

Scholar Holler Podcast

Episode 2 with Perla Miranda: Demistifying the Application Materials

Dr. Manny:

Hello, everyone. Welcome to LM Voices' Scholar Holler Podcast an expansion of the LibroMobile Scholar Holler Archives Zine. I am your host, Dr. Manuel Galaviz. You can call me Dr. Manny or Dr. Galaviz. This is a podcast for first-generation academics or prospective academics and is a resource to guide students through the process of applying and thriving in a graduate program. Today's guest is Perla Miranda who will be speaking to us about the application materials, and Perla will also share some stories of how she came to apply to graduate school. So there's a great discussion about Indigenous language revitalization in San Jose, California. So please welcome Perla Miranda to the second episode of Scholar Holler.

Dr. Manny:

Perla welcome to our podcast.

Perla Miranda:

Thank you Manny. Great to be here.

Dr. Manny:

Thank you for joining us. And I'm going to give you an introduction that we give to all our guests, all the folks that come in through LibroMobile, anyone who reads at the bookstore, anyone who presents at the bookstore, they get a comadre, o compadre, o compadrex introduction.

Dr. Manny:

And that's something that comes out of Austin, where we both met. In specifically, Resistencia Bookstore in Austin with Raul Salinz would encourage everyone who attended Resistencia Bookstore to, to be introduced in this way to kind of share where we come from. And to all our listeners, I met Perla as a grad student in my first year, as a masters student. And Perla was a second year. Perl helped me out so much throughout that one year, just to survive graduate school just to get the hang of it to understand what was required with the readings. And we were I consider myself fortunate to have been in a class with you in a graduate seminar with Dr. Martha Menchaca Oral Traditions and History where we came across some fascinating texts and fascinating works.

Dr. Manny:

And from that just developed a great friendship, but I still remember we went to the Mexican Institute of Sound concert. I think that was like my first week in Austin. And that was that was a lot of fun and definitely –

Perla Miranda:

For \$5.

Dr. Manny:

Yeah for \$5. And, you know it's funny you say all this because – or mentioned the price because I think Austin really you know, put me in a position where I'm a little bit more stingy with music now, or for concerts, because I'm so used to getting concerts for free, or I was so used to, you know.

Perla Miranda:

I miss Austin. For that reason.

Dr. Manny:

Exactly! I think I saw Ozomatli like 20 times while I was in Austin and all for free.

Perla Miranda:

My last concert before leaving Austin was South by Southwest and I saw Panteón Rococó, Ozomatli and René from Calle 13 for free.

Dr. Manny:

We were there together.

Perla Miranda:

Yeah, I mean, that was like the great despedida intentional or not, I call it my despedida.

Dr. Manny:

It amazing I do remember that with, I think Panteón opened for Ozo, and then it was, yeah, and you're right that was a free concert on a Thursday night during South by Southwest.

Perla Miranda:

I couldn't walk the next day, but it was worth it. Como dicen: lo bailado quien te lo quita?

Dr. Manny:

Pues si, lo bailado nadie nos lo quita. And that, that actually is some, one of those great memories because, you know, as we all know this year concerts you know, they haven't been canceled, but they definitely are not in the same kind of format that we've been used to. The mosh pits look a little different when you're moshing in you're living room. So you know, I do remember that mosh pit during Panteón Rococó's set in Austin. So yeah, I shared a lot of just great conversations with Perla also, you know, you were very, very instrumental in helping me with my graduate applications. And, and I know you, you also had you know, from there took on various career trajectories and, and that you also been able to help a lot of first gens as, as, as you were, while you were a graduate student, then you were a graduate coordinator and moved along.

Dr. Manny:

So at this point, I want to read your formal bio. I know that was the homie bio.

Perla Miranda:

That was amazing. It brought back a lot of memories.

Dr. Manny:

Perla received her B.A. in Politics and Latin American and Latino Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz and her M.A. in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests are in Indigenous language revitalization with a particular focus on Valley Zapotec from Oaxaca Mexico. Before joining the department of art and art history, Perla had been program manager at the Santa Cruz headquarters of the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science, graduate coordinator for the sociology department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, graduate program coordinator for the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, and academic and student service administrator at Stanford Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS). In all these roles she has used her experience as a first-generation college graduate to help students navigate academic systems and advise a diverse student population. Currently, she is developing a Zapotec master apprentice language learning plan in her hometown of San Jose, California. In her free time Perla enjoys, watching movies, going to concerts and music festivals, traveling, and playing Rummy Cube. Thank you so much Perla thank you for joining us today.

Perla Miranda:

Thank you, Manny. And I just wanted to take this brief opportunity to, well, first of all, thank you for that compadre/comadre introduction. And I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you Manny, Sarah, and LibroMobile for this opportunity to be here and be able to share a little bit of the knowledge that I've picked up over the last six years in these positions that I've had in student services in these institutions.

