

Episode 8: Sophomore Besties with Luis (T'27) and Gabby (T'27)

Victoria: [00:00:00] From the duke life office. This is the duke life pod. I'm your host, Victoria pinedo. Many refer to your sophomore year as a sophomore slump. But current students and besties, Gabby and Luis are tackling sophomore year. Head-on. These besties talk about their self-growth. And stepping into a more authentic version of themselves. In this episode, we'll hear all about their leadership positions in clubs. Finally choosing a major after semesters of exploration. And how they fight the academic curve. Sophomore year is all about alignment. And saying no to things you want to do, because it doesn't align with what you need to do. Sophomore year is all about protecting your peace and accepting help [00:01:00] along each step of your college journey, not just at the beginning . This episode was one of my favorites to record. It was so fun. You won't hear too much from me as we had technical difficulties with my mic. But I'll let Luis and Gabby take over this one. Now enough with me. Let's get onto the show.

Gabriela: My name is Gabriela Mendoza. I'm class of 2027. I am majoring in public policy, possibly sociology, with a minor in environmental science and policy. I'm from New York City, grew up in Brooklyn, was raised in Queens, and I am ethnically Dominican and Ecuadorian.

So I'm the daughter of immigrants and yeah.

Luis: My name is Luis Pereira Lazo. I'm also a sophomore class of 27. I am from Atlanta, Georgia, and I'm currently majoring in, and I say currently because it switches a lot, but I'm [00:02:00] currently majoring in public policy and double minoring, I'm doing journalism and media studies as well as education with a human rights certificate.

And yeah, and then I'm Honduran, so we got to represent here. Okay,

Victoria: Like many sophomores, Gabby and Lewis are part of many clubs at duke that keep them busy. They gain leadership skills and build relationships with their peers during these clubs in between classes and in the evenings. Here's Gabby talking about her journey, getting involved with BSA, the black students Alliance. The black student Alliance invitational also known as BSAI, and Mi Gente one of the Latin X clubs on campus.

Gabriela: Alright. At Duke right now, I'm very involved in BSA and Mi Gente now my first year at Duke I really dove into like my black identity and seeing like where I fit in Also black women have been one of the most supportive people for me and especially like black staff, black faculty I've just always felt very supported by the black community, so I'm a part of BSA Programming, which we plan like all the [00:03:00] events for like community engagement within the black community here at Duke, and I'm also BSAI Chair, which is the Black Students Alliance Invitational, which Invites incoming black freshmen to visit Duke

and I would say that's probably one of the most fulfilling things I've done so far with my time here, just because I remember coming in for BSAI and I was an early decision applicant and I never visited Duke. Yes, I did my extensive research, but there's only so much you can learn and can understand about a school community without visiting the actual school and feeling the vibes there.

Thank God I made the right choice, but I just remember BSAI being like one of those moments where it clicked for me that I was actually here and that I was actually moving forward with my education in a way that my parents never did.

And it was just a full circle moment, being able to come back and serve in the same way that I was served. And speak to students who were also nervous, had the same questions that I did, and see how much I grew in such a short amount of time on campus.

So that's one of my main engagements on campus so far I was just put on exec for Mi Gente which is our Latin [00:04:00] club here at Duke. Our Latine club.

And I am connections and caucus chair, co chair along with two other amazing people. I didn't feel like there was necessarily a place outside of a Google form where people could really express what they were feeling towards Mi Gente and I always say I hate to compare them, but I constantly compare them seeing the comparisons between BSA the way they function, the way the community is so tight knit and close, versus Mi Gente, where you see the same faces showing up to everything, or you see the same faces on the Instagram.

Yeah. Just Can

so Connections and Caucus, basically our goal is to once a semester have a community caucus, which is basically like a town hall. So imagine like Gilmore Girls where everyone just gets to air out their grievances.

