

MIGRATING TO SUCCESS

COLLEGE ASSISTANCE MIGRANT PROGRAM EDINBURG

SPRING 2017

CAMP ALUMNI



Lalo Rodriguez

Eulalio “Lalo” Rodriguez, an alumnus from the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), is currently working toward earning his master’s degree in Physicians Assistant Studies. He began working in the agriculture fields around the age of 11 and was a migrant farmworker along with his parents and three younger siblings.

Rodriguez and his family travelled around the country to work in the watermelon fields. He said it was hard work because he would be the one to have to load the truck with watermelons one by one.

His days were long and nights were short, which consisted of school, work, homework, and getting ready for the next day of work.

Rodriguez said throughout his life he has had to make many sacrifices, along with the rest of his family – such as leaving friends and fun activities behind, as well as his social life. To motivate himself, Rodriguez said he just took one day at a time when things got rough, but eventually he got used to the routine. This made him become appreciative, disciplined, and helped him build a can-do attitude.

He traveled to many different cities in Texas for work such as Odessa, St. Lawrence, and Denver City. When the time came to start working in the fields again, he said he was content because he felt closer to his family. Rodriguez remembers one time when the company that he and his family worked for changed ownership. That year, he said was the hardest for his family because they had to do twice the work for the same pay since the new management was unorganized and did not know how to handle the company labor and work procedures.

Aside from his regular duties working for this company, he would also have to take the truck to different locations, unload it, and return to reload the same truck with a few other workers. That was the last year he worked in the fields because his parents wanted him to focus more on his education since he was going to be the first in his family to graduate college.

When it came to school, Rodriguez said there was no doubt he would be attending college. It was something he knew he would accomplish and his family would support him all the way. During his senior year in high school, his migrant counselor introduced him to CAMP. Out of the many applicants, he was chosen for one of the 70 spots open for the Edinburg program and he felt fortunate to be one of the few to be chosen.

CAMP helped him in school by offering him financial assistance, tutoring, mentoring, and class materials needed for class. The program, a great support system for Rodriguez, guided him through his first year of college where he found he had many available places to study as well as people to help him. He made many friends who were on the same journey as him.

When asked to describe CAMP in one word he said, “Amazing.” This fun and once-in-a-lifetime experience encouraged him to continue his studies and he feels so fortunate to have been provided this opportunity.

Although it may seem like a lot of work to be a full-time student, he still manages to study as if he had a final the next day. He knows in the end that all his dedication and hard work will be worth it in the long run.

OMAR GARZA



At the age of 13, while most teenagers were enjoying their summer vacations, Omar Garza was picking grain in the heat, loading trucks, and making sure the grain was ready to be processed. A tough job for an adult, let alone a teenager, but Garza did his best working six times a week alongside his brothers and cousins in Taft, Texas. Garza's said his migrant farmworker experience would begin at 6 a.m. every day and end at 10 p.m. His daily summer routine included loading up old trucks with boxes full of grain, but one of his main jobs was to ensure the grain was fresh and ready, and had no moisture before sliding the boxes of grain onto an angled elevator where the grain would be collected in a truck.

He said there were times when the elevator would break down, and therefore he had to travel 10 miles to get to the nearest elevator. Garza said his job of picking grain was just "frustrating because it was stressful and repetitive."

Those long grueling days of grain picking inspired Garza, a UTRGV undergraduate student, to pursue a career in mechanical engineering and help improve the grain processing and agricultural industries. Garza said once he had made up his mind about what college major he wanted to pursue, his next step was to join the College Assistance Migrant Program.

Thanks to CAMP, Garza said it has helped him get into a tough college mindset and provided him with resources and tools to succeed. Today, Garza is a motivated student who hopes to always keep a 4.0 GPA, but most importantly, he hopes to become a role model for his little sister.

LESLEY GOMEZ



Focused on being the first in her family to obtain a college degree, Lesley Gomez, an 18-year-old freshman at UTRGV, is working hard to make sure she accomplishes her goal. With assistance from CAMP, Gomez is determined to succeed and face any challenge that comes her way. As a migrant student, Gomez has dealt with lots of hurdles including moving across the country, culture change, and the lack of support from people that are supposed to motivate her, such as school administrators whose knowledge about higher education was less than stellar.

One incident she remembers is a conversation with one particular administrator while in high school, who attempted to discourage her from graduating high school and registering for college because she "moved around too much and

would not have enough credits to graduate," she said.

Her most recent job as a migrant farmworker was during Spring Break 2016. Though she helped work in the fields while on a tractor once in a while, most of her work consisted of traveling with her family to care for her four younger siblings while her parents worked.

