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*Tell me about how you arrived at CCSF and a bit about your high school years*

I moved to SF with my family from Mosco when I had just turned 15 and I went to high school for one year with and it was not a match with the Russian education experience and I felt like I wasn’t able to get my education further. My parents had a temporary contract job and I wanted to do as much as possible while I was there and they wanted to support me.

I found out about CCSF and found out there was an opportunity to take a proficiency exam for high school and (inaudible) California High School Proficiency Exam and if I passed that that is something that would give me the equivalent of a high school diploma and I would be able to move forward with my education.

That’s what I decided to do and it was kind of a difficult decision at the time because I didn’t know if I was ready and if I wanted to go to a community college – it wasn’t what I thought of originally and I didn’t know how a community college works and it wasn’t like university and especially top name ones, but it was kind of a different change, but ultimately, I decided to do that – and then started at CCSF at 16, so that was how I got to community college and ultimately, looking back it was a great decision for me and something that I feel positively about and remember City College warmly and think highly of my experience.

*Did you think you would come to the U.S., finish high school, and then enter a top university? Is that what you thought about in your 15-year-old mind?*

Yeah, sort of. I was hopeful and planned to do high school, improve my English, get an educational experience in the U.S. and then get into a good university. At the time, I didn’t know anything about how admissions works or what are the qualifications that I would want to look at, but it was a lot of uncertainty.

*Were there schools you had heard of back home?*

Yes, Berkeley, Stanford, Columbia, Yale and top Ivy League Schools are the ones that had international prestige and the ones I always heard about. That would have been a dream for me at the time.

I didn’t specialize in my country, it was a standard school curriculum and we had lots of English classes and hours of instruction to that, so that was (inaudible) the specialization of my high school, but beyond that, I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I decided to study business and economics. I thought it was interesting and I could apply it to a lot of industries and thought that the foundation would be valid for me with whatever it is I chose to do ultimately.

You arrive at CCSF. Where did you even begin? How did you decide which classes to take and how did you navigate your way around?

I don’t remember the details, but what I do remember is that it was a big decision. Should I go to community college? Am I ready? Is this not the right place for me? So, I registered pretty late, and of course, many classes were filled and slots were taken by other students. I am not really sure I knew which classes to take. I think I might have found some materials like GE courses, Assist.org or transfer courses. I started to get some general classes like English and statistics my first semester. I know one thing. I was lucky somehow to sign up for Math and English 1A class and when I got there the first day, there were 20 or 30 people waiting or trying to get in, so that is something I felt that fortunate about.

*Did you ever see a counselor?*

I did. I saw a counselor when I first started. I don’t really remember her, her advice, or (inaudible).

When you arrived, was your goal to see which disciplines were of interest?

My goal was to begin the curriculum to transfer. One of the things that was interesting was that in Russia, you applied to a school, you get into a program and everything is dedicated to that major and you get into a program as a freshman and you study that for the whole period, whereas here, there is a lot of flexibility, you can take GEs, switch majors and figure out what you wanted to do. I didn’t know that would be possible. Kind of knowing those requirements and following them was a priority from the very beginning.

*How did it feel in the classroom for the very first time? What was the environment like as someone new to this country?*

Uh. Well, I think. I remember my first class was statistics and I didn’t know that the start time was ten minutes after the list time. I was certain that I was going to be late to my first class and it was so embarrassing and I got there and saw that people were still getting there, and I thought it was good and that I would be mindful of that for the future transportation. I remember the experience being very positive, made some friends in the class, got to know the people sitting next to me and I think there was some things where we were working together on some in-class assignments was encouraged and so I got to know some people. It was kind of hard to meet people in a commuter school environment, but in terms of classroom experience, I just remember it being very positive and the professors doing their jobs well and they are willing to share their knowledge and willing to be there, so that was a positive for me.