Last night was actually BSAs. Community Caucus, or Black Caucus, that's what we called it and it's just a really great way to see where everyone's minds are at, and I remember going into Black Caucus and being like, oh right now I feel like the black community's kind of thriving, like we're vibing I don't really have any major concerns, like obviously [00:05:00] outside of being at a PWI there's only so much you can not complain about, but being able to be around my peers and Listen to the concerns that they have brought up or listen to things that I didn't even realize that I was lacking here that I should be getting. And I would like to see the same thing happen for Mi Gente I'm really excited that I get to be the one who gets to contribute to that community and contributes to that goal and mission.

And I feel like it's gonna be really beneficial to the Hispanic community here at Duke just because I feel like we could be a lot closer than we are now. And there's a lot of room for improvement and community engagement. So I'm excited for that.

Luis: Round of applause. I just, I love hearing Gabby speak.

She like motivates me. This is my like, number one motivator. Stop. I love you. Love.

We have a lot of tea to go through,

I don't even know how to top that. I'm a little nervous now.

Where do I want to start with? I think I'll start like with Mi Gente and then move on like to other roles that I'm a part of. Within Mi Gente, I serve as a secretary. So I send out like the the agenda to like our exec members just so that we can get like a better understanding of what we're going to discuss within our exec meetings.

Victoria: Luis is also part [00:06:00] of the same club as Gabby. we talk a little more about his favorite part of his role as secretary sending out the bi-weekly newsletter. I am one of his loyal recipients of this newsletter. His latest newsletter read. Word on the street is A Boogie with a hoodie is here just for little old me. Oh mis gatos! Duke just got 10 times better. Referring to the rappers scheduled performance during P-Checks in Kville later this month before the duke versus UNC men's rivalry basketball game.

Here's little old Luis on his favorite experiences with Mi Gente executive team duke student government and another organization that he's a part of beyond borders.

Luis: And then my favorite part is sending out the newsletter that's like biweekly

I really love it because I feel like I can show like my personality within it, but also provide resources that Duke offers to these students specifically the Latin community. And so I've gotten like a lot of compliments about it. So I do feel like my work is like very [00:07:00] appreciated with with everyone and like sometimes every now and they're like, A peer or a friend might come up and be like, Oh my God, like I went to this event because of you.

So that's like really nice and really touching.

Another role that I serve on is DSG. The Duke Student Government. I serve as the Senator for Equity and Outreach.

I love the work that we do. Equity and outreach. For those of you guys who don't know, we basically represent the underrepresented and we make sure that everyone is being treated equitable in terms of resources.

Last year we did the laundry initiative.

So starting I think spring of 2025. we're going to be able to have free laundry for those of it'll go into like tuition and then it'll be covered for students who are on scholarships , it'll be fully covered. I think that was a really big like initiative that we took cause we saw that a lot of students faced that struggle to pay for laundry sometimes, or that annoyance where like you really only have to do one load, but you have to put a maximum of 20 bucks into your account.

We heard individual's concerns about it. And then we took that initiative and made it into a project. And Thank the Lord that it was passed.

right now we're working on like a spring breakthrough initiative. So we're making sure [00:08:00] that students who aren't able to go out there and explore the world or go back

home during spring break, that Duke is able to provide like A service project for a week, which is like the week of spring break.

I really just love being able to put my work and have others like benefit from it and hear their feedback from it and things that we could improve on.

add music transition

Luis: Another club that I'm a part of is Beyond Borders, which was previously known as Define America.

I love this club so much. Originally, when I entered Duke, I was pre med. And then I took chemistry and I realized that was not for me. So then I was wondering what are clubs that I could partake in that I could show my advocacy? Because I did a lot of advocacy work in high school.

And so with Beyond Borders they focus on immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

I think the work that we do is like really impactful I'm not gonna lie. The reason why I joined was because they had a free Washington trip to lobby.

And so I was like, I need to partake in that. And that's where I actually like really got close with. Gabby Yeah, that's where we were like, Two peas in a pod, like I loved her so much from that [00:09:00] experience and just being able to see each other grow from that and advocate and lobby representatives on what their stances are on immigrants and immigration reform.