Dr. Manny:

No. Well, we're eager to hear the knowledge you have to share with us in, in all your roles as, as a grad student applying to graduate school. So what are you currently doing right now?

Perla Miranda:

Well, as you mentioned, I'm working at Stanford University. I'm in my second year. Yeah, it'll be three years in the summer of 2021. And so I at first started at the Center for Latin American Studies, which has a one year master's program. And it's interesting because when I was applying to grad school, I did consider that program. But personally I felt "one year?". I did five years as an undergrad. And I was like, one year is going to be a blink of an eye. You know, I don't think it's long enough. It's interesting that years later I ended up at Stanford, first of all. You know, it's a private, research, renowned institution and I ended up in the program that I considered, but ended up not applying for it because it was too short, more than anything—for me.

Perla Miranda:

And so I started working there and about a year ago in the middle of a pandemic, I had the opportunity to kind of move up. And now I'm at the, in the department of art and art history as my current position is title the student services manager. And so I'm responsible for all of the academic and student services in the department along with a team member that I supervise. So it was an opportunity to kind of

grow and expand my skills, my knowledge to work with the department, because I've worked with interdisciplinary programs at UC Santa Cruz. When I moved from Texas back to California, I worked at the sociology department but it was an opportunity to expand. And so now you know, I'm responsible for the undergraduate and graduate programs which is a PhD in art history an undergraduate degree in art history. And then we have two MFA's, one in doc film and one in art practice, and then two other undergraduate programs as well in film and media studies and art practice.

Perla Miranda:

So it's definitely a little bit more responsibility and whatnot. So and like I said, it was an opportunity for growth and I'm supervising another student services staff member who helps me. Of course, they support me, but they really take the lead with the undergrads. And then I take the lead with the graduates, but there's a lot of cross collaboration in that as well. So doing that, working at Stanford, and then last semester, I actually started the masters in public administration program here at San Jose State University. It was an opportunity to, you know, I thought a lot about it in the sense that I had reflected.

Perla Miranda:

I had graduated I graduated from the MBA at UT Austin in 2014, and I said, okay, so what's going on? You know, it was an opportunity to reflect, and I realized that I've learned a lot in student services, a lot of administrative processes, a lot of those type of skills. But I do want to be able to serve our community a bit better. And so that's why I figured the MPA would be an opportunity to kind of professionalize or just get more theory on administration and hopefully be able to work for a local government or run some type of social program or service to be able to be a better asset and access to the, to the community specifically Latino community, but really, you know, just underserved community. So that's what, I'm what I'm doing right now academically.

Dr. Manny:

Wow. No, that sounds, that sounds impressive. I mean, that's a lot, you know, remember, I still remember your graduation from LLILAS, the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American studies at UT and then seeing you in the capacity of a graduate coordinator to then now here with the great things that you're doing and advancing. Also just to think about how many students you impacted throughout the years that's also very impressive. And in LLILAS you were carrying on a research project, that was very much in language revitalization, are you still, I mean, I know from your bio you're working on this apprentice language learning plan. What does that look like? Or what inspired you to get into that specific work?

Perla Miranda:

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I also wanted to give a shout out, cause, you mentioned that I was there as a support, for you as a student. I mean, we were colleagues, we were peers and then it was for me a great honor and privilege, to serve in your last semester as your graduate program coordinator. So you were one of my first cohorts that I graduated. I didn't bring in, but I graduated.

Dr. Manny:

Yeah. And you threw a great ceremony for us too. [laughs]

Perla Miranda:

I just, I just ordered the food. That's all it was. So likewise, you know, the support, the mutual respect and alegría, is there. You said that I helped you prepare for applying for the PhD program, but then you also, you and I remember you and Juanita helped me prepare. I did a mock interview.

Dr. Manny:

Shout out to Juanita, too.

Perla Miranda:

Shout out to Juanita as well. Great students services affairs professional as well out in Idaho. So definitely shoutout to her.

Dr. Manny:

Yeah, definitely. Un abrazo.

Perla Miranda:

Both of you helped me do a mock interview, which helped me cause you know, it was applying to the position of graduate coordinator and I think it was the other one. What was it? Oh my God, I'm blanking out something affairs, community affairs, but anyways, thank you as well for, for all the support.

Perla Miranda:

So in regards to research yeah, that was one of the best things that, I mean, that's one of the reasons that I wanted to pursue graduate studies when I finally learned about it. That's what it was graduate studies. My understanding was that I could pursue specific research. And so my research question and topic came about from my personal experience growing up here in California in San Jose. Growing up in a, I guess, bilingual environments/home, but also a very linguistically you know, interesting landscape. San Jose has one of the biggest Vietnamese communities, for example, I went to a very diverse school. At home, the rule was my dad would say "la casa es para el Español y en la escuela el Ingles" so that's one of the big reasons why I'm bilingual now because we had that rule.

