

Yeah. I'm originally from California, San Diego, California to be specific. Prior to Harvard, I was actually living in LA, but I moved here for graduate school at Harvard Graduate School of Education. But I was interested in also getting experience as a student worker. I saw the work-study opportunities available and CEEB came up. I knew that I wanted to really see what it was to work at the graduate level and the law school came up. I applied, went through the application process and became a student worker last fall.

[00:01:38]

When you started last fall, where were you working in CEEB?

[00:01:42]

I was working at the front desk.

[00:01:43]

The front desk?

[00:01:44]

Yes.

[00:01:44]

As a front desk person greeting students and doing all that front desk work, right?

[00:01:49]

Yeah.

[00:01:50]

Just back in a little bit. Explain a little bit what this program is from your graduate school, was which school?

[00:02:00]

It was at, Harvard Graduate School of Education. It was a Masters in Educational Leadership Organizations and Entrepreneurship. It's a mouthful name [LAUGHTER] but you know, Harvard.

[00:02:10]

Yes.

[00:02:11]

A lot of acronyms.

[00:02:12]

Yeah. What's your interest in that course, specifically, what you are planning in terms of a, "I'm going to take that course because I want you to do," exactly what?

[00:02:21]

I mostly focused in higher education, just because I knew that I wanted to [OVERLAPPING] in higher education. It prepared me for my current role as a program administrator by learning different ways of building community, working with students, [OVERLAPPING] and helping them navigate the various challenges that they may encounter.

[00:02:39]

Oh, that's really good. Harvard School of Education. That is another program. The students work programs, is that what's called?

[00:02:47]

The work-study program?

[00:02:49]

Work-study program.

[00:02:50]

Yeah. I was a work-study recipient, so I was able to use that work study anywhere where work-study opportunities were available in the law school had CEEB as a work-study program.

[00:03:03]

That program is just for this specific course that you took or is open to all School of Education students there?

[00:03:11]

Anyone can apply for this, actually open to all students across Harvard that qualify for work-study grant. They could use it [OVERLAPPING] anywhere where work-study jobs are available.

[00:03:22]

Throughout university schools, they would have that program. Yeah.

[00:03:26]

Undergrads and graduate students, if they qualify for Federal Work-Study, they can apply for federal work-study jobs in CEEB. We currently have positions where we allow work-study students to be a part of our team. That was the program that I came through.

[00:03:43]

Yes. The students in the higher-level already of higher education, so you can come to departments throughout Harvard and work for what, six months?

[00:03:53]

It would be a one-year commitment.

[00:03:57]

One year commitment?

[00:03:58]

Yeah.

[00:03:58]

Oh, nice.

[00:03:59]

Yeah.

[00:04:00]

That's really helpful because you already know a little bit about the Harvard community, right? It's just a matter of adapting to department that you are going to work for. That's becomes a little easier and manageable in a way to deal with everything. Do you think being a student at Harvard and then, take a up position, work position, also at Harvard in a different school. Do you think that you find a better connection with other students? I don't know if that's the right way to phrase it, but do you think because you were also a student, that connection was easier?

[00:04:42]

I think in some ways I was able to relate to students who have moved from the West Coast or a different country to Massachusetts. I knew that when I first came to Massachusetts, it was in the summer, it was super hot and then entering those new seasons, it was my first change of seasons where I got to see snow, got really cold [LAUGHTER]. I was able to really, relate to some students who had never seen snow before or been in a different place like Massachusetts.

[00:05:10]

Yeah.

[00:05:11]

In a way I was able to relate to the students in that way. I was also able to suggest some tips. For example, now that I'm in the second year, I'm able to help students who are in their one L here and let them know, "Hey, a change of season's coming." [LAUGHTER]. "You want to make sure you have this and that." But it also, I feel I was able to relate to students by also being a student at the same time, managing different. [OVERLAPPING].

[00:05:40]

I always feel like that is a little bit right? It's not an advantage, is just knowledge that you acquire because you are a wise student as well. It is easy to understand like relatable in terms of what you expect, right? What about your work at CEEB, what exactly you do there?