And then this year I was able to become an exec member. So I serve as the community connections member. It's it's not like the community caucus one, but I had to change the name on it because I felt like publicity didn't really showcase like the work that I was doing.

We serve the Duke community, but we also are trying to branch out into the Durham community. So it was a recent new change that we just made. What I do is I do a lot of like policy readings that focus on immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Luis: And then I translate it to make it more accessible to Duke students who really aren't into reading policies or to the Durham communities who don't really understand like that type of structure and that jargon, which is like really annoying. Cause sometimes these are things that are affecting them and they aren't able to understand it properly.

And so I simplify it. And then I put them into graphics and then I post them . I've had individuals who say I've learned so much from this thank you so much and other orgs outside of Duke [00:10:00] like Durham orgs we talked about how much immigrants contribute to the economy, which is something I think a lot of people don't actually truly understand.

And so we made a graphic on it and provided statistics and all like these numbers as to how much immigrants truly contribute and a lot of orgs were reposting it and we got a lot of feedback from it and then a little project that I'm doing within this org as well is I'm doing a website.

And within that website, we're going to showcase immigrants stories and their lives within Durham, but also how Duke has a role in that and seeing if they're being positively affected or negatively affected. And in the case that they are being negatively affected, how can Duke better respond to that relationship that they have with the Durham community?

that's one thing that sometimes we struggle and like lose while we're like living our lives here because we're such in a bubble Like we like to call it the Duke bubble because we forget like everything that's out there

Victoria: Switching gears. The sophomore year is [00:11:00] usually plagued by taking on too much at a time. We often think that we can take on more because we are older. Wiser. And more confident than we used to be when we were first years.

However sophomore year things start to ramp up and really big decisions have to be made. Such as planning for the second half of your college career. And at Duke. That means declaring a major or choosing a pre-professional track. Here's the Luis on deciding to pursue a pre-law track. After switching from pre-med.

Luis: It's difficult to say that for other majors, but with public policy, you could do like public policy and computer science, like public policy and environmental science.

It releases stress that we have where it's oh my god what do I do? And a lot of the classes here sometimes cross lists like with Pub Pol and I Think just like surrounding yourself with friends to that truly like just want to see you succeed as well. in my opinion, I genuinely don't see that within pre med.

like just from my experiences and it's of course, different from everyone else. But when I was originally [00:12:00] pre med, it was very competitive. It was very like gatekeeping resources, gatekeeping advancements in terms of Oh, there's this internship here

and it's like at PubPol, it's You need to do this right now. If I find like a resource, I'm sending it to Gabby. If Gabby finds something, she's sending it to me. And it's I feel like that's like truly what the public policy community is.

It's just seeing one another thrive and excel because at the end of the day, all we truly want to do is just change the world to make it better. And I feel like we all have that same mindset and that same goal. And I just, I love that community for it.

Victoria: Choosing a major is often about choosing something that aligns with what you are intellectually curious about. And it has to be the right fit. It's often not just for career outcomes. Gabby and Luis talk about how silly it is that as high schoolers, they felt that they knew exactly what they would pursue for the rest of their lives.

We deepen the conversation when Gabby describes how her cultural background centers her approach on helping uplift friends and classmates [00:13:00] at duke when things get tough.

Gabriela: The confidence that we be having like thinking that we like thinking that we actually know yo, coming out of high

school, I was so sure on what I was going to do for the rest of my life. And it was the biggest smack in the face when I got here. I was like, damn, nevermind. And

I feel like what Luis mentioned earlier about like us sharing resources might not that it's just only an us thing but like it's very much more of Because we're friends.

That's the kind of attitude we have. Yeah, I feel like a lot of You How we grew up considering the fact that we're like Hispanic low income like it's a lot about lifting each other up And that's how we were raised So that's how we moved through life and moved through college like I see something on my email I think my friend would be interested in and I'm forwarding it to her, But a lot of people I feel like because they've come from a place of privilege or from a place that they'd never really had To like share resources or see someone else around them struggling and be like, oh, I know this would help them out I feel like that's not something that You Is very common or just because also within the public policy range there are a lot of white people So yeah a lot.