Perla Miranda:

But then also, both of my parents are Mexican migrants. My father's from the Northern part of Mexico, Durango. And then my mother's from the Southern part of Mexico, Oaxaca, which is ethnically and linguistically a very diverse state. And so, although we grew up bilingual at the same time I also grew up hearing my mother's family speak this other language. And for the longest time, I didn't even know the name of it. It was, you know, they called it the dialecto or idioma. And then finally when I was 10 years old, and this is how I opened up my thesis. I talk about this time where it was just my mom's family. I was at the table, it was like a Sunday, we were having lunch or brunch.

Perla Miranda:

And then they started speaking in Spanish, but then transitioned to Zapoteco, but I didn't know the name of it back then. And then my brother walks in and he's little, I was 10, he must've been like six and he said something like "porque estan hablando en Chino". And then that was when my mom's like, "no, no estamos hablando en Chino. Estamos hablando en Zapoteco". I was 10. And that was the first time that I heard the word Zapoteco, because again, they would always refer to it as idioma or dialecto, which is kind of the practice. But you know there's reasons why we kind of have to push back a little bit on that, but anyways so that was where my inquiry, mi curiosidad, kind of came about. Why my family—my mom's side of the family—speaks a different language.

Perla Miranda:

And I hear it, when I go to Oaxaca, to my mom's pueblo. But why is it that my generation, both cousins here in the U.S, and in Oaxaca, why don't we speak it? Cause none of my cousins that I'm aware of are fluent. They don't identify as fluent. Maybe one or two that are older definitely understand it. Although sometimes again, they hide that. But when it comes to speaking, it's very very limited. So yeah, that was the seed, if you will, of where that curiosity started from. But when I went into grad school one of the first classes that we took was this thing called the pro seminar where they, I mean, on the first day they're like, what's your research interest? I'm like, I don't know. I have like ten different things.

Dr. Manny:

It's intimidating. And you're expected to give this 10 second, a brilliant –

Perla Miranda:

You're supposed to already have an abstract. You know, of what you're going to do. And you're like, Hey, I just got here. I don't even know where I'm at. When I first went in, I wanted to do something with migration, wanted to focus with women, Indigenous women, the language aspect was always very relevant. I was just curious, like, what is Zapoteco or why is this language not being transmitted? And so through classes and through that pro seminar, I was finally able to narrow down my research interest and my question. Like I said, it was one of the best academic experiences that I've had. I did my research in my mom's community, it's called San Jeronimo Tlacoahuaya located in the Valle Centrales region of Oaxaca.

Perla Miranda:

I spent almost three months living with one of my aunts, my mom's older sister, and her family. That included my cousins and my cousin's children. So it was just a very nice multi-generational family environment where I can see this. And I had never spent more than two weeks in the community because we always go for fiestas or a compromiso. So we're in and out. And, you know, we go during vacation time. So we also try to explore the parts of the state. So this was the first time, when I did that research, that I was able to, make networks and connections. And of course it was my own, the research I owe it to my family. My cousins, my aunts and uncles, anybody they would introduce me to, they would say something like, "Esta es mi prima. Esta interesada en el Zapoteco. Te puede entrevistar?" So they were fielding people for me.

Perla Miranda:

It was a great opportunity, but at the same time, I feel like I needed a lot more preparation because I thought I was picking—I didn't realize it until afterwards until I started to transcribe, to meet people and hear their stories or, even later once I was writing the thesis. I thought I picked a very politically neutral topic, which I did not. The history of language, just indigenous languages in Mexico and Latin America it's a very long one. Since the first contact with colonization. There's this linguist that I follow who's Mixe, her name is Yásnaya Aguilar. And she's the linguists that recently went up to the Mexican Senate and said the words, something along the lines, “las lenguas no se mueren las mata el estado” which basically means that it's not out of thin air, that indigenous language transmission is—people want to stop speaking.

Perla Miranda:

There are institutional reasons and even laws there have been at times that have, not motivated, but definitely impacted people to not want to pass that on. So that's what I did my research on. I was trying to understand why my generation didn't learn it. And what can be done to reverse that. I propose having a bilingual environment in the community in Oaxaca, but also because it's such a migrant community and there's a huge community of migrants in for example, in Los Angeles, some here at San Jose, California. Throughout the U.S., I also propose it in the diaspora. We should try to revitalize and contribute to that.

Dr. Manny:

So welcome back, everyone we've been talking to Perla Miranda who is currently at Stanford University and has held multiple posts there as a student service administrator. Before we move on, and before we start talking about the actual application materials, Perla, why did you want to pursue a graduate degree?

Perla Miranda:

So I actually didn't even know what graduate school was, I went to UC Santa Cruz, which is on the quarter system. It wasn't until like the last quarter that I was graduating, that I realized, oh, what's next? M.A, a PhD, you know, those kinds of professional degrees, but obviously at that point, this was spring, there's no way to apply for it and there's a whole process behind it. So that was kind of where I guess the seed was planted or whatnot. And then I guess what would flower it, if you will, was my professional experience at SACNAS, this national organization whose mission for the last 40, 50 years is to increase not just the number of Chicanos and Native Americans in sciences, but make leaders out of them.

