

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
MS.0404

“FM”
Interviewed by Kristen Diehl
March 18, 2022

Johns Hopkins University

Oral History Collection

Interviewee: "FM" (FM)

Interviewer: Kristen Diehl (KD)

Subject: During this interview, FM talks with Kristen Diehl about her experience attending Johns Hopkins. Throughout, they discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on FM's courses. They also discuss FM's experiences in high school, her family life and the impact of the loss of her father, and her hometown. They also discuss her experience transferring to Hopkins and her thoughts on living in Baltimore, her internships with CIIP and extracurricular clubs on campus, and her interests in law and pursuing law school after graduation. The interview finishes with FM's thoughts on how Hopkins could improve its support for pre-law students.

Date: March 18, 2022

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KD: So this is Kristen Diehl here with FM on March 18th, 2022, at the Eisenhower Library for the First-Generation College Student Oral Histories. We would like to start this interview by acknowledging the impact of COVID-19 on the Hopkins community. The questions in this interview were written before the coronavirus pandemic, and therefore do not directly ask how the consequences of this public health crisis change the experiences of our students.

However, we thought it was necessary to begin our interview with a couple of questions related to the pandemic in order to recognize the particularly challenging experiences and changes these students faced. So our first question is, how do you feel the coronavirus pandemic has impacted your undergraduate experience? What are some challenges or changes it caused for you personally?

FM: That's funny. Well, I feel like most people, it definitely changed our lives. And I know this project is for first-generation and limited income or just first-generation?

KD: It was first-generation.

FM: First-generation is a thing that matters more? Okay. So not only am I just –

KD: But your full experience.

FM: *[laughs]* Well, I'm both, part of the whole FLI Network with first-generation limited income. Now, not only that, I transferred. So I'm a transfer student. So the year I got accepted into Hopkins is the year the pandemic started.

So my first year at Hopkins, a whole brand new deal, brand new environment, I was at home on the West Coast, three-hour difference.

So my 9:00 AM classes were 6:00 AM. And then my little – I have little siblings, they're in elementary school. So I was helping out my mom because she is not great with the technology because now they had the computers and now they had to figure out their own situation.

So I had to help them out, but I wasn't sure of the technology because we were using something different, not Zoom. Well, they're not using Zoom, I was using Zoom. Sorry. And also just like helping out with homework because my mom, she does speak English, but it's her second language and it's not great, like she has cold conversations and everything, but it's not the same as like what are they asking in this grammar thing or like explaining. I've been through the school process so I can help my little siblings better than she can, so that responsibility fell up on me.

Obviously, the pandemic affected a lot of jobs, my mom was part of that. So it was a complicated, it still is *[laughs]* a complicated time. The pandemic isn't over. But yeah, it was just adding a lot of hurdles that weren't there before, and it lowered my time. I was already only going to have two years at Hopkins, now I only have one, really, because I was at home for my first year.

The second year, I remember the first time I was on campus, I was like one of the freshmen and I was like, "Okay. So where is this building? What is this building? How do I get here?" Like figuring out housing, it was just like thrown on me. So that was just – yeah. But thankfully aside from those hurdles, I've been good *[laughs]*.

KD: How did you find online classes? Did you feel like –

FM: Oh God, I hate them.

KD: Continue.

FM: *[laughter]* No, you continue your question.

KD: So sort of how did you find the system itself, access to faculty during that time, a sense of connection to the university? I'm curious about that.

FM: So even before the pandemic, I did not like online classes. I just found them – in my old school, I took like one or two because there was no other option, and I absolutely hated them because it felt so impersonal, like there wasn't any connection and then it was easier to slack off because like, "Oh, I'll get to that presentation lecture in this amount."

And then our professors would try to get us to interact more, but it was hard because like we're all online. That's why I never really liked them and then cut to 2020, it's all online. And then I've had professors who

are older, who are not as used to technology, so it was a learning curve for us and them. So that was interesting.

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The one thing I did like about online classes was that most of my professors recorded with the exception of a couple. Most of them recorded the lectures, and the ones who didn't, I didn't appreciate it because it was usually like at 7:00 AM, which meant I had to be up.

There was no other option and I'm already sleepy. So it would've been perfect if it was on East Coast time because it would've been 10:00, like, "Yeah, I'm awake at 10:00." 7:00 on the other hand, I'm still like, "What?" And they're like, "Hey, here's policy stuff." And I'm like, "Here's the history?" Like, "What? Sorry, what?" That's what I didn't appreciate about some professors who didn't record them because I was like, "Excuse me, I'm asleep." Yeah, I think honestly, online has never been for me because I feel like it's easier if I see the professor, especially once we're getting into more technical stuff, like when I had math or economics.

Well, I like seeing the professor write things down, I feel like it makes it easier, plus it is nicer when there's other students around me who are like, "I don't know what's going on." When some person does and I'm like, "I don't know how they know it," *[laughter]* but it's cool. *[laughs]* Yeah, not the biggest fan, but it ended up being fine.

And I did like is when there was the recorded lectures. Again, there was that tendency to slack off a bit, because you're juggling so much here. I'm still not used to it, not going to lie. Like in my old school, I talk about it with my friends, here, it's all hard classes, there is no easy class. I joke about it, but there is none.

And in my old school, I would have one or two really hard classes, the rest, I'd still try, but it wasn't as intense. So now I'm in an environment where I was used to two intense classes and the rest manageable, now *[laughs]*, it's five that are intense.

And I feel like sometimes professors think I'm only taking their class, when that is not the case, I'm taking four others. It's been a lot learning how to manage that. I talk to my other friends, obviously they've been here the four years, so they can relate, but they're like, "We're kind of used to it," and I'm like, "I'm not, I'm so not." Yeah, just managing the workload was a challenge. And I don't think it helped by it being online.

KD: Sure. Now that folks are back, do you find that there's still classes occurring online?

FM: Yes. Last semester I had two that were online, this semester there's still some online, but I don't have any because I've made it. I specifically

chose my classes that way. And yeah, I show up in-person. I feel like it's easier. Just being surrounded by other students and seeing the professor, it helps me. Downside of in-person, which I know I was talking about how much I hate online.

Another benefit of online was like I had more time. So I had more time to like cook, clean and do all that stuff because I'm like, "All I have to do is close that, okay, I'm here," now I have to take into account. I have to walk to my apartment, I have to do all that stuff. Also I was living at home.

So half of that was like, my mom was helping me with, especially when it came to finals season, she was just like, or midterms. Although technically here we never stop having mid. Okay, that's another thing, sorry, sidetrack. *[laughter]* What is going on with this school that has from week three to like till final season it's midterms, I don't understand that.

In my old school, it was just the one week and then finals, that I knew, this, I don't understand. Okay, that was just my little side tangent. So just like when I was at home online, one of the benefit is obviously I was at home, I just said that. And it was easier because all I had to do was close the laptop.

My mom would help me out. And especially when it came to midterm or final season, she doesn't really let me help around the house because she's like, "I know, I can see the mountain of work that you're doing. You're fine. After you get over this final project, you're helping me obviously." That's a big help.

Now it's like I have no help. I have to do my laundry, I have to cook, I have to clean, I have to shower *[laughs]*. I have to do all this tiny other things that now cut into the time where I'm like, "I'm not just being in classes, I also work." You know what I mean?

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It was easier in terms of I had more time, now I have lesser because I have to walk and do all this other stuff by myself.

KD: Yeah, different things to juggle.

FM: Yeah, different things to juggle *[laughs]*, really.

KD: So moving backwards in time, could you tell me where you were born and a little bit about your family?

FM: Right. So I was born in Tualatin, Oregon, it's a nice little suburb outside of Portland. My family, well, so, okay. So I don't know what you need. My mom and dad had me obviously and I have an older

sister, then my mom and dad divorced when I was seven and then my mom remarried. And then now I have two little siblings with her, which are the two little siblings I mentioned. So it's me, my older sister, my two little siblings, mom and stepdad. And my dad passed away.