[00:06:02]

I was a program administrator, I worked primarily with our student journals. Harvard Law School and CEEB specifically supports over a dozen student journals that are led by our student editors-in-chief. In my role, I'm able to help them from getting their manuscript ready through the publication process and getting their journal shipped to their subscribers that include the high-profile piece. I think in a way, supporting students from start to end and really keeping that [OVERLAPPING].

[00:06:36]

Giving the upport that they need. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's also might be interested in finding a work with the journals. I don't know. Because I'm not into the law jargons and everything will draw him here for a while. It's just so very, very interesting to see the process that they go through, preparing all the reviews and putting all these script together to be centered for publishing. Knowing that this eventually is going to end up in many, many parts and places. Not just in US but throughout the world, right?

[00:07:12]

Yeah.

[00:07:14]

I think I heard that some of these publications go to other countries as well for their libraries and everything, right?

[00:07:21]

Yeah, they go to all over the world, which was something that really wasn't surprising to me, but it was really eye-opening to feel this journal will be going to the other side of the world. Yeah.

[00:07:32]

Yeah. Then you are part of that regardless of being administrative support, somehow you are part of that process to know that these publications from students that gathered here are going there. I know that the Library of Congress always require a good amount of these publications to be there for them as well. It has to be sent to them, right?

[00:07:56]

Yeah. We have those high profile people, not only here in the US but around the world. It's pretty great because our students are working on these important publications and then they get mailed out and shipped out to another place?

[00:08:09]

Yeah. What do you do? Usually you have regular meetings with them to talk about their needs and what they do or in your office or you meet with them in their own journals, how does it work?

[00:08:26]

In the beginning of the year, we have a training where we go over what the process is like. But throughout the academic year on a case-by-case basis, I'll meet with the student editors and chief or their staff to answer any questions they have. As we know, our law students are really busy with busy schedules, so it's really hard to find that time sometimes, but I provide them with my schedule that way they can book an appointment that works best for them. Then we meet over Zoom or in-person, whatever works best for them.

[00:08:57]

What is the training for? At the beginning when they're first starting, getting acquainted with the journal positions that they chose. What is the training, most basic information that you give to them?

[00:09:09]

In the training, we go over frequently asked questions or important information that they should know before getting started. For example like, who's our printer? Liaison. Important contacts that helped them, will help them to get started, but also how I can support them throughout the process. I give them my information and how to get a hold of me.

[00:09:30]

Different budgets as well, finances, stuff they need to know or not?

[00:09:34]

We have different trainings that we host a finance training. We're doing events training because we know our student journals host sub-sites, symposiums, they hold trainings. Our student orgs, they share event booking and working with our catering and our HLS, ITS department.

[00:09:56]

That's good to know. You said you came from LA. Can you tell us a little bit everything you can in terms of, you were born in LA?

[00:10:07]

No. I was born in San Diego.

[00:10:09]

San Diego.

[00:10:10]

But I did my undergrad in Los Angeles, stayed there. I did my undergrad at the University of California Los Angeles. I was there working as a college adviser. Working with students from high school to college and moved to Cambridge last year.

[00:10:29]

Wow. Let's go way back. You were born in San Diego. Your parents are also from San Diego?

[00:10:37]

No. They're actually from a city near Mexico City.

[00:10:43]

Do you know how old they were when they moved to San Diego?

[00:10:48]

I think they moved around the early.

[00:10:55]

Really early, and I was born years later in San Diego.

[00:10:59]

In San Diego?

[00:11:00]

Yeah.

[00:11:01]

They came together?

[00:11:02]

Yes.

[00:11:02]

They didn't meet in San Diego. They came from the area near Mexico City, but they already were in a relationship. Married and came to San Diego, and that's where you were born?

[00:11:12]

Yes.

[00:11:12]

How was life in San Diego growing up, how was it?

[00:11:17]

San Diego is a town near the US-Mexico border, so you really have both cultures. As a kid, we would go often to Tijuana, which is the city right next to San Diego on the Mexico side, so you would have the cultures of both countries. The great food like tacos solely for the holidays, so that amazing food was always there.