Perla Miranda:

And of course to be able to become scientists and leaders in these fields, folks have to pursue PhDs, MAs and, all of that stuff. So it was actually my my working experience at SACNAS that helped me realize, what was next. What was graduate school. And that I could pursue something like that. And then, if that what watered the seed, what really cultivated, la cosecha, I have to give a big shout out to my friend and mentor, la Doctora Xóchitl Chavez, who's in the department of ethnomusicology at UC Riverside. I met her because she was still doing her research on the Guelaguetza festivals here in California, while that UC Santa Cruz, she was a PhD student in anthropology at UC Santa Cruz.

Perla Miranda:

She was with this organization in Santa Cruz, called Senderos, which has been around for almost 20 years, that started off as an afterschool dance program for Latino/Indigenous youth, and has now grown to this organization whose main mission is to show the different pathways for education and career to students and the community. So I met Xóchitl in Senderos and she's the one that, I think this was like a year after I graduated from college, she was like, okay, so what's next? And I was like, I don't know, keep working? And that's where she planted the idea of graduate school and told me about the master's in Latin American Studies at UT Austin. And again, I was like, UT Austin, that's the Berkeley of Texas.

Perla Miranda:

Well, first of all, I was like, Tejas? What am I going to do over there? But then I was like, UT Austin, that's the flagship of that system. But she encouraged me to apply, but at the same time, and this is key, was obviously the mentorship. I mean, I applied in 2011 and of course you have to start, back then we were taking the GRE test. So really the preparation started, in early 2011. But yeah, she's the one that guided me with my statement of purpose, gave me some strategies on who to approach for the letters of recommendation. And then once I did get accepted and I confirmed where was going, I accepted the admission offer, she started preparing me the summer before I went off.

Perla Miranda:

Because again, I was three years out of college. It was hard to transition from college to work. Cause you know, when you're in college, I mean, you read, work, write, and think 24/7, even while you're sleeping, that's when you get the best ideas. So I had to transition from going to college to a nine to five, and then I was like, Oh gosh, I'm going into grad school. And what is grad school? Because it's a different ball game. Yeah, *te lo ponen todo bonito*: its research. Well, you know what research means? You have to read like 10 books on one single topic.

Dr. Manny:

To write one sentence.

Perla Miranda:

Not even a sentence to just cite. Or a bunch of different articles. It's different because, as an undergrad, you're kind of, I think it's changing, but at least in my experience, I felt like I just needed to regurgitate or kind of repeat and have a basic surface understanding of what the readings were. And I mean, two articles for a class in one day and I was like, Oh my gosh, that's so much. In grad school you're assigned sometimes a book in one week, you know? In some classes you have your read eight to 10 books in one semester or in one quarter. So it's a different ball game. And again, and I really do mean it, when we first started the first day, at least at LLILAS there is that welcome with the faculty and the other graduate students, *y luego luego*: What's your research interest and, you know, what are you focusing on? Like, I don't know, I just got here.

Perla Miranda:

I felt I was a little unprepared for grad school. Again, I felt unprepared for undergrad. I was, you know, out of the loop as to what that environment was for grad school, but having Xóchitl, help me read articles the summer before, like that was fundamentally, that kinda got me at least *encontré el hilo* in other words, you know, got me back on track. And realize, Oh man, this is a, this is a whole different league. It

really is. Graduate school is a, it's a whole different league and I've mentored and I've worked with both master's students and PhD students. And PhD students sometimes say, well, you know, I have five years. You have longer, but then you also have a lot more milestones, a lot more requirements, you have a dissertation.

Dr. Manny:

You're also getting older. [laughs]

Perla Miranda:

Well, if anything like tío Bernie, you know, he's an example for *sí aguanta, tienes que tener aguante*. With the MA it's also shorter. So it's a give and take and there's different pros and cons to what type of program you want to pursue. But for someone like me and I applied a PhD program, I didn't get in. And to be honest, personally, I'm so glad I didn't, I don't think I would've made it to be honest. You know, the MA at LLILAS was like the perfect taste for me to get my feet with my research to really get a fundamental understanding of my interest in language revitalization. And I really felt like I got the knowledge and the skills to be able to, you know, maybe I'm not doing this professionally. Obviously, my job is in student services and I'm trying to shift that to do more work for local government or community. With the MPA, but I'm also, I have this knowledge base to be able to try to help out with this whole language revitalization because of the masters.

Perla Miranda:

But again, for me, the master's was like the perfect taste academically, intellectually. And that's what I tell students, if you're not sure that you want to do the PhD—you know, the PhD, if you have this burning question that you're thinking about day and night, even when you're sleeping. If you have a research question like that, then you're ready for a PhD. But if you're still trying to figure things out, but you are curious and you want to do the work and you want to know what research is and what not. Then the MA is the perfect way to start. And that's something that you did. You started off with the MA and then went on to the PhD.