KD: Sorry to hear that.

FM: Thank you.

KD: Could you tell me a little bit more about your parents' education, the education that they had?

FM: So all three, they were all born in Mexico, my mom, my stepdad, my dad. So my dad, I believe he stopped going to school after middle school and then went straight into work. Mom finished high school and my stepdad also, I think he got to middle school. Yeah.

KD: And what are your parents' occupations or professions?

FM: Right. So my dad was a construction worker and my mom is a cosmetologist, which pandemic, no parties. So that really hurt her. My stepdad for the longest time he was a cook. He worked in restaurants. But a couple years ago he moved into construction. So now he is a construction worker.

KD: Nice. You've touched on this a little bit. Could you speak a little bit more about the town or the place that you grew up in?

FM: Yes, it's a very nice suburb *[laughs]*, it's a very predominantly white one which changes –It affects your experience when you're not white, because I'm Mexican American, Mexican, the important bit. It's a nice suburb.

So there's a lot of wealthier students and I was not one of those. I love that place, and it gave me a – I value the education I got from there. I value the experiences and the resources. But there is also a lot of racism. So that's just the experience.

KD: You've talked about sort of the other students and sort of the education that you got. Could you talk a little bit more about what high school was like, sort of thoughts about classes, extracurriculars, friend groups at school, things like that?

FM: My school had a lot of things to do, *[laughs]* really. I think there was like a whole like MBA, not the MBA, Future Business Leaders of America, FBLA thing. And then if you were part of that, you can help, they had a little cafe and they managed it and then there was a culinary arts class, so basically a cooking class.

We were the students who made the meals, but the FBLA students ran

it when I'm like, "hold up, I could still do the math, I could run this," but anyway, not the point, *[laughter]* not the point. So I did culinary arts classes during my schedule, because I was like, that's one of my – You can pick a, obviously you had your regular classes and then you had your extracurricular classes, your fun classes.

I was either taking culinary or I was taking theater. There was a lot of things to do. My mom didn't love me staying after school because she needed me at home. So there wasn't much I could do there. There was a couple times where I was, in the spring, mostly where I would be a part of, my school has a tournament of one-act plays.

So we, us students either direct or act in one of them and that's kind of what I did in terms of extracurriculars. There's a rotary club in my school, which is essentially like a – The rotary club is essentially for business people who, and like they get together and have meetings and they have different organizations.

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And then one of their programs they run is the rotary student exchange program. And they select one student from the city, they sponsor and they go on exchange, which I was lucky enough to be one of those students selected. And then I got a scholarship to go study abroad for my junior year of high school, which I went to the Czech Republic.

KD: Wow.

FM: What other things were you asking me with that question?

KD: Any particular, like you've mentioned sort of business, was that kind of a topic of sort of academic study that you were interested in or any other school subjects that you were kind of focused on at the time?

FM: Ooh what wasn't I focused on is a better question. I really love school. Honestly, I don't think that's a shocker to any student who's at Hopkins. So I feel like we all love school. We wouldn't be here if we didn't. And in high school, I've always loved learning *[laughs]* and business.

I just remember because I remember business one of them, but I wasn't in the FBLA, I just remembered, because I was like, "Why are they running the cafe? We know how to handle a cashier too. We can cook, but we can also do this." It was just a little like side bit for me. I was like, "Here's the food and you y'all do the thing." I don't know.

There was something about it where I was like, "I could also be in the cashier." *[laughs]* History was one of my favorite subjects. And then we had to take a language. I feel like most high schools do that.

And I ended up taking Spanish for native speakers, which is not real language, because I already know it. And it's for native speakers. It

was essentially like an English class, because what do you do in a regular English class? We do writing, we do movies, we analyze them. We write papers. We work on our grammar. That was essentially the Spanish for native speakers, but obviously just in Spanish.

So I really loved that class, and especially because that teacher really wanted us to be proud of our roots, especially considering we are in a very predominantly white school. It gave me a lot aside from just practicing Spanish. It was a room where we're like, "We're okay, we're all here, we're not alone." It was just a very nice place that I will always love. I think in terms of high school, yes, yeah, I loved my high school aside from the little moments.

KD: Sure. *[laughs]* Yeah. Thank you. What were your parents' thoughts on education-

FM: Oh gosh

KD: The college search and application process and all of that?

FM: Since I was a kid, education has been number one for them. My mom literally was – I haven't ever heard anything, but you need education. It's been emphasized my entire life. I've mentioned, my mom only got to high school and she's like, "No, no, no, this is why we're here. This is for your own good. You need a career, you need something because we want better for you than what we did." That was just what's emphasized all the time, education, education, education.

When it was time for college, my mom was like, "I wish I could help you, but I can't, so it's all on you." Which is how it's been since I was 17, it's like, "All right, I need to figure out which colleges. I need to figure out how to apply. I need to figure out FAFSA," which is a mess. I hate that thing so much, so much, because I have to figure out that, I have to input all of that.

The only thing I'd ask of my mom was like, "Show me your last tax statements," She'll just give them to me and then I figure it out. She's tried to support me *[laughter]*, but it's hard for her to do anything aside from like, "You got this," because she doesn't know it either. She doesn't, yeah. I feel like I said that wrong, anyway.

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I've felt a lot of support, it's always been emphasized. Like I mentioned before, and she does – Finals season it was always, "You're not picking up your plates, I will do it." Like it's help when she sees me that I'm struggling. But in terms of like the little things and it's like, "You need to go to this place, you need to do this and XYZ."

I didn't have that. I needed to figure that out. And I had to explain it to

her. Obviously I started off at a different institution, but that was mostly because I had just lost my dad. And my mom was very adamant that I couldn't leave the house because she's like, "This is pretty traumatic. You are not ready."

And at first I was fighting her. I was like, "I am ready. I got this. Whatever, I can do it." But at the end of the day I was like, "No, you're right. I cannot leave home." *[laughter]* And it was only made clear once I started college where I was like, "Oh yeah, she was definitely right. I was not ready to be by myself." I needed to be with my family for those first couple of years.

Obviously after I was in my second year, I was in my sophomore year and I was like, "I like this school. There's nothing wrong with this school. It's not the school I wanted." I am very ambitious. I've always wanted to be like top schools, always. That was always the dream. So I was like, "Let's try it. Let's go for it. Like what am I gonna lose? Nothing. Well, I'm already not in those schools, so let's go for it."

So that's when my sophomore year of college I—First I told my mom, I was like, "Listen, I want to try for those amazing schools, those dream schools. And that's what I want to do, but they're mostly on the East Coast." And so she did not love that bit that I mentioned. I feel like if you're born on the West Coast, you dream of the East Coast, and if you're from the East Coast, you dream of the West Coast *[laughter]*.

So that's where I was at, I was like, "Oh Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, these are East Coast. I want East Coast." And so I think that was just kind of like figuring out like, "I want to be on the East Coast." So once I told her about that, she was just like, "Okay, all right, I support you."

But exactly the tone I said it *[laughter]*. It wasn't like, "Oh my God, yay," because she was just like, "I don't want you to leave." She was like, "Why do you have to leave? What?" But anyway, she's like, "All right, go ahead." And so I started making a list of places I really wanted to go.

Part of the transfer application process is that you have to have letters of recommendation. So I had to go to my professors and be like, "Hey, by the way, I wanna leave. Wanna write me a letter?" *[laughter]* Obviously not in those terms, but that's what it felt like.

And I felt so awkward being in their office hours, because I love these professors and then I have to be like, "By the way, I want to leave this place." But everyone I asked the letter, they were so supportive. And there was one professor, which got me here, really, she was my intro to political theory professor.

That was my first taste of Hopkins, because she was tough. That was a tough class. I remember, because she was telling me, she's like, ""You

thought my class was hard? Yeah, it'll be harder at Hopkins." She wasn't wrong. But anyway, so I was in her office hours, because we were going over some stuff that I was trying to figure out, because political theory is not easy.

