

International Students and American High School

By: Lucio Persad

Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du!

I don't get off of my bed, I don't open up my eyes, in one quick, instinctive motion I hit the snooze button on my alarm.

Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du!

I lay there motionless, my head tucked into a perfect crevice between my right bicep and my firm, but fluffy pillow. My eyes still only see the dark nothingness of the back of my eyelids. My left arm leaves the side of me, flailing to reach the snooze button once more. I go to hit the shiny, blue button, all I want is five more minutes right here, right where I am. My hand does not make contact with any button, instead it is met with another set of fingers.

"Lucio! What the hell are you doing! Get up!" My mother's voice echoes in my ears. My before shut eyes are now wide open, and my head, that was in that perfect position only moments ago is shot up out of a cannon. "I'm up, I'm up, I'm up," I say as my words stumble onto one another.

I would be lying if I didn't say that, that is exactly how many days started every single day from then, my first day of high school, to the last.

That first day of high school was scary for way scary for me, and no it was not the fact that I had to wake up a little bit earlier. I was in a new school, I didn't know anybody there, I was leaving all my friends who went to the local, public, middle school with me and were now going to the high school. I was now going to some big, private, boarding school with kids from all over the country and all over the world. It was terrifying for me. To make everything ten times worse, the world was still in the middle of COVID.

I remember I didn't do much that day. I don't know if it was the mask, or the strict rules we had to follow because the school didn't want people getting sick, or me just being plain nervous, but I honestly don't think I talked more than a couple words for that whole day. The bell rang at 3:20, classes were let out, and I was ready for more pain to come. The first day of school, meant the first day of soccer, which further meant the first day of tryouts. I've played soccer my whole life and coming into the day I was excited to play and confident I'd make the team. At 3:20, on that exact day, I was not excited, I was not ready to make the team, I was just plainly out of it.

I went to the locker room early, straight from classes, the tryouts didn't start till 4:00. I needed to get out on to the field and clear my mind. I changed my clothes, put on some contacts, fitted into my short soccer socks, laced up my cleats, and took off my mask. I grabbed a ball and headed over to the field. To my dismay

there were already players out there shooting, joking around, just having a good time. This made me even more scared.

This first day of tryouts just consisted of a condensed scrimmage, four teams of eight playing each other on a smaller field, while two teams of eight waited for whoever loses. The teams consisted of what I later learnt to be: two teams of returning varsity players, two teams of returning junior varsity players, and two teams of players that were new to the program, either because they were new to the school or played a different sport last year. The two teams of the new players sat out first as the coach explained some stuff to us about the program and such.

While the coach mumbled on, I began to watch the players play on the field and noticed these two guys, injured on the sidelines jeering, laughing, and messing around with each other and the varsity guys. The coach eventually finished and for some odd reason the two injured guys came up to talk to me. I don't know why to this day, but out of nowhere they just said, "What's up!" They introduced themselves as Will and Esteban, two juniors, I replied with my name and that I am originally from Canada. Will's next words were, "No way, we finally got another one!" He indeed was also from my home country, the only two in the school. Esteban from Mexico. I know it sounds weird to say, but in that moment, I became an international student, these guys didn't know that I moved to Virginia around

three years ago, they didn't know that I didn't live in the same dorms that they do, they just knew me as another guy from somewhere else.

Within no time it was time to play. My nerves and stresses from throughout the day had gone away, these two guys must have relaxed me. I had an impressive showing, with no disrespect, against players that were not on the same level as me, it was clear that some of them had never kicked a soccer ball once before. I had one goal, then another, these two guys on the sideline were still fixated on me, they got some of their buddies giggling and laughing.

Out of nowhere I pulled a nutmeg on a defender and scored my third goal of the tryouts. Esteban screamed in his perfect Mexican accent, "GOALAZO PAPI LUCIO." The boys on the sideline went crazy. That nickname stuck, "Papi Lucio," for the next four years. I started jeering them on the sidelines, I felt on top of the world, like Lionel Messi. Needless to say, two days later, after the third and final day of tryouts I made the team, but the highlight of this first day was definitely meeting these two guys, who became two of my best friends, and becoming an international student at the same time. I know I definitely overplayed this situation, but it really was one of the highlights of my whole high school career, even shaping of who I was at the school for the next four years majorly.