Dr. Manny:

Yeah. I think that was one of my, you gave that metaphor though, of getting my feet wet. And that was actually one of the reasons why I applied to the MA. Well, to begin with, I didn't see myself as a PhD. And I did apply to a PhD program, actually, I applied to anthro at UC Santa Cruz.

Perla Miranda:

Me too. And they rejected us. *Esta bien*.

Dr. Manny:

Yup. They did, they did.

Perla Miranda:

Thank you. I'm glad. I don't think I would have made it to be honest. I would have maybe walked away with an MA, but the speed you hit, you hit the ground sprinting with the PhD. With the MA you hit the ground sprinting double time.

Dr. Manny:

We've been talking about graduate school, what led you to graduate school, and shared really great memories with mentors, Xóchitl Chavez, shout out to all the profes at UC Riverside. Dr. Richard T. Rodriguez will be joining us. Who will be speaking more about letters of recommendation, because that's a really important topic on this podcast. And similarly we have el profe who's out there who merits no other name, cause everyone knows him as el profe Alfonso. So el profe Alfonso doing amazing work out in UC Riverside. Just shout out to all the UC Riverside profes. They're huge supporters of the bookstore. Adrián Felix as well, who was a postdoc, I believe at UC Santa Cruz at some point. So, Dr. Sochi Chavez was helping you, mentoring you through this process of applying to graduate school. And can you just tell us a little bit cause you did mention statement of purpose. What is a statement of purpose?

Perla Miranda:

It's probably the most important piece of your application packet. In the programs we get hundreds of applications and the statement of purpose is your opportunity to shine and to stand out for the committee that is reading your packet. A statement of purpose it's, I don't want to say it's abstract. But unfortunately at least in the programs that I've been there's just not a—I can't tell you it's a standard definition because it's really depends on the program on the department, on the field. From what I've been able to gather in the last few years it's your opportunity to shine. You definitely want to reflect why you want to pursue graduate school, graduate studies and specifically that program, what is it about that program?

Perla Miranda:

Whether it'd be the faculty. Maybe they, for example the program at LLILAS it's an academic program that's also has a very tight collaboration with the library. There's really unique collections there. So maybe that's literally the only place where you could do your own research. For example, in my case, I didn't know about this until I got there, but one of the first dictionaries that was written in Zapoteco was actually by Fray Juan [de] Córdoba and who they say he did it in San Jeronimo Tlacoahuaya, which is my mom's pueblo and the Benson has one of the original copies from like the 1580s.

Dr. Manny:

Wow, I'm always amazed at what they have.

Perla Miranda:

What did Lalo Alcaraz say? They probably have Hernan Cortez' calzones there. [laughs]

Perla Miranda:

You can talk about something that specific that they have a collection there. This is going to require, if the deadline is December 1st, you don't want to start looking at stuff on November 1st, you really need to start doing your research about the programs a year in advance. Most programs usually accept for

the autumn's either quarter or semester. If you want it to go in autumn of 2022, then autumn 2021 is when you want to start researching and getting idea of the programs. The statement of purpose, some programs do provide specifics. Some will let you write four pages, double spaced. Some will only let you do one page single spaced.

Perla Miranda:

So you definitely want to look at those specifics, but it is a small one to two pages where you have to write a lot. You have to say a lot in a small amount of words. Why do you want to pursue that specific program at that specific school, that department? It can be a faculty, collections, it could be a particular area and access to a certain population or a museum or a library. Another thing is, you also want to try to let them know what has prepared you for the program. What type of research you want to do and why is that research important? What is it going to contribute to the field?

Perla Miranda:

How is it going to disrupt or challenge or add to the field? And what do you want, what do you plan to do with it? Not just the research, but the degree career wise, do you want to go into teaching? Do you want to go into the private sector? Whatever you think this degree is going to help you with, reflect that. You also tell students or prospective students or that are interested, you also want to think about it. What makes the program a great fit for you? Why are you a great fit for the program, but why is the program also a good fit for you? Because it is a two way relationship. I'm not gonna lie the program also gets a lot of recognition when our students do groundbreaking research when they get those external fellowships and funding, like down the line. That's also extremely beneficial for the programs recognition.

Perla Miranda:

So it is a two way street. You also want to put yourself in that position of believing in yourself and saying, I have a lot to contribute to this program, and this program will benefit from my presence for these reasons. What a statement of intent or purpose is. I've worked with some programs that do provide some guiding questions either on their website or on the actual application, other programs, don't. I'm a believer that we should provide that. You don't have to follow it to the T. If the program that you're interested in does provide those questions use it as a guideline.

Dr. Manny:

I think I've done that too in the past where I looked at other, I think Berkeley does that, or some programs at least in anthropology. I kind of borrowed those to write other statement of purpose for perhaps other essays.