After then I had to slip in, "By the way, I wanna transfer. Would you be willing to write me a letter of recommendation?" And then she's like, "Where, why?" And I explained to her like, "You know what, I really always wanted to be incredibly challenged. I want to be part of being one of the best. You have to be where the faculty, the professors, the environment are constantly high-level, really."

There's another, like high-achieving, and I'm just, I want to learn from them and I'm being like inspired by them and try to take in it so I can improve. These schools have always been like my dream schools.

I want to try again because when I was going through the college application process in high school I don't think I put my best foot forward or did my research for all the schools I was considering in. I was just trying to survive and graduate high school, but because of my dad's death and grieving, everything was piling up and this was my chance to re-do it. I'm at a better place emotionally and mentally, so I wanted to try.

And so she asked me which schools and I was like, I mentioned, "Oh, I'm thinking of Georgetown and then these other schools." And then she's like, "Have you thought about Hopkins?" And I was like, "No." *[laughs]* "You mean the medical school? Or isn't Hopkins more known for their science?" I was like, "No."

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And she's like, "Well, I'm biased. I may be biased. But I think Johns Hopkins is better and has a better political science program than Georgetown, in my opinion." That's her opinion. We're hitting the alleged lies right there. Because she did her master's and PhD here. So she's like, "Maybe add it to your research."

And then I did, and I was like, "Oh shoot, this is a pretty good school. This is an amazing school." And I just kind of like going through the research process I just discovered more and more. And I was like, "I like this school."

Then I go to my professor's office hours and I'd ask her more questions that she just, I don't know, like it's very easy to sell Hopkins. And then I was like, "All right, I'm adding it to the list of places I'm gonna apply." And then I applied and then I got wait listed of some and rejected over some and then this one accepted me and that's how I'm here.

KD: Nice. When you sort of got accepted into the Hopkins, when deciding to go there, how did your family feel about *[laughter]*, you touched on this a little bit, but the idea of you actually moving to the East coast and kind of any perceptions of Baltimore or what this area was like?

FM: Okay, yes. I still remember the day I found out, because I was on the floor. That's the thing about me, especially because we were in the pandemic. So I was just sitting on my chair all the time. So the thing about me is like I'm sitting on a chair all the time. I get like frustrated by it or annoyed by, it's uncomfortable.

So I go sit on the floor. So I was sitting on the floor, on my computer and then I got the email, and then I click and I was like, "Oh it's going to be a rejection. All right, let's go." And then it's, "Congratulations, you're in."

And I did Olympic level of like jump *[laughs]*, and I had my computer like jumped up and ran to my mom, she was with my aunt because she was dying her hair. I think that's what they were doing, yes, something with her hair. And I ran and I was like, "Mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy. Oh God, I got in."

And she's like, "Oh, okay. But why do you want to leave your family?" *[laughter]* It wasn't really the big congratulations I was hoping for. And then I was explaining to her like, "This is a huge deal. It's a very competitive school. It's tough to get in, especially transferring, because they're accepting even less people."

And she's like, "Yeah, but I knew you were going to get in, you're a great student." So I had to explain that that's not the point. And even now that I'm applying to law schools, I have to explain to her, there might be a chance I don't get into them because it's so hard to get into. As much as I may be a good student, there's thousands of others like me and it's really, it depends.

So I was explaining that process to her and she's like, "I'm not going to lie, I'm having mixed feelings." Because it's like, "I know this is for your own good. And I'm never going to tell you no. Why am I going to cut down your"

There's that phrase in Spanish, but essentially translates to like, "I'm not going to cut your wings. That's not who I will be. But I'm telling you that it's mixed feelings. Because they are mixed feelings because I don't want you to go. And especially all the other side of the country, you don't know people." So that was a concern of hers.

But after a while, she was excited for me. Everyone else in my family was very excited. My sister, well, my older sister was very excited, she understood the – She was raised here. She's in a college herself. So she's like, "Oh, oh shoot, really?" So that was more of an excitement. It

was more of the –

I got the congratulations from everyone else except my mom, that one was tough because I was like, it's a huge deal. And she didn't understand the scope of how big of a deal it was, and also combined with I'll be leaving. Baltimore wasn't a consideration. My mom has anxiety. So she tends to stay away from the news.

And also the fact that she really like, I was going to say she doesn't really care about American, like American news, not really. Like she'll just be like, "Oh that big thing happened, dah, dah, dah." She just tries to stay away because she says it's depressing. She says the news is depressing. So she tends to stay away from it. And also she's not like, she wasn't born in the U.S., she isn't first-generation American, she came here when she was 17 and she didn't have preconceived notions of other cities outside of the areas where she lived.

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FM: She did not hear or know about some of the stereotypes thrown in or associated with Baltimore. Like obviously anytime I mentioned to anyone who wasn't my family, I'm like, "Oh, it's Baltimore." They're like, "Oh, crime. Oh, this." That wasn't what's coming from her, because she didn't know about it.

And I knew it wasn't gonna be a consideration because she doesn't go seeking out that. But she still is nervous because her thing is like any city is dangerous and you're by yourself. That was more of where it was coming from, not of the preconceived notions and stereotypes of Baltimore. Yeah.

KD: Could you describe the sort of the first few weeks being at Hopkins, the transition from the West Coast to here?

FM: So humid *[laughs]*.

KD: Very humid, yes *[laughs]*.

FM: Very humid. I was not used to that. My mom came with me to help me set up my apartment and then she stayed with me for like three days and then she went back. So obviously the first three days it was really moving into my apartment, buying groceries, getting everything sorted.

She drove to D.C. and then we drove from D.C. to New York, because these are the two spots I've always wanted to go. But it was like within a day. So it was very fast. It was like, "Ooh Times Square. All right, we're back to Baltimore." *[laughs]* But it was, I guess it was just a very, I guess us just bonding because like we're like exploring this.

And then I was working as a pre-orientation leader, it's a program for the Center for Social Concern. It's like welcoming the freshmen. And I

had worked for the Center for Social Concern and then they asked me before, like, "Would you want to be a pre-orientation leader?"

And I was like, "I would, but I haven't been on campus. I don't know anything, I just know this classes." And the supervisor's like, "I know you, you got this. Are you ready for the challenge?" I'm like, "I'll do it, but I'm warning you, I don't know the campus." He's like, "It's all right." I'm like, "All right, let's go."

So after my mom left, I literally started working as a pre-orientation, literally the day of, I was like, "All right, Mommy, bye." Okay, come to campus, try to go to the meetings and try to figure out the layout because I was so lost. And so I had a friend who I had met throughout the online from classes.

She's like, "Do you want me to give you a tour?" I'm like, "Yes." So just trying to figure out the places. Everything was very new, but I was so busy, just like, "Alright, we have this, we have to set up this, this, this," that I didn't have time to like, I guess process a lot of it.

But yeah, I just do remember it was very humid. I was not used to that. I would literally only be outside for five minutes and I already have a thick layer of sweat. And I was like, "What is this?" My hair was having fun *[laughter]*, to say the least. That was wild. That's wild. I guess West Coast baby, I was not dealing with humidity that much like we do here.

And then school started. So that was just like, "Okay, I think I know where my classes are." I still had Google maps, because I was like, "I'm not sure if it's in this side or this side." And also around that same time, like it's my senior year, everything is absolutely new, new environment.

And then one of the, my dad's anniversary of his death is around like the second week of September. It's hard to say what was my experience because it was just a combination of everything all the time, and new city, new school, new everything. And then adding the emotional stuff that I was already carrying. It is a lot to process all the time. Like you've asked me, "What was your experience?" I'm like, "It's a lot." *[laughs]* It was just a lot.

KD: Yeah. I can't imagine sort of coming here and you yourself getting used to it kind of through the first time and then taking on that sort of leadership role to orient other folks to the campus. I can't imagine.