I feel like a lot of the really [00:14:00] heavy topics including like diversity and racism just go a little watered down within the classes. And there's always people trying to like Debate things that shouldn't be that debatable, which I actually mentioned this yesterday during black caucus but somebody like I came up with a little counterargument and was like, Okay, then how are we supposed to learn if everyone just agrees with you?

And it's just supposed to be yes men in the classroom, which makes sense. That's a very valid point. I feel like low key, that's what makes class exciting. Seeing who's gonna push back or seeing how you can like further, not prove your point, but get your point across.

I feel like I spent a lot of my freshman year trying to educate people around me and like the people that I surrounded myself with. I was constantly having to explain why this disrespected my personhood or this would offend someone or this is a really like ignorant way to think.

And, I feel like I spent a lot of my freshman year doing that just because I thought this is a predominantly white institution these are the kind of people that I'm gonna be surrounded with. As much as I was, like, constantly surrounded with black people and the community a lot of my friends outside of that were really wealthy white people.

And I felt a lot of times, I was just constantly [00:15:00] explaining my personhood and why I like deserve to be here, why I deserve to not be disrespected. And now I feel like it's also a thing of protecting your peace almost. And I'm not going to say like I cut these people off completely, but like I've definitely distanced myself for the sake of Not having to constantly

feel like I had to prove myself to be in a space or not having to constantly educate someone because it does get exhausting and I was talking to my friends at home about that.

We were talking about study abroad opportunities and I was like, Oh, I'm not going to Spain and they're like, Oh no. What was it? I think it's Argentina. I was like, Oh, I'm not going to Argentina. And they're like, why not? Like, why don't you go to Argentina? And I was like, I literally do not have the brain capacity to be like racially profiled every single day.

Like the thing is also I present to the world as a black woman at the end of the day while I'm fully Hispanic, I'm 50 percent Dominican, 50 percent Ecuadorian, I present to the world as a black woman. So even if I go to Argentina and they're like, oh, you're Latina, you'll be okay.

No, I won't. And mind you, my at home friends are like Middle Eastern, South Asian. So they as, as much as [00:16:00] they are minority women I feel like they would never truly understand what it's like to be a Black woman walking through life. And we spoke about Argentina, and they're like, oh, if you need to be the change you want to see in these spaces.

And while, yes, that's very much like my mindset, it's truly exhausting.

I didn't realize that until this year, because last semester, I was adamant on being a mi gente being the change with colorism like getting more afro latinos involved like including other minority groups and it's just yes, that's important work And yes, like that is something that should be happening Like I can't put all that responsibility onto myself and I feel like that's a lot of what I did in high school and I feel like that's the older sister in me like the older sister hispanic sister in me as well because it's like I wanna, like I'm so outspoken and yes, once again, yes ands, exactly, yes that is who I am, that is my personality, and that is, I fear, who I'm always going to be.

add music transition

Gabriela: This year has been a year of like reflection and really taking a step back and being like, okay [00:17:00] yes, I am an advocate. And I'm also a human and I'm a person and I have emotions and I'm a student and I want to make sure that I'm prioritizing myself because how can I pour into other people's cups if I'm empty, so just A semester of reflection, for sure, for me.

Luis: Growing up in like a Hispanic household, I've I've become very loud and talkative, and there's like moments where sometimes I don't like to showcase that , but when I'm very comfortable, I do like to present that because I also want like other individuals to know that like they themselves can be as truly as authentic as possible.