Perla Miranda:

I don't think there's a standard definition of what a statement of intent or purpose is that will tell you, answer these three questions. Each program is going to be a little different. At LLILAS, as we did publish those questions, we said these are recommended questions to guide your statement of purpose. Some programs will do that. Some programs won't. Sometimes it will be in the actual application. So again, don't look at the application the week before, a month before. Well, sometimes the actual application isn't open until maybe two or three months before. But again, as Manny mentioned, look at other pro-

grams and start drafting your statement of purpose over the summer. And again, usually if you apply for autumn, you have to apply the year before. You really need to start working on this stuff a year before.

Dr. Manny:

Yeah. And that sounds something that we want to stress too, to everyone who's listening to this series, because we come across the situation where you myself, or some of our colleagues at the bookstore even who are in graduate school. Or even friends who are professors get asked for letters of recommendation like two days before they're due. That's just honestly not enough time to write a letter, but in the same process, I had folks reach out to me seeking mentorship to apply to graduate school, but they're reaching out November 15th when most applications are due either that final week of November or December 1st or December 15th. Those are generally the application due dates and it's very hard to be like, well, what's your interest. And then to really try to write an essay. And then the statement of purpose or statement of intent, some universities call them statement of purposes, others of intent. I'm glad you mentioned it, that they look very different. There's no one standard fits all. And I would definitely encourage them, perhaps to have an outline, but definitely tailor each individual one to that university.

Perla Miranda:

You hit the nail on the head with that one Manny. Yes, absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more. What I would recommend is having an outline, like you said, or a draft for the summer before you start applying. But definitely look at each program. And the other thing I kind of forgot to mention in this statement of purpose is if you do want to mention the faculty that you want to work with, because that's the other thing with graduate school. You do need to identify people that you would want to work with. Some programs assign a faculty member to you once you get either admitted or you say yes, others especially with PhD programs, they want to make sure that you are going to have someone. Again, you hit the ground running.

Perla Miranda:

So they want to make sure that you have someone to have that initial contact. MA programs for example, at least at LLILAS, you have to look your own faculty advisor. You have to determine that. Try to find one within the first year that would guide you for your research over the summer. If you were lucky, you would confirm two, but usually you would do that when you would come back. So those are some differences, but nonetheless, you do want to mention in the specialty and the PhD programs who you want to work with and why. Not just name drop. You want to tell them the why, and of course there's going to be superstars if you will among faculty in all universities.

Perla Miranda:

My recommendation is look for other folks, look for new, younger professors, the assistants or the associates. Of course, most committees require that you have a full faculty professor, either on your committee or as an advisor, but you're going to have a committee too. Usually your first year you work with one or two, but then by the time you have your dissertation committee at the end, you're working with three or four people. And sometimes even you get to bring in external folks as well. That's another piece of information that I would encourage you to tailor specifically for the programs. And when you do mentioned faculty it doesn't have to be elaborate. Again, the statement of intent purpose can be as short as two pages, as long as four. It depends on the program, but if you're going to include faculty, give a small reasoning, insight as to why you want to work with them.

Dr. Manny:

What is the personal statement?

Perla Miranda:

I'm so glad that you brought that up. So kind of to bridge, you know from the statement of intent/purpose to the personal statement. I also want to mention even though it's a limited amount of space that you have. The statement of intent/purpose is really to drive and say, this is why I want to do this. This is how I'm going to change the field or contribute to it or whatnot. But that doesn't mean that you can include your personal experience or a small statement of your personal experience and what has prepared you for graduate school. Just be strategic about it, because it's such a small amount of space that you have to work with, but don't think it's just purely academic.

Perla Miranda:

No, like there are experiences personal experiences that, again, like in my case, it was me growing up in a bilingual house, but really it was trilingual now that I have that knowledge, it was a trilingual environment. I was only bilingual and I was interested in why we didn't—I didn't learn that language and also my cousins. So if I had to approach this, the statement of purpose or intent now for LLILAS, I would approach it obviously a lot different with the knowledge that I have. You can include some personal stuff or experience in the statement of intent, just be strategic. So the personal statement, there are some programs that give you the opportunity. A lot of the times it's optional. So you do have to look for it and definitely use that extra space where you can make a statement of your personal upbringing and you can make it less academic and more personal.

Perla Miranda:

You can talk about your professional experiences, personal, academic, that brought you to this point of realizing why you want to do graduate studies or why you want to do graduate school. At Stanford this is called the diversity statement. It's again in the application, so you don't have to submit a whole different essay. It's in the application. I think it's a text box, and I can't remember if it's limited. Again, this is why I say as soon as the application becomes available to you, look for it. Look through it so that you can see all the different information that they ask you.

Perla Miranda:

In the personal statement you definitely want to, if there's an experience that can show your problem solving skills or your critical thinking skills, it doesn't have to be academic like that could have happened through a work experience, a personal experience that you had, through a sport or through a hobby, a life experience. Use that opportunity to extract that and say, in this particular situation, this is how I confronted it. This is what happened. This is what I got out of, and this is how I can use this particular experience, my personal experience to help me be a successful graduate student and to be successful in your program.