[0:35:00]

FM: Oh yeah. We had to take them to R. House. The beautiful thing about how pre-orientation works is that you're in pairs, so you're never – I was never alone. I had someone else with me, but she was a

sophomore.

So she was also getting familiar herself *[laughs]*. So I remember where the coordinator would be like, "Okay, we're going to take them to R. House for lunch. Let's start planning our route." So we walk from, yeah, from this building to R. House and back and back again, just to figure out, "Okay, this is the best route that we're going to be directing them."

And when I was in front of the students, I was like, "By the way, if you feel scared, it's normal. I feel scared, and I'm older than y'all, I'm a senior, but don't worry, it's normal." I just remind them like, "Hey, it's tough. And it's also new for me. So you're not alone in that, because it's new for me too. So, Hey, I got you." But it was really nice being in front of all those students.

KD: And I'm sure in some ways, yeah, that aspect of it, of you also saying like, "I'm going through this too." They probably like really related to that, and that helped them feel better.

FM: I hope. For a sec I thought I was like, "Oh, they're probably going to not even listen to me," 'cause they're like, "Who are you? You don't even know this place." That was in my back of my mind during the time, but now leaving it, I'm like, "I know those students and they're so sweet. I hope, and I don't think they were thinking that." I think they're like, "All right, she's also struggling, let's go."

KD: We're in this together.

FM: We're in this together *[laughs]*.

KD: You mentioned sort of meeting a friend in-person that you had connected with online. How was that meeting friends, kind of seeing folks and putting sort of faces to names?

FM: It was so wild. A lot of people are taller than me, *[laughs]* that is what I took away from that. Literally, I think everyone who I feel like I became friendly or I knew of, or were my classmates, now I see them in-person, I was like, "Oh my gosh, you're real. What is this?" It was just a bit jarring, especially a person I became very close with. I'm still very close with her. We live in the same building. I saw her, she's like five, nine, and I'm five, four. And I was like, "Oh my God, you're tall." And she's like, "I told you this." And I'm like, "It's different. It's different, it just is."

KD: When you moved here, did you sort of get a roommate right away or you lived on your own?

FM: I lived by myself. Yeah. I wanted to get a roommate because cheaper, but I didn't know anyone, and I didn't want to risk the whole roommate

matching situation, because I've heard enough horror stories from my own friends in my old school. I've never lived on campus, because in my old school, I lived at home and I would just take public transportation there. It was two hours each way. So fun. So fun. Two hours on a bus, two hours back.

Again, just the life I've had *[laughs]*. All my friends have lived on-campus and heard their stories. When I moved to Baltimore I didn't know a lot of people and the people I became friends with had their living arrangements set and with who because they've been here for X amount of years, they know each other and they already had roommate situation set up and stuff. I didn't know anyone. And I was just like, "I don't want to risk that." My friends from my old school have had horror stories. Sometimes I was like, "I definitely don't want to risk that." So I just try to find a cheap place that is nearby, which is how I ended up where I ended up.

KD: That makes a lot of sense.

FM: Yeah. I was like, "I'm not risking it."

KD: *[laughs]* It's probably smart. Have you met any other first-generation college students while at Hopkins?

FM: Yes, yes. I mentioned I feel like in the beginning that FLI, so that's the whole program, which is first-generation limited-income. You could either be first-generation, or you could just be limited-income or both, which is my case. The program coordinator Clifton I believe, he's often in charge of – he's in the Life Design Lab. He's often in charge of doing events, specifically like FLI students.

So I've gone to those and I've met a lot of different people from them. I have this friend who also transferred, who was also FLI, that I've met through, we met in class, really, but I saw her one of the events and I was just like, "Oh, I know you, you're also part of FLI? Okay." And we became friends quickly.

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It's amazing because with her, we talk and we're like, "What is Hopkins? What are these students? What's up with them?" because like, sometimes they just love to go out without regards to the budget. And I'm like, "That is not me." I'll drink my water and let you enjoy stuff.

And just talking about how weird it is to figure out how college works and all that stuff. I'm thankful for that friendship, because we are constantly bonding over like, "What is going on? This is weird," especially since I feel like the majority of the school here isn't first-

generation. They've had time and some guidance in the form of their parents or high school counselors or whatnot.

KD: Well that's great. I'm glad you were able to sort of find folks with similar experiences and kind of relate to each other that way and support one another.

FM: Sometimes we're like, "What is going on?" *[laughs]*

KD: Yeah, over the question –

FM: *[laughter]* Or be like, "Am I crazy or is this this?" And then we're like, "No that is insanely thing that happens at school. I'm like, "What?" So just bonding over the craziness of just –

KD: Yeah, just what is going on? *[laughs]*

FM: I feel like that is a perfect description of college, what is going on?

KD: Yes, for sure. So sort of onto academics, what is your program of study? How did you choose it and what do you feel is valuable about it? Also take a drink.

FM: Taking a sip of water. Yes. For the record, I'm taking a sip of water. I am a political science major with the minor in economics. *[pause]* I chose political science because I was definitely interested in how power worked, I feel like I've mentioned it before, I'm Mexican American, I'm a woman.

Definitely I've already experienced some things where it's like, "That's not how that should be," since I was a kid *[laughs]*. So I knew there was imbalance, inequalities, racism, sexism, that I knew since a kid. So I was just very curious about that.

And also I love history classes. I also felt like a lot of things were missing, and I mentioned in my high school I had the Spanish native speakers, which was also not even just grammar stuff. We were learning about all the stuff the U.S. did in Latin American countries, around the '70s and '80s, Cold War, to stop the spread of communism in a sense in place a lot of dictatorships that destabilized a lot of the countries.

So it was a lot of things where I was like, "I'm learning my history. Why didn't I know that before?" I was always very curious about that. And I think political science still answers a lot of those questions of like, "what are these systems? What is the power within them and how are they shaping and moving policies which affect our lives?" And that I love.

Economics came in because we were doing, I took a class in my old

school. It was poverty and social inequalities, I think was the name. And then we had a whole week dedicated to wealth inequality. I was like, "Hold up, a lot of these policies, it's like, where's the money?" And the wealth inequality economics.

So I just jumped in to see like, "what is going on here really?" because obviously economics is a study of money and choices. So I was really curious about that after my wealth inequality class, and I ended up minoring in economics. But it was really a branch of political science.

And in high school I took IB economics, and I remember I had a lot of fun just like with the graphs, which I realized that I laugh at myself now because I'm like, "Wow, you loved it then, you don't now. It is much harder than it was in high school."

I mean, I still like it, but it was like, "Wow, it's more complicated than I did in high school," *[laughs]* which is the same for literally everything I've ever done. It's like, "They gave us so much simpler stuff, no wonder we were in love with every topic." *[laughter]*

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And also political science, I chose that because I was like, "I also want to be a lawyer."

I'm literally waiting to hear from law schools as we speak. And one of the things that since I was a kid I wanted, I was like, "I want to be a lawyer. That's what I want." After watching Obama and I told my mom, I was like, "I want to be president, that's it."

And she was like, "Hold up, he, you need a career to be president. Presidency is just like, it's not a career. You need a career." She kind of low-key made it sound like presidency is a hobby because you need to build up to it. *[laughter]* That's how she simplified it. And I was like, "Sure." *[laughter]* She's like, "All right, we need a career first."

Both our first lady and our president are both lawyers, back then it was Obama and Michelle Obama. She was like, "What about lawyer?" And I was like, "All right, lawyer then president, got you." I made that choice when I was eight. *[laughs]* I don't know, it kind of stuck with me.

And in classes, the classes that I completely love were history and we're talking about that. And then with that, we got into a lot of policy, political science, we're dealing with policy. So a lot of those. And then I took a civil liberties class, which is within the political science realm. So it's a lot of those laws and rules.