*What would you say the instruction was like at CCSF? How would you rate us now that you have a chance to compare to UCLA and Duke?*

Well, honestly, I must say that I have in general, very high opinions about the instructors that I have and I often remember my experience and whenever I talk to people about it, I always think and say that I had great instruction, small classes and the professors were willing to teach and do a good job. There were a few exceptions where things didn’t go as well, as always. (laughs). Having taken a lot of classes, there is going to be some variation, but I had a lot of great professors in an environment that works very well for me to have that small class size and have people be available. I can honestly say that I received great instruction that prepared me well, and I was challenged. I learned a lot. I didn’t have to just do anything and I can get As.

I know that one of my English professors taught me how to write and how to structure an essay. I got a couple of Cs, and I was completely shocked because I considered myself a good writer, but once I got feedback from the professor, Nicholas Smith, and I don’t know if he still teaches there, and I learned to structure my essays with a thesis, opening statements and how you transition, and I think that is something that has helped me, and it was valuable to be challenged and not just given grades. I can think of a lot of examples where there were really interesting projects and opportunities, of course with Susan and other professors – it’s been great.

*What were some of your greatest memories at CCSF?*

I think just kind of the environment, and learning and studying. Of course, all of the professors that I met. Everyone has been very supportive and gone the extra mile to help me learn and to help me develop my interests for the future. The professors like Susan and others in the business department and I will stay in touch with Susan and a few other people, and I think it is just very valuable to have that kind of connection and also the student environment and being a part of Alpha Beta Gamma and the people I met there, participating in those events and just really fascinating to see where people have ended up in their careers and to see what they are doing. It is an honor and privilege to see what people are doing and to be in touch with them throughout their careers. Having that kind of network of people that I am in contact with that are my mentors and friends.

*How did you build community at CCSF?*

That’s an interesting question. When I started it was difficult for me with City College being a commuter school and me kind of living with my parents. Everything just felt like there were so many people and everything was just moving so quickly. One minute I am in class with inaudible people, and the next minute I go to class and everyone is gone, going their separate ways. I kind of made friends in class talking to people sitting next to and those were some of the early connections just having someone to chat with. I didn’t really make great lifelong friendships from that and when the classes ended, I didn’t see the people after that.

After about a year or so, I don’t remember if it was Susan’s class or on campus advertising or what people might have said, but I decided to become involved and kind of see what it is about and I remember I came over and it was already late and they had elected officer positions, and I said that I wanted to get involved and asked if there were any positions that I might be able to help with, and they had an ICC rep available and I thought that it was great to become more involved and get to know these people and attend more events. I participated in the college-wide meetings and learned about what other clubs do and saw issues of student government and that was fascinating and I reached out to a counselor and she was able to come over for a presentation on applications or career. So, I think Alpha Beta Gamma was a big part of my community college experience and I guess the people I met through the business department or Susan’s introduction or people through the Russian community that spoke Russian as well. Looking back, I am still kind of in touch with a fair amount of people through social media and people that I see more often, Nara who was also a student (inaudible) and recently, she was able to visit LA for a few days and we made the time to connect and thought it was important to us and it’s just been amazing to look at so many years after to see where we all are and to cherish the connections.

[talk about Nara’s visit]

I think you introduced me to Nara and said that this is somebody who is going to Berkeley, and you can talk to her and get more knowledge. We talked over Facebook and started communicating. She was there when I was there and then became friends on Facebook and now we are much better friends.

Talk to me about transferring and what the application process was like and what your hopes were in terms of transferring.

I also applied to business or economics programs, many in CA, Berkeley, LA, Santa Cruz, Davis and for some, I did the Transfer Admission Program, which was nice to have that security and it felt comforting to have that available and valuable. I applied to reach schools like Stanford and Columbia. I got into Davis, UCLA and Santa Cruz. At the time, it was difficult because I wanted to get into UC Berkeley and I didn’t get into Haas and it was a sad and difficult experience for me. I felt like something was wrong and that life was over, but ultimately, I am very happy with where I ended up. I loved UCLA, the culture, the city, the spirit and the environment and it was valuable to move there and move away from my family. That was difficult personally and financially and to kind of continue growing what I have there. I think ultimately, everything happens for a reason, and I couldn’t be happier or love my schools more, so that was kind of the experience for me.

What was UCLA like coming from City College?