And like just for my background, that's like really motivated me is community like it has for all of us And just being able to showcase that again, in the spaces that we walk in I'm a very big family person. I think my number one motivators are my parents. When I was six, like I saw my father be Deported and so like that change within itself is like what truly fuels my

flame and my passion for the work that I do and Yeah I think like another big factor that plays [00:18:00] is like being gay in a hispanic household and being Gay in like a latino community sometimes we can see like the disconnect especially like when it comes like to religion and things like that and so I feel like I'm also like a very big advocate in that because sometimes you don't see a lot of Queer individuals be like shown in those spaces where like they truly feel Their god loves them so I feel like that's One thing that I try to center myself within and remind others that at the end of the day It's truly what like you believe and like That connection that you have with that like spiritual God

The one thing that I truly just had to understand was that no one has the right to tell me the relationship that I have between like my god and I'm Christian, which yeah, I'm Christian.

So Yeah, so I feel like it's you know, like those churches like, you know how crazy you can get

It's just like a sense of belonging that I try to like present everywhere that I go I just I love seeing people smile I love seeing people's like energy being reflected and being able to feed off of that But also bounce back [00:19:00] from

Especially in the times that we're in right now It can get very crazy, very hectic. We can get lost in our own world, but sometimes we just have to stop and compliment an individual. They might be having like a difficult day or things like that. And trying to remain as true to yourself as possible.

And I think like at Duke, sometimes that can be difficult because other individuals like thriving and succeeding, but then you also have to remember that like you might come from a different background than them. And so just like acknowledging that, but also not hating yourself for that using that as fuel

add music transition Comparison is a thief of Joy - Academic Curve

Luis: . Another thing that I wanted to talk about was, like, in terms of that comparison is a thief of joy. I 100 percent agree with that phrase. I literally lived by that my freshman year.

When I got on campus, I think one thing that we tend to struggle on is Appreciating like the small works that we do in our big accomplishments I think as first generation low income students We're constantly trying to figure out what the next thing is Because we just [00:20:00] don't have the privilege and the time to just sit there and appreciate every single thing that we've done

when I got into Duke, I remember opening up my letter and I cried and then I was like, okay, what's next?

What's the next paper do? What's the next assignment, the next big project. And then college came. And then I see myself like at this PWI and I'm like scared shitless. I have no idea. Like I didn't, I toured Duke, but after I got in and yeah, just like having that mindset where I felt

like I truly didn't belong and that I was more of that that case to bring up the statistics in Latinos here.

I truly think the one thing that made that connection was, , the lack of resources that I received throughout my educational endeavor academic wise.

I knew I had like imposter syndrome so every time like when I wouldn't understand something, like I would constantly like blame oh my God, it's 'cause I went to a public school.

That's why I'm not understanding this stuff. And that's so valid on this. That's understand. Yeah. It's valid and it's understandable, but I think there's also to a certain extent, you have to , [00:21:00] just think to yourself , at the end of the day, I have to stop using this excuse and just work hard.

Yeah. And that's like what a lot of us have to face. Like we have to work twice as hard as like our other like peers. Absolutely. And although it's not. Okay, in my opinion, I feel like it makes us stronger because we didn't have the resources that other individuals have here

and so being able to come here and say Oh, I got here because of my academics. I got here because of my extracurricular works. I think that's just That's like a stronger reason for you being here. And that's that passion and drive that Duke really wants. They want to change their cultural structure that they have here.

They want to change that academic atmosphere here. And so I definitely think that's why we're here. We're here to create that change so that other students find that transition into college easier.

Victoria: Luis brought up a good point. The academic learning curve that first-generation low-income students face when they get to duke. It's not to be underestimated. How do you overcome [00:22:00] this? Luis describes it as working harder. Which it could definitely feel like at the beginning. More hours of studying, less hours of socializing. But someday that changes. He learned to ask for help and unlearn the toxic behaviors of being embarrassed to ask for help. To anyone outside of your friends and family. Here's Gabby on how her difficulties with chemistry at duke. Led her to ask for help and the highs and lows with the academic advising at duke.

Gabriela: Oh, chem took me out, girl.

Yeah, so I initially came into Duke thinking I was going to be an environmental science major. And I feel like a lot of the reasons as to why a lot of minorities unfortunately, do not follow through with like classes like STEM, like really hard, not really hard STEM courses, but like

Luis: even the basic, yeah, like CS chemistry,

Gabriela: things like that is because we look at these intro classes and we're like, bro, we are not equipped for this.