So I always attributed to political science, which is why I was like, "I love this," which is kind of a, I think I can be a lawyer. Is essentially

where it's like, "I love this work." So really it's a combination of things where like what I was already interested in, what are kind of my future goals. And just even within school, adding on economics, I wanted to add in cognitive science, but they don't got a minor here. And then the transfer credits are, I only have so much time.

KD: Sure. Yeah. You've touched on a couple of classes that you've taken. Do you have sort of any memorable professors or classes that stick out, especially to you?

FM: Yes. My professor, just in Hopkins?

KD: I think specifically Hopkins, but if you wanna elaborate, feel free *[laughter]*.

FM: Just making sure I'm good.

KD: No I should have specified.

FM: Yes, because I've taken a lot of amazing classes in both places. In terms of Hopkins, one of my professors, three stand out to me the most are also within political science, are my Professor Spence, Culbert and Bennett. Professor Spence, he did urban politics. Professor Bennett, she was political theorist. So that was ancient political theory.

And then Professor Culbert is also within theory and that was Law, Morality, and the State. I just loved them, because I felt like they actually cared about us and they were so passionate about their topics and they really wanted us to learn. And you could just feel that. And I would go to their office hours, I'm like –

The amount of times I was showing up to office, I was like, "I don't understand this reading. What are they even saying?" And just breaking it down, just trying to actually help you. There are people who are meant to be teachers and I feel like those are the three that I feel like definitely deserve to be professors because I've never felt so –

I don't know, not even just see, but just like, "You know you got this," just supported, is the right word. And I feel like they completely cared about us and they – I remember Professor Spence when it came for our final, he's like, "I know y'all are writing a lot of papers. What if instead of writing a paper, you do something creative, like do a podcast and then just giving me the annotated bibliography?"

So I'm like, "All right." So that was cool. So I was like, "Okay." But creating that was insane. I was in charge of the technical stuff, that was not easy recording. Like, oh God, that was fun, especially over Zoom with people. So that was insane. And then I was the one who was like, "I'll take care of the edits."

I regret that. *[laughter]* I really do regret that. I was like, "There is a lot of editing." And then one of my group members is like, "Oh, we can hear a door slam. Can we take care of them?" Like, "No, it's staying there. Our professor will be fine if he hears a door slam." I was like, *[laughs]* "I can't edit it anymore. I tried."

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And then just other classes that I've really taken that I've really loved, or like even now, like I just mentioned, I was in my standing office hours with my professor, Duffee, he's teaching corporate finance. I am not doing well in that class, to put it mildly. He's like, "All right, let's work on this. How are we going to fix this?" And he's like, "By we, I mean, you."

And we were just talking about how we're meeting, trying to meet like once a week and just going over this stuff. And I feel like definitely supported also by him because he obviously is like, he wouldn't be bothering helping me go through the explanations of why this certain thing works if he didn't really care that his students know. In terms of classes, I don't know. I don't think I've taken a class that I don't love.

I may hate it while I'm doing it, because the work is, sorry, the work, *[laughter]* we're editing that one out. The work is always hard when you're really going through it. I feel like I've thrown every curse word, everything at the wall, just because I'm like, "I don't understand this and I'm so frustrated. That's always going to be a part of it because we're learning, learning means it's going to be challenging. That's just the reality."

But at the end, I really love what I've taken. I feel like a notable was race and politics and memory. That was wild. I loved it, wild in the best way possible, because we were dealing with, it's another political theory class, which again, political theory, woo, I love that. And I have such a love-hate relationship, but I love the concepts of the people that they're saying and everything is so brilliant. I hate it because oh my God, how they write are sometimes are not the easiest ways to follow.

KD: It's dense. It can be dense.

FM: It's very dense. And I'm like, "Why? Everything you told me in 10 pages, I told you in two sentences. Why?" *[laughs]* So that's just my love-hate with political theory, but like race and politics and memory, were dealing with like – I took it last semester, which is when a lot of like critical race theory debates were happening and we were literally in the middle of the production of memory and how it works and then race –

Again, it was just like a lot of things that were going on in the real world were like literally coming into our classroom in the discussions

and it was a two-person class. So I was like, "Ah, there was no hiding in that one." But I loved that class. It was confusing too because we had a lot of, we had Nietzsche and I was like, "All right, my dude. What are you saying here?"

And just trying to figure out what he's saying, it's stressful, it's complicated. But I still love it. Race and politics of theory, race and politics of memory, urban politics. I was just trying to run through the list. I feel like those are the two that, oh, law and morality in the state jump out. Oh, and I took an economic development of Sub-Saharan Africa. That was an econ course. And that also jumps out, it's amazing. Yeah, those are top four.

KD: Even like the names of these classes sounds so interesting.

FM: It's so interesting.

KD: I know everyone, it's especially a great way to learn when what you're learning relates. You can like see the kind of, sort of immediate connection or the immediacy of what you're learning to what's actually going on in society. We're switching gears a little bit and we've talked about, and sort of the shorter amount of time that you've been on campus. Can you talk a little bit more about apartment life here and your perception of different living spaces, what that's been like?

FM: Apartment life. Well, growing up, I was growing up in apartments so it was like nothing new, really. I was like, "Yeah, the only difference is that I'm paying the bills now, that is not fun." There's been some maintenance issues. There's been some pest issues throughout my time of where I live, which has not been fun.

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I have to call maintenance a lot to get that fixed. And I know it wasn't me because literally the day I moved in, the day of, I opened the door, I'm like "cockroach." So that was really frustrating. And I was dealing with that. And I really wish I would've been at places like Nine East or the Academy, but they were not affordable. And the only way they were going to be affordable is with roommates, which again, I didn't know people. Yeah.

KD: The apartment where you've been calling maintenance, is that sort of university housing?

FM: No. I'm a senior, so they don't offer housing to seniors or juniors. So that one is obvious. I'm outside in a private property essentially. And thankfully they've been good about coming in and fumigating. So at least they answer. [laughter] So it's like, it could have been worse. And for now it's been a couple of like months, knock on wood, no cockroaches for the last couple of two – Since December I've been good. And hopefully we'll stay good.

KD: Yes. Good luck *[laughs]*.

FM: Thank You.

KD: I hope it stays good.

FM: Grocery shopping has been fun. I've realized how expensive it is. That's kind of why I had to take on a job. I was like, "Okay, so expenses aren't looking great and I'd like to afford groceries." So that's how I ended up finding the job I have now. Because I'm like, "All right, I need this."

And yeah, I'm just realizing, I'm like, "I don't know. It's just so expensive, just so expensive." I was like, "How am I paying this close amount to what I pay for groceries at home, like for a family? How am I getting near those levels?" It is like, "What's going on here?" And it's just like, "Oh, the city is so expensive in terms of groceries." And I could only go to like Giant or Safeway because I don't have a car, so I can't really move further out to be like, "Let me just go this one other place to try to find cheaper things."

KD: Yeah. So I know there's like the Giant over towards Hampden, and then the Charles Village Safeway.

FM: Charles Village Safeway, those are generally, you'll find me.

KD: Gotcha.

FM: You'll find me there.

KD: Spend a lot of time at those locations myself *[laughs]*.

FM: *[laughter]* I spend a lot of time there.

KD: You've touched on a couple of clubs or campus activities that you've participated in. Could you talk a little bit more about those, which ones you're part of or participate in?

FM: Right. So I am a part of – I am a stylist for Marquee Magazine and I just, not even two weeks ago, finished my last responsibilities for that one. I did two photo shoots, one I was styling, another one I was modeling in, which was nerve-wracking.

As soon as I was like, "Why did I sign up for this? This is weird and awkward." But I still had fun. And that last photo shoot was insane. Just everything was going wrong. Anything that could go wrong went wrong. And it was the final one *[laughs]*. We needed to stay on time, because we need the magazine to come out on time.