Dr. Manny:

Thank you for sharing that. Definitely not all universities ask for personal statements. So, if they don't ask for one as a separate essay, or perhaps it's not a text box in the application itself then definitely be strategic and have that. I think you mentioned how you open your thesis with the story about you being

10 years old, and your brother thinks that your family speaking Chinese, but it's not. It was a language that was foreign, despite the fact that it was so familiar it had become foreign almost. I think that would be perhaps an example of something that you can include as to why you want to study that topic.

Dr. Manny:

I'm glad you mentioned it too, even though I just graduated, but these things take time to get to the point where you complete your dissertation, you defend it, and then you graduate and get this diploma, et cetera. But I first applied to graduate school in 2012 and that was to start graduate school in 2013. And at the time it was definitely a different situation. I think that's something that's important to note that it does take eight years, seven to eight years, if you're going for a PhD. Master's can take like you said one year, which sounds insane, to perhaps four years for some folks and and definitely things are going to change.

Dr. Manny:

The application process will change. And I think you mentioned a diversity statement, and I think that's something that's very new. When I was applying, it was the personal statement and these languages, these words that we're even showing and demonstrating to you all might look different six months from now or two years from now. So definitely keep that in mind or as you're writing your essays as you're considering writing. But at this specific moment I do want to just say again, thank you for what you've been sharing. Thank you for sharing some information with us and how not only your research, which I always find fascinating your work, what you're doing currently at Stanford, or what have you done at Santa Cruz and for giving a shout out to these amazing profes, Xóchitl Chavez. Just amazing brought the Guelaguetza to UC Riverside, which I thought was amazing. A few years back we took it as a pilgrimage. People from all over California or the Southwest and everywhere went to Riverside to this event, which I thought was amazing.

Dr. Manny:

So definitely shout out to all the folks putting in a lot of work, a lot of community engagement, all the staff or the faculty shout Juanita as well. Who is just doing great things work out in Idaho which merits its own set of applause for those students she's working with and perhaps some of the conditions she's faced. Someone who was very important to our professional development in graduate school and with all this said. What advice would you give to students when they're filling out—they're considering these applications or the application process? What's the one thing you would tell them? That's of paramount importance.

Perla Miranda:

I mean, I don't want to sound cheesy, but definitely believing yourself and to believe in what you're proposing, that you want to pursue this and follow through cast the wide net. Like I mentioned, I never would have thought of applying to UT Austin to LLILAS if it wasn't for Xóchitl mentioning and encouraging me to do so, or even the PhD. I think I was only going to apply to like San Diego State, to programs here in California. And just MA's. If you are thinking of the PhD, but feel more comfortable doing the MA apply to a PhD program again, if you can. I know that part of what also limited me to only apply into four programs is, I mean, let's be honest, the application fees are high.

Perla Miranda:

Stanford has one of the highest application fees in the country at \$125 for each application. There's oftentimes opportunities for the application fee waiver. And I'm not gonna lie. I'm a procrastinator, I have to be honest, you know, two degrees later, I'm in my third one. I work with deadlines, I still procrastinate, but I do want to recommend and encourage you to start. Don't wait until the last minute to start applying. I mean putting the packet together. Which typically includes the statement of purpose. If you want to develop a separate personal statement in case they don't ask for it, but it's optional, or at Stanford it's called the diversity statement.

Perla Miranda:

And the reason why you want to work on the statement of purpose and have a draft before you even start applying is because what I would recommend when you ask for letters of recommendation is provide the faculty, let them know these are the schools that I'm applying to, these are the deadlines and here's a draft of my personal statement and my most recent resume or whatnot. Sometimes the resume is required. Sometimes it's optional. So have that ready. Also, the difference between a resume and a CV. A resume is typically more professional, and they want to see job experiences. In a CV, if you've written anything—it's more academic. Basically the CV is the academic version of a resume. So, if you have any publications, any research that you've done, that's where you want to highlight it.

Perla Miranda:

Sometimes it's a required piece of the application, sometimes it's optional. And then a lot of the times too, especially for PhD programs, the writing sample. We didn't talk a lot about that, but the writing sample is also an important piece because it does give faculty a baseline of your writing style. I was lucky that I had a final paper from a class, but I had a professor look at it and she gave me a lot of feedback on that as well. This is coming from a procrastinator saying, do your research, the program a year ahead and figure out which programs you want to apply to. And then the summer before start working on that statement of purpose, so that you have a draft to send to your references, the people that you want to ask for letters of rec, and don't neglect the writing sample. We didn't talk a lot about it, but again, the writing sample for the majority of PhD programs, and maybe some MA programs will ask for it. And of course the transcripts.

Dr. Manny:

I can't let you go without asking the last question. Knowing what you know now in all the positions that you've been in on professionally everything that you you've gone through. What advice would you give your former undergrad self as you were considering applying or selecting a graduate program?