[00:11:47]

For you, how was the influence growing up? Because you're describing pretty much a very rich influence from the Latino culture in your life. But growing up, how was the Mexican culture in your life? Did you feel the difference or did you feel the pressure one way or the other growing up, being American. Dealing with the American culture in one aspect, having to speak English, but also learning the Spanish and receiving that culture from your family. How was it?

[00:12:24]

I thought it was a great mix because you have great food, and you mix both, but also the language. I went to a school where I learned English and Spanish at the same time.

[00:12:34]

A bilingual school?

[00:12:35]

Yeah, a bilingual school from kindergarten through pretty much the end of high school. It was a way to keep my language and my culture and learn more about my culture at the same time. It was like a balance. But also growing up in San Diego, half of the television channels were from Mexico, so we had those Spanish TV [LAUGHTER] channels, but then you have English channel, so you had a mixture of both people either spoke English or Spanish or both or a variety of other languages as well. Many of my friends, their families also came from different countries, not only in Latin America but all over the world.

[00:13:13]

It was a very diverse community there?

[00:13:16]

Yeah.

[00:13:17]

Then I don't think the pressure would be that much. It felt more natural I would say, than if someone was in a mainly white community that you are just arriving or having the shock in terms of a cultural shock that you'd feel. That goes to high school as well?

[00:13:37]

Yeah, so it was a pipeline from my school that I attended K through eighth grade till high school where I still continue that Spanish and English program and then went off to college. But in a way, my parents really wanted me to keep learning more intense so that I could be fluent in Spanish, which was helpful because I would translate for my parents growing up. Those phone calls that would come in, I would help them interpret as well, so translate and interpret documents.

[00:14:10]

Your parents, until, by the time that you went to high school, they were already fluent in English or it should depend on you. You have brothers?

[00:14:19]

Yeah.

[00:14:20]

I'm sorry, I didn't ask.

[00:14:23]

Because I was the youngest one, I was still really helpful and to this day, I'm still helping my parents understand certain documents or make some phone calls, which is great.

[00:14:37]

How many brothers do you have?

[00:14:38]

I just have an older brother and sister.

[00:14:40]

You have a older brother and sister?

[00:14:42]

Yes, I'm the youngest of three.

[00:14:44]

How is dad and mom, in terms of personality. Tough or sweet, how is that?

[00:14:51]

I think they both have their personalities, but they're a mixture of sweet and supportive, which was a great discipline as well.

[00:15:00]

The typical way, behave and don't do much. After high school, what's your choice going to college for example? Did you do everything on your own? Did you have help or your brothers helped you, or how did you apply for that? Because you already mentioned that, sorry to interrupt you. But you already said that your parents supported and motivated you all to go to school to persist in your education and go further.

[00:15:33]

Yes. I was part of a non-profit in my community that helped with college applications. So they demystify the process. I really thought you went to high-school, you're automatically in college beforehand. That was my perception of it, but that non-profit really broke it down and told me, hey there's an application process. There's different steps that go into a plan of college and they helped me.

[00:15:56]

They give you all that training in a way?

[00:15:59]

Yeah.

[00:16:00]

Tell me more about it, and I'm curious how this non-profit works. They were in the neighborhood that you lived? How was it?

[00:16:08]

They were based in my community. They were a couple of streets away.

[00:16:11]

How many people, you remember?

[00:16:13]

They probably served over 100 students independently. Because we were separated by night just because it was a small building, so they could only handle students on certain nights like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.

[00:16:27]

They had to rent the space, but they had access to that building or to the space in those buildings, and that's where the meetings would be with the students to go over their applications?

[00:16:39]

Yeah. They started as early as eighth grade in the community and then through senior year. You would start getting motivated early and know more about how to apply to college so that by the time you're a senior, you had the information of where you wanted to apply or wanted to learn more about. That encouraged me in my future work in college, where I supported students through their college application process.

[00:17:09]

What you learned with this group non-profit, you also end up applying later helping other students, which is really nice Armando.

[00:17:20]

Where those folks were, they were paid to work in this non-profit or they were from the college community around your area in Los Angeles that gather together?