Gomez stayed strong and used this as motivation to work even harder and graduated from high school. In addition, she was accepted into UTRGV. With a goal to do better so she never has to work in the fields again, Gomez said she is grateful for CAMP's support. The program has helped her financially by providing her with the required supplies for classes and a place to live – a dorm room on campus. CAMP also gives Gomez a monthly stipend for attending required life skills and academic workshops. In addition to financial support, CAMP also sees to her academic needs by providing tutoring and mentors. Through CAMP, Gomez has met new people, made new friends, and experienced new things. Gomez plans to continue working hard throughout her college career and hopes to one day earn her degree in English and become a teacher to inspire other migrant students to earn a higher education.



JESUS MENDEZ



Paying for college is a difficult obstacle for most students. The same is also true for a migrant farmworker who wants to pursue a higher education. This is the case of Jesus Mendez, a UTRGV student and a member of CAMP.

Mendez, who became a migrant farmworker at the age of 16, said he always wanted to attend college, but did not know how he was going to make that happen due to financial reasons. This was stressful for his family and himself as it was the determining factor on whether he would attend college at all. His two older sisters attended college without financial aid assistance and he admits it was a struggle for them.

To help fund his dream of a college degree, Mendez said he began applying for scholarships and noticed there were very few scholarships for students who were migrant farmworkers. While in high school, he heard from the CAMP recruiters giving a presentation during lunch, and was encouraged by his girlfriend to find out more. After receiving information, Mendez applied for CAMP, and was one of 70 of 170 total applicants to be accepted to CAMP for the 2016-17 academic school year.

An Edinburg Economedes High School graduate, Mendez has received lots of support from CAMP in his transition from high school to college. Thanks to CAMP, Mendez said it has helped him be more attentive in school by allowing him study time at the Emilia Schunior Ramirez Building reserved for CAMP members. He also receives a lot of assistance from CAMP staff and faculty members, and all the other resources available through the program.

With a goal to become a nurse and travel the world helping people, Mendez is one of four children, and the only sibling who has experienced the migrant farmworker life. He knows that in the near future his youngest sister may have to work in the fields too.

Each summer Mendez worked long days picking cabbage on a farm in New York. He would collect as much cabbage as possible to sell at his uncle's market stand where his mother also worked. Mendez said he still remembers the smell of rotten cabbage and today he refuses to eat cabbage because of that. "Working in the fields involved long hours and drastic climate changes," he said. After working in the cabbage fields, Mendez said other jobs felt simpler to him. He is now grateful to be getting this education and not have to work the fields for a living. That hard labor was the motivating factor that changed his life, Mendez said.

CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY



The College Assistance Migrant Program is for those who work in the agricultural fields or have family members who work on the fields. With the many struggles some migrant farm worker students face every day, CAMP is there to make their life a little

easier by giving them their own tutors, help with financial aid, a place for them to study and more. CAMP is put in place to give motivation to incoming freshman who are migrant or seasonal farm workers. The project helps to show them that they aren't alone.

CAMP in conjunction with other university departments also host several events on the UTRGV campus that helps give CAMP students an opportunity to get involved with the different services provided at UTRGV. The Zombie Walk that was held during Halloween week was a blood and food drive that was held on the UTRGV campus where students could dress up as zombies, donate blood, donate canned food, and have a good time as well as spread the word about how they can save lives. Events like these show us a little

bit of how CAMP at UTRGV helps their students to grow as an individual and give them great opportunities to pay it forward.

By creating opportunities for CAMP students to get involved, they also allow students to build long lasting relationships with the other students on campus. Aside from the main goal of every event held on campus being student retention, one of the other underlying goals for CAMP is to give the students an opportunity to unite everyone that is in the program. Since CAMP is a first year experience program for freshman; making good friends early in their college career will be allow students to continue to have the support from the other CAMP students as the years progress.

With all things said, CAMP at UTRGV does an excellent job at providing their students with the proper assistance for their first year and gives students life-long experiences that they can carry on into their future.



CAMP STAFF HELP



WHAT CAMP OFFERS

CAMP helps students pay for school by offering monetary stipends each month for completing a life skills class each week, monthly student group meetings and weekly tutoring. The program also provides housing assistance for some students and these students have to meet with their dorm mentor once per month. Many CAMP services are provided on an individual basis for each student. The students are a top priority for the staff because this program is dedicated to them. Students can be found spending most of their time at Emilia Hall working diligently on their academics or simply spending free time at the center. Nearly three quarters of all the CAMP students graduate with bachelor's degree or higher.

-The Editorial Staff

CAMP

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley is committed to helping you succeed by providing you with a quality program to help you achieve your dreams of a college education. As a student participating in this program during your freshmen year, you will be provided support services to improve your academic skills, attend educational/cultural field trips and participate in academic advising, career planning and group counseling sessions. You will also have the opportunity to become acquainted with other CAMP students from Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy counties.