I remember at city College when I was reading about college environment, I didn’t understand that. I thought it was normal, you just take classes and it is similar to high school. I guess that coming to UCLA, I really understood more about that college spirit, life and fun and making more connections and just having that large college experience. I lived in the dorms my first year as a transfer and I got to meet a lot of people. A little different coming in the first year as a transfer I think I didn’t have the full four-year experience and at the time, they didn’t have a lot of resources to kind of support or connect transfers. For the first time, you were the same age as the freshmen. All of my friends were a year or two older and connected with people in classes. I hung out with people I met in the dorms. I didn’t feel the difference between freshmen and juniors, and overall, people were younger than community college and it was nice to have that many young people. We all had a great experience at UCLA that was different…

What was it like coming to City College at 16 years of age?

Coming to college at 16 years of age was an interesting experience to start college at that time because I didn’t have a clear idea of what I wanted to do. I had less than other people, so many I didn’t have as great an understanding of what I wanted to do and future career goals.

*Tell me about your decision to go to graduate school.*

I wanted to get more experience in the field (economics in general) and try to figure it out more and see if I might be interested in research, pursuing an academic career or going into like a business world and I think I didn’t really get a sense of that in my undergraduate experience. Part of it might have been just taking more time to explore my interests and to get an education while I was still at the learning mindset and something I was used to. I was mindful of the different education requirements and in Russia, it is more valuable to have a master’s degree and our universities are five years, so when someone comes with a master’s degree, some companies are not sure how to treat that and right now, a lot of people are doing bachelors or masters.

I decided to apply to graduate programs in economics and fortunately, I had professors who were willing to help me out with the process. I did some research and came up with a personal statement about my accomplishments and interest and people in the career department, along with my professors were very helpful who took time to review and make sure that it was reasonable and ultimately, I was accepted to several programs at Duke, NYU, Georgetown and University of British Columbia in Canada. I think those are the ones I can remember off the top of my head. I ultimately decided to pick Duke because of the strength of the program and the strength of the school, and ultimately, I connected with the program director who was very open and very personable and helped me with the decision and clarifying anything that I needed. That flexibility and opportunity to focus on research or gain more applied skills and also kind of the people at Duke and how they were willing to outreach and explain anything – I really got the sense that people were trying to make this the best program, to be strong, and to make it the best that they could for their students. I found it very much as a place where I would be able to develop and not just have a degree as a check mark and to get that degree and be able to and that was how I made the decision.

*What did you think you were going to do after Duke?*

In general, when I started Duke, I didn’t know what was going to happen. I didn’t know if I wanted an academic career or whether I wanted to get a Ph.D. Right now I want to get work experience and with a good foundation or understanding or some of the issues. Having U.S. work experience is just so much more valuable than having some of those skills that foundation or something that is valuable for life. So, I was recruiting everywhere and ultimately, just ended up in Los Angeles recruiting with AG (Analysis Group) and where they had openings and it was kind of good for me because I knew the city, had some people that I knew and love Los Angeles for the city and the climate and it was a great place – I couldn’t ask for a better place to end up. Originally, I was on the student Visa and OPT and was fortunate to get a work visa in the lottery and am grateful to have this opportunity and to have the support of my firm.

I am analyst for an economic consulting firm and we work a lot with litigation and helping compare analyses to help support the arguments that our side is making.

In terms of day to day work, it is a lot of data analysis, working with data and analyzing and creating materials from that and creating in meetings and discussion as to how to move forward. We usually prepare some kinds of materials that will presented in litigation and it differs a lot by case and there is no typical day.

I get to work on different cases in different practice areas and experience different issues in different situations and also develop mind skills as I perform different analyses so it is a very interesting job.

I’ve been on calls or discussion of our results, but I haven’t sought out the client. We get a lot of case background and a lot of strategy on what points were trying to make. We are generous analysts and we move around. We don’t really have a specialty. I work a lot with finance like loans and fund fee (inaudible) I have tried some different things and work with different people, so I am not committed to one area, which is a good things. You get to develop your skills so you don’t get stuck in one area ans you get to figure things out.