But it was still enjoyable. I'm a part of e-board for FLOC, which is a Female Leaders of Color and I am the professional and academic development co-chair, and I'm also part of the Women's Network and I am the vice president of Diversity Equity & Inclusion. And then I'm part of E.P.I.C., which is Economic Policy Issues Colloquium. I don't know how to pronounce that last word, but I'm sure you know what I'm trying to say.

KD: I know what you mean.

FM: You know what I mean, that's the important bit. I'm part of the leadership, but we don't really have roles, but I'm mostly in charge of flyers. I would call it like, I guess creative director essentially. Yes, that's what I'm a part of. And I just got a role in Witness Theater for one of the little plays. So I'm excited.

KD: Which play is it?

FM: They're still writing *[laughs]*. And it's just like a type of one-act. So it's like not long play, which is like, I need that. I don't got time for anything else. Yeah.

KD: That's awesome.

FM: That's kind of what I've been, I guess, involved with.

KD: Sure. You also mentioned having a job. Can you talk about what internships or jobs that you've had?

[1:00:00]

FM: Internships, I had one over the summer. I had the CIIP, which is within the Center for Social Concern. CIIP stands Community Impacts Internship Program. First of all, you have to apply to be a part of the program.

And once you get in, you get paired off with a nonprofit organization and they typically don't pay, but because we're through this program, Hopkins pays us not the nonprofit. That's all we need, the paid internship. I had to, I was like, "I can't not have one." And I was paired off for the Out For Justice, which is a nonprofit dedicated to helping and giving resources to returning citizens from prison and their families.

So I was interning there for the summer. I wasn't given enough hours because I was online, they paired me with another internship. So I had two internships at the exact same time. It was for the council member, James Torrence, he's in the Seventh District. So I was an intern at that office too. And that was my last summer. Yes, last summer. And that was pretty fun.

There was a lot of research and writing involved in both of them and calling. And then I guess they were office work jobs. Even in like my old school, it was just picking up, like being a note taker or helping out, like giving out surveys. Sometimes they paid you for like little stuff. It wasn't really anything like long-term, it was just like whatever little odd jobs I can find around campus, that's what I would do.

But considering I was limited, because I lived off campus and I couldn't stay, I couldn't really work much there. But obviously I was living at home, so I was saving money *[laughs]*. Now here, I did a note taker job too. And then the Center for Social Concerns sometimes needs help, they put out presentations. So they have students like facilitate them. So I got paid to do that.

And then during the pandemic in the summer, I worked as a cashier at Safeway. Summer 2020 is not the time you want to be a cashier. To put it very mildly, it is not the time you want to be one.

And that's when I was a cashier. I got yelled at because they had to wear a mask and I was like, "Sir, I didn't create the policy." He's like, "I don't want to be here for 20 minutes with the mask." In my head, I'm like, "Sir, I still have like eight hours left on my shift. I'm sorry. You can deal with this. Like I'm dealing with this."

That was just in the summer, only for the summer just because I wasn't gonna be able to balance more. And now I have a part-time job at the Off-campus Housing. I started recently. And as I mentioned before, I was getting concerned because I was like Hopkins with financial aid, they give you set amount of money and that's supposed to cover like your rent and food, but you're supposed to manage it.

So I was doing the math and I was like, "All right, I have enough to cover rent and a little bit of food. It's not looking good," especially since I like to go out with friends sometimes because I also like to live *[laughs]* and have some sort of social life. I was like, "All right, we really need to work," and that's how I ended up over there.

KD: I guess sort of being a transfer student, this question could apply to your whole college experience or just Hopkins's, this sort of time that you've had here, some summers or breaks you've had jobs. Have you been able to sort of travel home during breaks since coming here? Or how have your summers and breaks been and that kind of leads into the next question of like, how has your relationship with your family been while you've been at Hopkins?

FM: So the first one, so the first three years, obviously I was at home. So I stayed at home. And then now I move once this academic year started, so now I'm a senior. I went to two homes *[laughs]*. I went to visit my family in Mexico and then flew to my home in Oregon. We all do. So

we visit my grandma. So that was in December and then I flew from Baltimore to Mexico. So I was visiting my family.

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And then from there I went back to Oregon with my family. What is it called? The nuclear family essentially because I was with a lot of extended. Everyone was there, essentially like my mom, my dad, not my dad, my stepdad, my siblings.

Then we moved back to Oregon and then I flew back to Baltimore. I wanted to visit them again for spring break, but the plane tickets were like upwards of 500 and I was like, "I'll just see y'all in May. I'm not paying – No, but I don't have enough money in the budget to make with groceries." I was not going to pay for a flight home.

And in terms of how close we've gotten, I think that my mom constantly is asking me to text her once I'm at the apartment, be like, "Hi, are you awake?" Just to give her check-ins and then I forget. And she gets worried.

One time I went to the movies and she texted me like at 10:20 PM, and obviously I'm at the movies, I can't hear it. And then for some reason I check and I was like, "Oh, my God, 20 minutes have passed." So I was like, I run out. I'm like, "By the way, I'm fine. I'm safe. Don't freak out." Then I got a text from my sister, she's like, "Why aren't you answering the phone? Mom is freaking out. "

And I was like, "Why is she texting you?" She's like, "I don't know. Answer her." And I'm like, "I am, was at the movie theater." I do try to check in with her and then I check in with my, I try to have conversations, like throughout the week be like, "What are you doing? I'm just walking up from, just checking," because it's nice, because obviously I miss my family. I've been with them for longer time than I have been by myself.

And yeah, just calling and I'm calling my little siblings and then they're fighting and I'm like, "Don't do that." So I feel like I'm trying to keep it the same, the same like ties or like the level of relationship, but it's hard when you're far away. Like my mom text me a picture of my little brother who's in first grade and they had to do like, who do you love?

And he put me because I play with him and I cook for him and it was like, oh adorable. And mom was constantly saying how the kids miss me, even my sister was like. "The other day they were like 'I miss her.'" And I was just like, "Yeah, I know, I miss them too." So sometimes it's hard. I can't be calling them all the time because I'm also busy. I feel like we have a good amount of communication where it's like we're talking more than once a week, mostly with my mom. Just

she likes to check in. She's like, "Are you alive?" And I'm like, "Yes. Technically speaking, yes." *[laughter]*

KD: What has your support system been like here at Hopkins?

FM: I have a couple of friends who are just very, we try to be there for each other just because like, as we've mentioned before, it's hard to be here. It's very challenging. We were like, "Okay, we've been killing ourselves here. All right, we're going to go watch a movie. All right, we're going to go to the mall. Oh, we're gonna do something just to be like, we – Otherwise we're going to go insane if all we're doing is work.

So I feel like that's been great and just like we constantly have like movie nights or just like we're trying to check in with each other. I feel like it's great sometimes like with –

And also in terms of like, I guess academic support, I was used to go to the Life Design Lab a lot and I'll be like, I know like two of them, of the advisors, but they know me because like the amount of times I've been like, "I'm having a crisis. What is going on with my life? What's going on with this future? Apparently what is the future?"

Just trying to like handle it because it's so overwhelming, and then just like talking it through with them, I go to the counseling center. I have a therapist, so I have therapy like what, every twice. Wait, no once every two weeks. Just because as I mentioned before, I did lose my dad and that is traumatic, to put it mildly. It's a lot of powerful emotions and it's a lot to deal with, especially on top of school.

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And now that I'm by myself, it's gotten, I don't know, more harder. And I was like, "You know what, I should be in therapy." So I go to that. So in terms of like, I have friends where we try to do stuff, when there was the ice skating rink, I was like, "I don't care. We're going, because we need something. It's just trying to find ways to like stay."

KD: *[pause]* Sorry, I was looking at the time briefly. I also went to the ice skating rink and enjoyed it as well.

FM: Did you use the emotional support seal like I did?

KD: I mostly just clung to the wall or like to the railing *[laughter]*, but I probably should have had the – That's a really good way of putting the service those provide *[laughter]*.