[00:17:32]

This was in San Diego.

[00:17:33]

San Diego, sorry.

[00:17:34]

But the non-profit was based in my neighborhood, and as a students we would go every week and get tutoring help with our homework if we needed help understanding. For example you were taking calculus, you were taking a complex subject, they had tutors who would be able to help you understand. Because we know that growing up low-income, a tutor could cost a lot.

[00:17:59]

Exactly.

[00:18:01]

They were able to provide that assistance, and even the college application process. Breaking it down, how to write a personal statement, how to apply to college.

[00:18:11]

That was for just the Latino community or it was for anyone in the neighborhood, as diverse as you mentioned, that would need help with those.

[00:18:23]

Subjects, anyone in the neighborhood who was first-generation, low-income.

[00:18:30]

That's a lovely program reminder. Have you heard of anything similar here in the Boston or Cambridge area?

[00:18:37]

Yes. When I moved from LA to Massachusetts, right before my program, I worked for a local non-profit here in Chelsea called the Chelsea collaborative La Colaborativa, and they provide a lot of resources to the residence of Chelsea. When I moved from California to Massachusetts. I was hoping in their summer youth employment initiative and what their program is really placing students in internships, students who are in high-school or in community college in internships around Chelsea or East Boston.

[00:19:23]

You are part of them as well, you helped to them, or you just heard of them?

[00:19:26]

I was helping the program in an administrative capacity, like checking in with students, how their internship is going. Really trying to promote also different opportunities, how they can transfer those skills either to college or different careers, employment, technical route. It was a really great opportunity to really provide students with more information.

[00:19:52]

Tell me more, in this group, this non-profit group that you know in Chelsea, they always need volunteers to help, or they have a set group of folks trained and that's how it's done. Instead of, for example, let's suppose that law students would like to participate and help. Would they accept that? Or how did you find out, and how did you apply to be part of the administrative?

[00:20:21]

Yeah, I found it through the Harvard employment site. When I was getting started to become a graduate student, I was looking for jobs, and then I saw it come up as a summer job and I was, I just finished my job here at LA. I want to continue doing something and that's how that position came up, and I continued working. This program was coming out of a different stage of the pandemic. They were remote last year, so they were getting back in person. In a way, I was able to help them transition certain aspects of the program and work to create new ones that would support the students.

[00:21:00]

Mostly high-school students.

[00:21:02]

Mostly high-school students.

[00:21:03]

Do you remember any of these students had any chance to come and had an internship at Harvard or not just nearby Chelsea?

[00:21:11]

I think most of them were near Chelsea.

[00:21:13]

Near Chelsea, I think it depends on the time, we have the Latin Bridge Program, it's a school to work program that happens. I know that a union member managed that connection with Harvard. But they can only come three times a week because their school is nearby, so it's easy access for them to come to Harvard. I think it would be much more difficult for someone or for students in high school in Chelsea to come here, though they can take a train, but it would take longer. Because they finish school at 3:00 PM and then they would have just 2 hours or an hour-and-a-half or something like that. But still, it's a beautiful program that I didn't know that so many people getting involved and help the community, which is fascinating.

[00:22:03]

When I came last year as well, I was balancing different jobs, but I also got involved with the Harvard Museums and where they have a project which connected students from Chelsea in Summerville to create an exhibit here at Harvard Peabody Museum. I was able to help with that as well.

[00:22:19]

That's lovely, it's good to know of those projects, so the students would work with art and then for an exhibit and Peabody Museum.

[00:22:27]

Yeah, so every time they did the project, it was a different theme. I think when I was in the project last year, it was wild animals. The students would come over the weekend to learn about the different animals that were in the museum. Then they would have to come up with a narrative or a story, and then that narrative or story would be put up in the museum, so they contributed to that exhibit.

[00:22:55]

That's really nice, let's go back to San Diego. You had this non-profit group that helped you to deal with applications in tutoring and everything else to prepare you for college, and that's what you did, any specific area that you were more interested?