*What can CCSF do better?*

One of the things I wish there was more of was school spirit and that kind of college experience, so maybe it is more difficult to do that in more of a commuter settings, where people are coming from different paths and with different goals and somebody might be transferring and somebody might just be taking a few classes for personal interest, but I think focusing on school spirit or sporting events. I have heard that the football tea is pretty good, but I don’t know enough about that. Anything to create a more spirited community would be great and hopefully lead to more people being as proud and as fond of City College as I am.

I don’t have a good answer right now in terms of my future. I just want to see how my career is going to go and how I feel about that in a few years and whether I feel like I am still developing or if I want to move forward with an economic consulting career or explore academia and any other opportunities. For now, I am taking it day by day and trying to focus more on short term goals while learning as much as I can and grow and develop here. Ultimately, keeping that and the business situation and opportunities and all of that in mind to just see where that leads me.

*44:45*

*You arrive at CCSF in 2008 at the age of 15 and now you are 24. How does it feel to be where you are as a professional today and looking back at your 15 year old former self and what impact did CCSF have on you?*

Take me back to sort of the impact that CCSF had on you. I think CCSF prepared me very well for the path that I ultimately took with my education and my career and not only did I gain knowledge in the classes at a university level but also met a lot of people and learned about education and life and connected and saw what people were doing and how they were using this opportunity. It gave me a good education that I was able to apply in the future and allowed me to transfer to a top university with worldwide recognition which ultimately helped me accomplish my professional goals today and ultimately taught me about the kind of person and life in academic skills about in time management, experience or writing, and looking back, it has been fascinating about what a journey this has been and how things have fallen into place. For me, it has been very unexpected. It’s not like I planned my life at 15 and that was how it went. For me, the college that I went to and the graduate school and getting a job after grad school and moving back to LA and a lot of those I could not have predicted, and it is just fascinated to see how that has turned out . I always think of CCSF very fondly. I recently got back from a trip to Russia and talked to people are my educational experience and I mention City College, how people treated me, and what I was able to learn and accomplish. I think it has been a major part of where I am today and I consider it one of my alma maters, a place I will always cherish, remember well, and a place that I will always want to have a connection with, and be a part of if possible.

For me, I am very proud of CCSF and I am happy to bring up and share how much value that it given me.

*How did you change in the two years while at CCSF (15 years of age to 17 years of age?)*

I really opened up a lot and became more confident. Part of it was academic skills that are hard to describe how much I have moved from X to Y. I have learned a lot and it prepared me well for the challenges of UCLA and Duke courses. I learned a lot about the education system and I had a general understanding of people going to college and transferring, but I didn’t have the details of what you can do with that and what schools you can go to and you can have guaranteed admission and how the system works and you can take whatever classes you want within a requirement and explore different majors. It was really interesting for me to take a variety of classes from Shakespeare to French to dance and

I had a 3.92 and I got a B in something like international relations or some sort of class.

*What has been your biggest accomplishment to date?*

I think my biggest accomplishment to date was navigating the U.S. education system because when I moved with my parents we did our best to research and my parents were supportive both personally and financially and for that, I am blessed. All of us didn’t know what we could do and how to navigate admissions or what are the steps necessary to get from point A to point B to apply for college and what should I write about in my essays and how should I do that? What do I do when I am a student? Should I join clubs? What activities should I take advantage of and how should I structure my schedule? I think a lot of that was very new to us and with the support of my family I have been able to navigate that and research and say that’s what I should be doing and make those independent decisions and figure it out and I think that is an accomplishment that I am proud of to be able to figure things out and take advantages of opportunities and accomplish my career goals and kind of be in a great place right now with hard work.

*How does it feel to reflect?*

It was a big honor for me to be asked to participate [in your sabbatical project] and I am appreciative that you took the time to travel and meet me at my office environment after some scheduling issues and it was an honor to participate. It is great to reflect on what things have been and to really talk about how City College has added value to me and it has been a great experience and it is great that they can hear that (straight outta City College) and that it can be brought back to the college itself and to talk about everything that has happened and to and how things have worked out and to remember my whole journey and try to reflect on my past. I am happy to participate and honored and glad that I get to do this and to share the benefits of City College with others.