FM: As soon as I saw the seal, I was like, "That's my emotional support seal. Please do not take them away from me."

KD: Yes, we're connected.

FM: We're connected. We are one, yes.

KD: Another form of sort of support system *[laughter]*, an unexpected one. You've talked a bit about the FLI Network. The next question is, have you felt supported by Hopkins as a first-generation student and how can the university increase its support for first-generation students?

FM: I would say yes to a certain extent. I think also it has to do with – There's not a strong pre-law program or advisor. So law school, I've been navigating by myself. I haven't had any help. And I've asked and they're like– It's not been as strong.

So trying to figure out the LSAT by myself, which costed me, because I didn't realize I was supposed to take it before. Like it would be better to take it in the summer before your senior year. I took it in November. I'm writing a thesis, I have classes. It was intense and it was so much.

And then also, I didn't know there was a fee waiver and then I was talking to a friend he's like, "There's a fee waiver. I'll help you." And I was like, "Thank you." Because LSAT is expensive. And applying to law school is very expensive. So I needed that fee waiver.

And there was so much, to get that fee waiver, it was so intense. It was really horrible just because I was denied because of the amount of money it was in my account. And I was like, "That's not my money. That's Hopkins money to pay rent, that's not mine." And they're like, "It's too much."

So I had to explain. So I had to appeal, had to explain, "That's not my money, that's the Hopkins money that they give me for my financial aid." And explain, I had to give them they're like, "Oh we also need your tax report," or their tax statement taxes. I'm like, "I don't pay taxes. I'm a student. I'm dependent on my family." They're like, "Okay, we need a non-filing letter."

So I did try to do it with the IRS and they're like, "Oh you're not in our system." I'm like, "I know I'm not in your system because I haven't filed taxes." So it was a whole process and I couldn't get that letter. And then I was calling the customer service for the LSAC *[Law School Admission Council]*, because that's what it's called, the place where we take the LSAT, send in our transcripts, send in everything to apply, it's the LSAC. And they're like, "We can't do anything. We need that letter."

And then the day before it was due, I was calling them like, "Listen, I haven't gotten back the letter. I don't know what to do." And then the lady's like, "Oh, you could just turn in your W2 statements." And I was like, "Y'all are lucky. I thought to bring it with me because I would've

been done." Also have to write like, why do you need this money? I'm like, "Hello, I can't afford it otherwise." So all the, I guess the red tape just surrounded like fee waivers was intense.

And I had to do that by myself and then, because it took such a long process, I couldn't take the LSAT in October or September. I had to wait until November, which I was already bogged down with school. And then applying for colleges has been, or law schools, it's been a long process and I've essentially been doing that by myself.

So to a certain extent, yes, it's been supportive. It would've been even more had they had a stronger pre-law program and even now I'm getting their emails, they're like, "Oh, there's gonna be a seminar on how to navigate the LSAC." I'm like, "Wow." So after I did all that work, it's here.

[1:15:00]

So that's where I wasn't really supported. For other first-generation stuff, there's been a lot of like webinars and like events which have been helpful, but you have to seek them out. That's where I stand. It's been helpful for a lot of things, but when it came to law school, it wasn't as helpful.

KD: Gotcha. I'm going to pause the recording. So our next question is, what would you say in general about your life in Baltimore or Maryland? How have you liked the city so far? Are there certain areas of the city you've gotten to know? And then our kind of sub-question to this question is, have there been any events or historic moments in kind of the world culture globally or like nationally that have happened while you've been at Hopkins? Obviously the biggest, maybe one of the biggest ones is the pandemic. But any other sort of large moments that way?

FM: Well, they happened while I was in Hopkins, but not in Hopkins, not here. Because I was at home, there was a whole forest fire situation that nearly reached our home. So I think we were at a level yellow of alert. So that means get ready to evacuate, which is scary, because I'm trying to like go to class, I have my little siblings, and it's like my family's still going to work, so they're with me.

And I was like, "All right, I can't drive. We don't have a car, even if I did know how to drive," because they take the cars with them. And I was like, "All right, this isn't looking great." So it was just a bit of panic, but I was like, "We have a neighbor, who's our close family friend, she was like, "If we hit red, you're coming with us."

And it was like, obviously, but it was very tough. There was a whole Portland ice storm that happened and it reached us and then everything froze. And then there was some trees that fell and they cut off the

power in certain places. So for a week we didn't have heat because there was no energy. So during that weekend, it was when I had my interview for the CIIP.

So literally, when my mom and I were getting groceries, we were like figuring out like what to get, like stuff that can't be perishable, but figure could stay outside a bit, because it was very cold, and candles and all that stuff. I took my interview in the parking lot and we were like in a different county and I was like, "By the way, if I'm not professional, this is what's happening." They're like, "Are you sure?" I'm like, "This is the only time I can do it because I don't know what's going to happen the next few days. This is the only time I'm going to take it."

And obviously I went, well, I got the internship. And then just classes, I was at the mall just – I feel like a lot of people were at the mall just for heat. And obviously I had internet service there, and I was emailing my professor like, "By the way this horrible thing happened, I'll try to make it. I don't know how I would make it to class, but I'll try."

And they're like, "Just relax." And I was like, "I know I will, but I'm just giving you a warning. This is what's happening. I'm not just slacking off." And then I was able to, for some classes, make it, because I would use my mobile hotspot. And so for some classes I would be there, some other classes I wouldn't because I couldn't.

And then my computer died. So it was just like, "All right." Then my sister had a power bank, so I kept that charging. And then we had to go at Washington State to find a power generator and it was so expensive to rent. And then we finally got that. So we got some heat, we were able to boil water so we can bathe because obviously the water is freezing. There's no heat. So we were like boiling water.

And then we were just like, I was like, "Well this is back, like we're in Mexico. All right, let's do this." So that was just very historic, but I was at home, it wasn't Baltimore, but it was still within my time at Hopkins. Thankfully the professors were like, "Yeah, you're fine." I was like, "Good. If you were going to say otherwise, I would've been like y'all are heartless, this isn't okay." But that wasn't the reaction. So thankfully I didn't have to go on that route. What was the other question?

[1:20:00]

KD: It was, what would you say in general about living in Baltimore?

FM: Living in Baltimore, I feel like I got too used to how weird the weather is, just 'cause like the other Saturday was snowing and then now it's very hot. So I'm like, "What's up with y'all?" I've tried to explore Baltimore with a friend. We'd like try to go to different places, but time

isn't that the thing, it's like we really –

We try to go to like Inner Harbor, try to find other events that are happening around the area. We've gone to Hampden often because it's nearby and it's walkable. You mentioned emotional support or something you do for like health-wise, walking. That is so nice.

And usually I just walk around here. I've gone to Giant just for the sake of walking and didn't buy anything because I was just like, I needed to leave my apartment because I can't be inside there any much longer because I was like, "It's too much." So I walk over there and then walk back and I was like, All right, let's go back to work." I think it could be explored a lot more. There's so much to do.

And even now it's spring break, we're like, "All right, let's try to find events or things to do around the area. Let's try to explore this restaurant or like ice cream place or whatever we can do to get to know the place better."

KD: You've mentioned preparing for law school. Could you speak about your plans for life after Hopkins? Can you plan sort of to return to the West Coast or stay on the East Coast for a while, maybe stay in Baltimore?

FM: My plans really are dependent on those acceptance letters. That's where I'm at. In terms of where I will be, because I've applied to several schools and a lot of them are on the East Coast, but after I graduate, whether I get in or not, which hopefully I do and I will be going home for the summer.

And depending on if I don't get into any law schools, which I hope I don't, I switch to plan B and find a legal assistant job in Portland, because that's just more manageable because my family's there and I wouldn't be paying rent. So that is great great motivation.