Perla Miranda:

Oh well, even before that, I'm involved with Senderos, like I mentioned, it's an organization in Santa Cruz with the mission of informing the Latino community about different educational paths. And one thing that in speaking to youth, especially in high school, or in undergrad, is any opportunity that you can do research: do it. That's the one thing I regret as an undergrad, I actually did apply for this program at UC Santa Cruz, which was specifically through the EOP office, the equal opportunity program office that provides services to first gen students, low-income students and would not. And I applied for it, but at the end I ended up not doing it just because I needed to graduate to be honest. It was just going to be too many units, but I really regret not doing research as an undergrad. And there's different programs.

Perla Miranda:

You can do research with a faculty member for one quarter, for one summer, for a whole year. And even if you don't want to pursue graduate school right after undergrad, I mean, I took three years off. People take more, take less. Doing research as an undergrad gives you the opportunity to develop your own research question, to really pursue your curiosity. To develop a methodology, to know how to do things. You have to multitask, you have to be disciplined, you have to schedule your own things. I say do your own research project because those skills are also transferrable professionally. You can lead a project, you can be a program coordinator, program manager. Say I might not have the work experience, but I can do research. Considering graduate programs also, I guess another thing is to really ask yourself why you want to do this.

Perla Miranda:

I have a friend right now, who's in the master's program in ethnic studies at San Francisco State. And he already has a very thriving career. He's a pioneer in ESL interpreting here in the Bay area and he's pursuing his master's because of course it's going to help him career wise, but he's just curious about his research interests. Do you want that curiosity? To just do research and get that experience. Also think about, something we think about the end goal and knowing the difference. Most PhD programs lead to an academic preparation to a job in academia. What is academia? Do you really want to be in academia?

Perla Miranda:

Or is that the only thing that you feel you can pursue? I'm happy. I'm extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to do the masters because I learned a lot. And I hope that I can integrate some of the aspects of that into the MPA. For example, this quarter I'm taking a class on policy analysis and the main intent of that class is learning how to define a problem.

Dr. Manny:

Whoa.

Perla Miranda:

And I was like, what? Oh my God, I never thought about like, we're looking at policy and working backwards. Like how did they say that for example, we're not looking at the specific [example], but for example, the poverty line is at \$25,000, right? That's the policy. So how did you determine that?

Perla Miranda:

We're reeling it back and saying, okay, what problem and what stats led to saying that's what it is. Or another class we were discussing, I could think through public management how to make decisions and how those decisions, especially, in the public sector impact taxpayers or society. How do you distribute resources when there's a limited amount? So I'm thinking in a very different way. I'm pursuing this degree because I feel like I have a lot of professional experience and now I want to take it up a notch if you will.

Perla Miranda:

Thinking about the MBA or the PhD, what kind of career you want out of it as well. And so talk to people, you know definitely think outside the box. The reason is because you can integrate that into your

statement of purpose as well. So that's what I would recommend: do research if you can, if you're still an undergrad, even if you're not there's opportunities for people who have already graduated. Try to think about the future career that you want or prospects, and try to align that up with the type of degree that you pursue.

Dr. Manny:

Thank you Perla. That's amazing it would be great to go back in time and to give ourselves advice. And I think you know, the best alternative that we can do is give this advice to the next generation, to the next folks who are coming up.

Perla Miranda:

Absolutely.

Dr. Manny:

And to guide. I think that's the one thing that's to guide and we might not have done it the best or—

Perla Miranda:

We're still learning. We're still trying to find our way.

Dr. Manny:

Exactly. We're still learning. And definitely whatever we can do to facilitate that for someone else, that's what we're here for. I do appreciate you sharing all this. Definitely research is so key whether or not you plan on going into academia, those opportunities at an undergraduate level are there. And if you're already paying tuition to be there and to have these resources, why not? I'm sure those skills can then translate to other avenues. Thank you for bringing that up and for sharing even about EOP and these other opportunities that exist. I think the one thing that really guides us all is giving ourselves that permission to just be curious sometimes too, and perhaps to answer things that might interest.

Dr. Manny:

Why am I this way? Or why was it that I didn't come across my mother's language till I was X years old or 10 years old. And and in my case too, I've been very fortunate to have been able to study immigration and border security as someone who was formerly undocumented and then realizing what were some of the conditions that were happening, that forced my family to migrate. Then to be able to trace that through, first of all, through the oral traditions, oral histories, and similarly supplementing that with what was happening on a policy level and and really trying to understand what those worlds, which I think is a uniqueness of a graduate program that allows us to seek answers that sometimes are very personal. And so I appreciate all that you've shared with us today. Thank you again, Perla.

Xochitl:

Scholar Holler podcast, a series by LibroMobile Arts Co-operative and LM Voices is hosted and edited by Manuel Galaviz PhD, produced and edited by Xochitl Vallez, features art by Carla Zárate and music by Gloria Estrada. For more on this series and other community resources, please visit LibroMobile.com.