And honestly, I went into my [00:23:00] chemistry class and I was like, what is going on?

Luis: The pace is like crazy.

Gabriela: Pace is crazy, but I also, after talking to some upperclassmen and they've taken like courses at other schools they're like, in other places like NCCU and UNC, they feel like professors go ahead and teach the classes versus here at Duke.

They're like conversating or like working with you as if you were a colleague. So it's like they're already going into class with a pre assumption that you already know what you're doing. You should have learned this in high school. When, in reality, people come from such different places, such different backgrounds New York City is one of the most underfunded public school systems in America.

I promise you this is not something that was made a priority within my school at the end of the day, they were just trying to get us in and out. Yeah. And I'm very fortunate that I did go to a good high school, out of, literally, the grace of God, because I was not supposed to be in that high school in general, but,

Like my siblings right now with the lottery system in New York City, like I see how they are going to be impacted by it in the future. Like my little sister's applying to college right now. And I [00:24:00] see the imposter syndrome hitting her like now she's not even in college yet.

She hasn't even hit university.

Luis: Yeah, like educational resources. It's it's a big one.

Victoria: Have you guys been to the ARC or the AAC?

Luis: Girl, I live there.

Gabriela: Yeah. I've been there a little too.

Luis: Think it's Clover Reed, that lady is amazing, that woman is astonishing, like, when I truly tell you I, You could not read 30 frickin pages and understand a concept.

I went there she explained to me this is how you break it down, this is how you read it. And now it's it's quick. It's not as easy, but it's like a better process when it comes to studying

and it's always the intro classes, like I took chem 99 and I told Gabby, I was like, I withdrew and I have no shame in withdrawing from that because at the end of the day, like when I applied to law school, they're going to be like, he just wasn't cut out for med, but he loves law.

That's how it is. And so I feel like that's one thing that I I like about The Duke community to an extent, they're like, it's okay

Gabriela: I would say I feel like at other schools I have friends who go to Ivy's and they're talking about how their academic advisors are always so focused on [00:25:00] credentials.

Are you a double major? Are you a double minor? What certificates do you have under your belt?

And it took a lot of pressure. Like a lot of academic pressure. So it's very much focused like on academics. While I feel like here at Duke, as at least the academic resources I have gotten have been mostly focused on okay while, yes, you're doing this academically, how is this going to impact you in the future for your career wise

Luis: that's one thing that I love about like the resources here. Like my advisors always like I've switched my major like 20 different times. It's like actually absurd.

First it was biology. I came in here with biology.

That was the biggest mistake ever in my life. It was biology. Then I started, I barely started understanding some concepts in chemistry and I was like, okay, I'm going to do chemistry. That was a flaw. Then I was taking a political science class. I was like, okay, you know what? Screw STEM let's do like humanities like let's do political science didn't like my political side.

No, I know but but I'm saying humanities because I'm about to go to Popal and like all the other stuff. So then I was like, I'm gonna do that. And I there was a minute where I was like, let me do ICS. But then I was like, I don't know your ICS era. [00:26:00] Yeah,

I would audit these classes and I would be like, wait, this is really good. Like I want this.

I audited a sociology class and I was like, I love this. Like I want to do sociology. And then I was like, Let me figure it out. So then I did PupPaw, I took 155.

Luis: A lot of the intro classes here, in my opinion, are weeder out classes.

Gabriela: Oh, for sure.

Luis: The thing is you cannot base your major on these classes because it's just, it's unrealistic. And I heard a lot of complaints about pub paul 155, but I liked it.

They're so serious about if you forget to quote something, it's like automatic, like unintentional plagiarism. I, every time I turned in a memo, I was so fucking stressed.

I was so stressed out. Like I was so stressed out because it was just, it was really annoying. But then with PubPaw, you have to take a stats class. So then I took stats. And I was eating

stats up. Everyone was always coming to me Luis, do you know the code for this? Luis, do you know how to do this?