[00:23:12]

I think for me, I thought I was always going to stay in San Diego because San Diego was all I had known. I had an idea based on learning different languages, learning about different cultures that I wanted to focus on. International relations, international development, so that's the major that I pursued at UCLA. It was a great major because I learned more about different cultures, countries, and even had the opportunity to go somewhere new.

[00:23:43]

It's so interesting that you have one, or at least one idea, one perspective in mind that was going to show your college degree in West Coast. Mainly thing, life is going to be where I'm comfortable with and stay in this side. Then everything changes in college, you learn different approach to life and countries and everything else. Then from there, is that I'm going to East Coast just from the hot summer and beautiful San Diego and Mission Beach and everything else around, you go straight to East Coast, let's see how the winter is, is that what it is? [LAUGHTER].

[00:24:19]

Pretty much I think, based on my experience in working with students in that program in college and an after college, helping them with their college applications, meet, and helping the parents also, because I really believe is like a family thing. I came to the East Coast to learn more, so that's why I decided to pursue my master's in education.

[00:24:43]

Did you travel or?

[00:24:45]

I stayed most of my life on the West Coast, but when I was a student, I loved finding cheap flights somewhere New York because I wanted to explore somewhere new and all I had visited before was Mexico. It was just Mexico and the US but I think once you get the travel bug, you want to explore more and more. On a student budget, you want to find the cheapest flight.

[00:25:09]

With long hours and longer connections.

[00:25:12]

Yeah, you had four, three connections, [LAUGHTER] whatever it makes it cheap at the end of the day.

[00:25:17]

The interesting thing you're admitting that because I think I see similarities in the way, I think probably it would be the entire Latin America from Mexico all the way down.

[00:25:29]

Traveling for us is something that feel so good that the long hours flight, the cheap flights that we can find, which means exactly what you said. Long hours waiting long connections four or six hours, sometimes more in different places. We don't care. That's where the true definition of that is not the destination, but the journey that you enjoy more. Of course, I'm going to displace the end goal is that. But we enjoy everything in the process, even the long hours. Some people might think that that's the strange, which is difficult to explain but I feel the same when I have to go to Brazil, the flight sometimes are so expensive that if say okay, I found this cheaper one here, but I have to stay three hours in Miami or whatever is the connection here in US, and then when you get to Sao Paulo power or to go to my family's estate, you will still have to wait there for 3-6 hours. Other people would say no, let's take straight flights paid. I don't know, 3,000, 4,000 per ticket, just to get faster there. You will spend more, maybe you're comfortable with that. But I don't mind at all. It's interesting that you mentioned like the travel bug is more important to get around instead of worrying so much, I think.

[00:26:52]

If the layover is in a country that have never been before, if it allows me to go outside and [LAUGHTER] inside without missing my flight, I'll definitely explore it because I always asked myself, do I want to sit here? Do I want to check out this new country that I'm in right now?

[00:27:09]

It really depends on how long have you have to stay. If you have a longer time layover, you can definitely take Uber, do one of those tours that we have from the airport and just see downtown of that city and see how it is. It is another way to see things.

[00:27:24]

I think is really cool.

[00:27:27]

How was your coming to New England? How different for you it was? What did you learn?

[00:27:33]

I learned that it was very cold winter [LAUGHTER] and very hot in the summer, but I think it was nice to see the change of seasons going from summer to fall. I felt like getting cooler every month and then once you're getting too spring, you start feeling it to yourself.

[00:27:53]

It's nice to see the four seasons, the full four seasons.

[00:27:57]

Yeah.

[00:27:57]

Where my family leaves, we say that it just have two seasons is dry and wet seasons, so six-six month. We don't experience the spring, summer, fall, and winter in the sense that we hear about is just those two ones. Here you see all of them and the colors are amazing as well.

[00:28:19]

Yeah.

[00:28:19]

You have a chance to go out to eat like a Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire to see around?

[00:28:24]

Yeah.

[00:28:26]

Now that I'm done with my program, I have more time, and I've been getting really good recommendations for my co-workers here at HLS, where to go like checkout Portland and Maine, check out New Hampshire, check out new places and try this new foods. I just loved that I have more time now to explore.

