



Jesus Cortez

Undergraduate, English and Chicano/a

My name is Jesus Cortez, I majored in English and Chicano/a Studies. I was born in Mexico and was raised in the city of Anaheim, and I am 28 years old. I am also a first generation college student. I am part of the Alliance of Students for an Equal Education a group that fights and advocates for the rights of immigrant college students and immigrant rights in general.

Buenos Dias, Good Morning for my non-Spanish-speaking friends. I remember when I landed in the city of Anaheim in 1989 the only thing I cared about was reuniting with my mother. Who would have thought that 20 years later, I would be graduating from Cal State Fullerton with a double major; I didn't and certainly not many people who have known me throughout the years. But in those 20 years, many experiences have shaped my life, and changed the way I see myself and the world. In those twenty years, I have lost friends to both distance and the bullet—I have experienced poverty, hunger, pain, but I have also seeing hope, whether it is in my mother's eyes or in the smile of my nieces and nephews. I have gained knowledge from street corners and alleys, but also from my ancestors through my mother; yet, much of this knowledge had gone unappreciated for years—until I arrived at El Profe's class. It was in Dr. Gradilla's, Mexican/Chicana Intellectual Thought class that I began to appreciate the knowledge of my mother, and the beauty of my culture that I had neglected for a long time. I will not deny that for a period of time in my youth I felt shame in who I was, but through the years I have learned to be

proud of my roots and the knowledge that I have received. El Profe made me realize that everybody's knowledge has value. So today as I stand here, I tell you that it is not the degrees that make me who I am, it is my experiences that have shaped my life that make me who I am. I am thankful for all the forms of education and the types of knowledge I have acquired, whether this knowledge comes from the classroom or from the streets and alleys of West Anaheim.

Yet I feel it is useless to receive an education if we do nothing with it. The money we earn is not what matters; it is the impact we make with our lives that truly matters. Now that we have received this great education, we have a bigger responsibility with our community. We have the duty to teach but also to learn from our communities, so together we can create real change—we must struggle together. We must learn to appreciate our individual but also our collective struggles. We can not wait around for others to advocate for us and our rights; we have the power in our hands to create change. It is in the spirit of unity that I would like to say that I share the honor of being up here with all of my colleagues. I also share this honor with those who were unable to receive a college education and those who got stuck in the educational pipelines; but, especially with those who did not get to live as long as I have. I share this honor with my creator; with my ancestors; with my mother—MADRE MUCHAS GRACIAS POR TODO EL APOYO Y EL AMOR; with my brothers and sisters and the rest of my family; also, my immigrant brothers and sisters—my AB540 brothers and sisters; last but not least all the members of the ALLIANCE OF STUDENTS FOR AN EQUAL EDUCATION, especially those close to my heart—you know who you are, and Mr. Marco Antonio Firebaugh, rest in peace. I thank everyone who has supported me along the way and I assure you that my struggle will continue, but also that your struggle is my struggle too. To those in the audience who have not yet graduated or even started college, I assure you that your time will come as it has for me. As long as we have the support from our communities and our families, there is nothing that can stop us, not even budget cuts. As the great Tupac Shakur said “if you believe, then you can achieve, just look at me”. Lastly, I would like to recite something I wrote for this special occasion that hopefully reflects the lessons I have learned through these last 20 years.

There is no liberation without struggle
There is no struggle without love
There is no love without people
There are no People without humanity
But there is no humanity until we are all truly equal!

Thank you. Muchas Gracias!