And if I do get into a law school, obviously that'll tell me whether I'm going back to the West Coast or staying in the East Coast, yes. I really don't care where I'm at. As long as I'm in law school, that's where I'm at. I've applied and I'm just looking at the list and I'm like, "I just need one of you to say yes, I don't care which one of you says yes." I really applied to the ones I really, really wanted to go. So yeah, only time will tell me where I will be, except for the summer, I know I'll be home.

KD: Is there a specific kind of law that you'd imagine yourself practicing?

FM: Well, my first love has always been criminal law. That's kind of like what got me into, like more seriously think about law. Yeah, because I think it was in high school where freshman year we were told like do a presentation on something, you can pick your topic. And I was like,

"What topic are we gonna pick? All right, death penalty."

I feel like a friend dropped it and she's like, "That's open." And I'm like, "All right, I'll take it. I don't know. Let's go, let's go." And so obviously that was like, "Oh my God, this is horrible." So that introduced me to criminal law and then the following year, my sophomore year of high school I was doing, we were like do a paper, any topic, "All right, stop and frisk."

That was my other entry point, because like analyzing that policy and just how terrible it was and how discriminatory it was to the black and brown people in New York. So I was like, "Oh." It was just solidifying. Like I already knew of like things aren't good, racism is here, but I wasn't just aware of how systematic it was, literally how the policies were written.

I'm like you were obviously doing this on purpose, just so vaguely written enough for like, "Yeah, it's plausible. They didn't mean to do that."

[1:25:00]

And then I feel like junior year I wasn't at home. And then college, I did a whole, like a couple years ago I did a paper on privatization of prisons.

And then eventually it talked about the privatization of detention centers, which is like a lot of people are getting a lot of money to detain people, and I'm like, "That's a business model. What's the point of any business model to make it grow? So you are profiting of having more people in your jail. That's problematic."

So honestly that's always been my first love, criminal law. And I've been talking to, I've had a lot of informational interviews like last year and now just with other lawyers in different fields, be like, "What is this?" Because I have no reference really aside from TV, which is completely inaccurate. And so having informational interviews with them, like, "What do you do?" And then just like talking about them.

And then another love of mine has always been like movies, entertainment, and then someone's like, "You know, there's an entertainment law thing." And so I try to talk with people who are in that field, because that seems very interesting to me, just find a way to marry entertainment and then that creative side with laws, and ensuring a lot of that. That seems pretty cool to me.

And I've talked to a lot of like corporate lawyers, because I'm like, "This has a bad rep." Everyone knows like, or like a lot of people know like corporate law is very soul-sucking. Like it's very, the hours are terrible. This what we hear. What's going on? You work here. What do

you do?

Like I interviewed this person and she was just like, "You know, it depends on the company that you're working for." And she was just telling me like some of the strategies that she took, she was like, "It's work, but literally everything is work. Regardless of the field of law, you're gonna be working a lot."

And she was just telling me like what are the strategies she did to pick a firm, because she was talking about how she went to Columbia. So they often had a lot of recruiters having dinners, just trying to get the students to work there after they passed the bar.

And she was talking about how there was some companies, especially within the top 10 law firms where the recruiters looked essentially robotic, and she's like, "I avoided those, because if they're already done, it's not the place for you, it's just not."

And she was just talking about another strategy she uses, like when she found like a firm that seemed like wasn't that, she would look at the top management team and she would like figure out if they were married. 'Cause if they were married, that means there, and like happily, there's not a lot of divorces. That means there's some semblance of family life.

And then she would ask them like, "What do you on a weekend?" And if they can't even answer, because everything is work, avoid those. But if they were like, "Oh, you know, I like, I do tennis. I do this other things." Obviously when work piles up because there's ebbs and flows, they'll talk about how obviously now in this certain period has been work, but literally after that I'm like, "We'll be doing tennis."

So she was telling me about those strategies she used that were helpful for her to find her place. And I also feel like the beauty of law is that you don't have to stay with it. And there's other realms of –there's, I just mentioned three. If for some reason I just don't wanna do this one, I am not pigeonholed.

I feel like when you're a doctor, yeah, you are, you are gonna be a heart surgeon. You have to because that's exactly what you train for and that is it. I feel like that's the beauty of a law degree, is that, "All right, I wanna go into corporate for some reason or I wanna go more into entertainment or I wanna go to criminal or you know what, let's stop law, let's go into another avenue. But the law degree is still useful, policy politics, which is –

KD: The president.

FM: That is not the same. I don't have that same dream. Yeah, no, I don't think so.

KD: I think that's a really good –

FM: Not president. I'll be like policy, sure, but president oof, that was an eight-year-old dream.

KD: I think that's a really good perspective, like learning about the lifestyle that accompanies the work. And then just like so smart to do those informational interviews to get that kind of feedback from folks doing it.

[1:30:00]

FM: This whole thing is first-generation, what does that mean? It means you don't know anything, really. Usually your parents are your frame of reference. So if your parents go to law school or have these other careers, they can tell you what this is or with and family. When you're not that, your frame of reference are the jobs they did have.

And that is obviously not anything career-related, which you might aspire to or dream of. And so that was very important for me. When reaching out to people, I was like, "I just really wanna know because all of my references are that I love political science. I loved my, I guess my civil liberty classes or like anything with constitutional law.

But I also know that's not the real world and I just wanna know what you're doing, because at the end of the day, that's what I'm gonna be doing if I choose to pursue it." So my references are school and TV, which again, not reliable.

Even if you are a doctor and you're watching Grey's Anatomy, you'll be like, "Hey, that's very accurate," but no, that's not what you're doing. So that was very, very important for me, which is why I started doing them. I think I've done like at least five informational interviews. I've met up with more than once with some of them just be like, "What's up?"

KD: Overall, would you recommend Hopkins to other first-generation students? And is there any advice you would give them, maybe doing informational interviews is a form of that?

FM: Yes. I would recommend this school for first-generation. Just warning, it's gonna be different. It's gonna be incredibly hard, but there's help. You just have to literally go to the offices that are dedicated to that. And someone will point you to the right direction, even if you're in the wrong office. It's looking better for the pre-law.

So unfortunately I didn't get that. So you are in better hands than me. If this person, whoever wants to do pre-law it's looking better, that program is, or the department or I guess program is looking better. Yeah, I would say it's a good school. It's a really great school. And for

first-generations, it's just, because I know the experience of going to regular public state university, four-year university.

And I know what it's like here, which is why if you're hearing hesitation for me it's because I know the differences, but overall, still Hopkins is a great school. I obviously have the experience of another one where things are still hard if you're first-generation. It's gonna be hard either way because it's a new playing field, but it's just gonna be even harder here just because of how much is required of you. And I wanted it. And I feel like everyone who's here wanted to be here. So if you wanna be here, you got this. It was gonna be hard regardless of the school. So might as well come here.

KD: How would you summarize your time at Hopkins?

FM: A rewarding battle. It's been a battle, but it's got its benefits. I wouldn't have met the people I would've. I feel like it even gave me courage to apply to the law schools. I was like, "Oh they're only dream schools." I felt very validated here for having big dreams. So in that sense it's been rewarding. I've completely enjoyed my professors. I feel most of them have been very, very, very supportive. I love the curriculum. It's hard, I'm not gonna lie, it is.

There's a lot more expected of you and there's a lot more that is just thrown at you.

[1:35:00]

It's hard to navigate because again, you have to get used to it and something you haven't been used to at all. But hey, I have those skills now. Yeah, I think it's the only way, it's been a battle, but it's been rewarding. It's not as if it's been pure downside or pure upside, it's both. That's the best way.

KD: That's sort of the end of my questions. Thank you so much for speaking with me today. I know everyone's super busy, so I really appreciate your time. Is there anything else you would like to add before the interview is over, any parts of your Hopkins experience that didn't come up in the questions or anything you'd like to touch on?

FM: I don't think so.

KD: No. Okay. All right. Well, thank you.

FM: No problem.

[End of Audio]