[00:28:43]

It's good to learn and to visit these places. We need to chat more because it can give you some tips in terms of Maine, I have been there so many times and travel all around, even inland. It's really good. Let's talk a little bit about, I can't let that go. You don't need to say too much if you don't feel like it. But once you have this strong Mexican influence in your life, your family or parents are from there. How was it cultural connection when you went back, I assume your parents would go back to their family towns to gather, for holidays or whatever is the reason for vacation. How was the connection with folks there? How was the family gathering?

[00:29:32]

I think some important traditions or holidays within my family are Day of the Dead, which happens at the beginning of November. My dad goes every year to celebrate his loved ones who have passed. But in Christmas and New Year's, we would go to Mexico often to come together, gather together as a family and have break bread together, so like have those delicious traditional foods that normally or when it's cold like fruit punch or ponche. Then we had pozole we had those foods that come out when it's like a big gathering.

[00:30:11]

Oh my gosh.

[00:30:12]

We had birria which is really good and other delicious food.

[00:30:16]

It wasn't every strange for you, you always felt at home in a way going to Mexico will meet your relatives there?

[00:30:24]

I think it was always a great time to catch up with relatives because you spend so much time apart. But they always ask how's school? They're also able to learn more about what my experience has been in the US, and then I get to learn more about my cousin's experience of what it's like, because we're around the same age. We will learn how school going for you. Learning about the different experiences.

[00:30:53]

You would go to Mexico City to visit the town as well?

[00:30:57]

Yeah.

[00:30:57]

Because when you say Mexico City, I don't know how many people are used to visit there. That's a massive city. It's not just, I have never been to Tijuana. I know that's a big as well because close to the border with San Diego there. But Mexico City is really a huge. I loved everything when I went there is close to our Brazilian culture as well in many aspects, and my Brazilian folks are going to be mad at me. But I just feel like the people in general in Mexico City were just wonderful. The architecture and everything around also appealed to me a lot. The traffic is pretty much some pilot traffic. [LAUGHTER] But in the craziness in terms of the traffic, you can see that she works. Whatever it is that you see that feels like, Oh my God, I don't know if I would be able to drive here, but they know where they're going and the insanity of how busy is, how many cars? It is an amazing way and I wish everybody would go there, just see. It's not that you are living in a big city to go to a small town. I'm sure that maybe the neighborhood where your parents came from was smaller, but it's part of the metropolis.

[00:32:25]

Yeah, and every time I go to Mexico City, I discover something new, or I've visited a new museum. I try new foods. Like you mentioned, it's huge, something to do and something new to explore, which is what I like now that I have more time.

[00:32:44]

You travel more now to Mexico after you finish your college and graduate school?

[00:32:51]

I have been a couple of more times now that I have vacation time and to explore and more about where my parents are from.

[00:33:00]

I would like to go more there too. I don't know anything below California that I heard that are beautiful places that as well. I just know Mexico City and I went to Riviera Maya, to see that area that's really famous because of it Cancun and everything else. To be honest with you, Cancun was the least that I don't want to be mean, that sense. But if you go to Mexico City, you understand what I'm talking about for people who didn't. Mexico City is a different approach to Mexican culture. I felt like Cancun takes away everything that the beauty that you can see. I love [inaudible 00:33:40] Carmen and Toluene, and then as much as I got inland to see other small villages, that's the beauty for me. Much more than the fancy over Cancun and whatever it is, but that's it for us. Any plans for the future or anything that you should know about, what are you doing? Traveling or going somewhere?

[00:34:06]

No, none at this time. [LAUGHTER] But if anybody listening to this podcast has food recommendations here in Massachusetts, here in Cambridge or any places to check out definitely Teams me or reach or email me.

[00:34:20]

That's awesome. Thank you very much, Armando, for participating, and being here with us and chatting a little bit more about your reach family culture and everything that you have told us. I really enjoyed that to one. I hope you enjoy a little bit too.

[00:34:39]

Thank you, Edgar.

[00:34:41]

For everybody listening, and until next time, I'll see you then. Bye-bye. [MUSIC]