Not only did this moment shape how I was perceived for the next four years, but maybe more importantly it shaped my ideas, the ways I think to this day. One of those ideas certainly was, “Why?” Why would Will attend high school 431 miles away from home? Or, why would Esteban go to high school 1298 miles away from home? Or, why would my high school, in a town with under 80,000 people, have students from six out of the seven continents? These questions rang through my head each and every day.

For me the first day of university was completely different. It was a warm summer day, there was about 1,000 students on a campus meant for 30,000, and I only had two classes for the first six weeks. I decided to attend some summer classes to get ready for my freshman year, see how things would be in college and what not.

The day started like any other day: *Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du! Du, du, du, du!*

My eyes perked up, widening as much as they could at 8:00 in the morning. I was ready. Everything was much easier that day (compared to that of my first day of high school). My two classes went well, I talked more than I had ever talked before, and I even met some friends to eat lunch with.

The conversation at the lunch table started off with the TV show, “The Boys.” This is a show I had never heard of before, I really am not a TV person, but apparently, it’s a pretty popular show. These three guys all seemed to know it like the back of their hand, reciting quotes, acting out scenes, and such. I was mortified. I wish I could explain this show in its full detail, actually I don’t at all wish to explain this show, It’s plain weird. (If you really want to know what I am talking about, do maybe five minutes of research on the show and you’ll see, oh, you’ll see. But, preferably don’t, just don’t.)

After I swiftly changed the subject after the guys started talking about one of the main characters weird fantasization with drinking pure breast milk (trust me this is only the start of it, I had to just give you a little glimpse of this horrid show), we started talking about where everyone was from. Me, I said Canada, then Boston, LA, and finally, Brazil.

Those same questions from high school rushed back to me. How were my friends from high school going to be on their first day of college? And, why would my new friend go to a college 4738 miles away from everything he once knew?

I finally got the chance to ask my new friend, Facundo (Facu), around three months later over dinner. Just like my friends from high school he said he wanted to eventually move to the US and get a job here, so him and his family thought that

coming to college here would be the best way to fulfill this. Personally I was planning to attend university in Canada, but my parents basically said no, for the exact same reason: “US college prepares you for life in the US.” While Facu said these words out loud my high school friends voices repeated in my head, a new thought popped up, if US college prepares you for life in the US, is it wrong to say that US high school would prepare you for US college.

I decided to ask Facu what he thought about this assumption, I talked to him about my experience with high school and meeting so many international students there, and whether he ever thought about coming to the states for high school. Though he said it was a thought he had many times, but there was really never any action on it. He continued that he looks back at thinks that it was the right choice not to come. He mentioned how immature he was back then, how homesick he is right now and how much worse that would have been four years ago, and that he got into a great college in the US, so why would he need to go to high school here.

“Those are all excellent points, “ I replied. They really were. I had only ever thought of the positives of coming to high school in the US for myself and my friends, but never the negatives. My head started spinning, I had to ask him straight out. “Do you think that international students who came to an American high school are better prepared for American college, than those who attended high school in their own, home country?” His reply shocked me. Though he restated

that he is very happy about his own journey in coming to an American college, his answer was “Yes!” He described the way he thinks the American high school would help so much more with academics themselves, also stating that the American teaching style is totally different to that of other countries. Mainly, Facu talked about the social side of American schools; high school and college nights are filled with packed gyms and sold out bleachers at whatever basketball or football game there is. According to Facu, that’s just not the normal elsewhere, personally for him, he said at school they did work, that’s pretty much it. Lastly, Facu described all the obstacles he went through just to apply to a US college, whereas here that’s maybe thought of as the easy part.

In all Facu’s discussion with me left me wanting more. I again thought back to Will and Esteban and all of the other international friends I had in high school. I had asked them many times why they came to high school in the US, but never if they thought that it was the right decision. What would they say? Would they say something different now that they’re in college? Facu thought that there certainly were some advantages to American high school, but also clearly stated some disadvantages. Would my friends agree with him? Would my friends say that they were more prepared for US college, then Facu?

These are the questions that I would like to answer throughout this semester. I want to learn what the advantages and disadvantages are to attending American

high school as an international student, with the hope of attending an American college.