Can you explain this to me? And I was like eating that up. Cause I had I wouldn't necessarily call it privilege, but I took comp sci like first semester and so like that kind of I understood the concepts of coding and stuff like that. [00:27:00] So it did translate over into stats.

So then I was like, wait what if I double major in stats? Cause I've heard that those two go hand in hand.

Gabriela: See, I was a little more hard headed with my decision. I was like, in high school, I did a bunch of environmental justice advocacy work. My entire life was environmental justice based everything I did, everything I was involved with had something to do with the environment.

The reason I even started getting into it is because there was literally a dark smog lingering over my middle school. Our school was right next to a garbage disposal.

Whenever it used to rain the runoff used to go right through our school and there used to be, like, oil and trash and everything just running. And , my school was on a hill like this. So the garbage disposal was here, my school was right here, and then there was a gentrified neighborhood right here.

And then the projects was across the street from the garbage disposal. So we just have, like, all this trash water literally running through our neighborhoods. It was ridiculous. And it didn't start, They didn't even put drainage systems into the ground until it started getting gentrified on the other side of the hill.

So it's I saw this firsthand. And then also like, all my friends had asthma, like all these issues.. And I was like, Oh my god, I need to do something about this. And then [00:28:00] my entire life turned into environmental justice. And it's so big in New York City that it was like, I'm gonna say it wasn't not hard to get into, but also it's like the youth movement, especially I was very involved with like high school students.

Greta Thunberg, I was a part of her org and like AOC, like Sunrise Movement.

Luis: I saw her every day.

Gabriela: Yes, I used to intern with her. I used to stalk that woman on social media every

Luis: day. Like when is she gonna post? This and that. I was,

Gabriela: bro, I will never forget the day I was supposed to go to DC to march with her for the Sunrise Movement.

And My parents said no, because they were like, you're literally a freshman, you're a sophomore in high school. What are you gonna go to D. C. all alone? Are you crazy? But she was flying us out, like she was paying for everything. And the next day she posts with all my friends on her main Instagram.

I was so mad! I was so mad! So mad. Then they was like blasted on the news. Ugh. I was so upset. 'cause mind you, I literally helped plan that entire march. Yeah. And I couldn't even participate in it. 'cause I have strict Hispanic parents. Yeah. But I digress. That's something I'll always hold a grudge on.

I always tell my mom, I'm like, you know what I could have been doing,

add music break

Gabriela: I feel like I came in being like, I'm going to do environmental science and policy. Initially, when I was [00:29:00] doing my college search, I was like, I'm doing environmental studies. So it's a very big difference. So it's like like the intersection between like social justice, public policy, and into environmentalism.

It was never really I want to break down like, The biological concepts of the cell, like that was never my thing. So when I came in, I was like, Oh, I'm doing environmental science, obviously because like I'm an environmentalist, this is what I do. So I'm sitting there in my chem class and I'm like, no, this is not what I do.

This is not what my life is going to be, I fear.

Now it's time to actually get into the pre reqs. The hard stuff. And I'm thinking I'm gonna do environmental law. Like when I come to school I'm like, I'm gonna do environmental law. Like I'm gonna be a lawyer. First class I ever took, environmental law and policy 265

Freshman year first semester. We can only blame my advisor for that because why didn't she advise me to do otherwise? I don't talk to her.

Luis: Yeah, that's the hard thing too. I feel like you truly have to build a relationship

Gabriela: Mine didn't want to build a relationship with me

Luis: and that's the issue

My advisor, we met through Zoom, like obviously in the summer. And then that's where we like talked about what I want to major in and things like that. And she was like, okay you're going to do chemistry, you're going to do political science, you're going to do computer science, and then you're going to [00:30:00] do a writing 101 class.

First of all, worst writing 101 class ever. I like the professor, but these students know not to take it. Education is life. I'm very passionate about education. I have a nonprofit on it. And so

I thought like this was going to be good because education is truly life. Like everyone needs to be educated.

Everyone needs to experience that privilege of having an education and It was the complete opposite. But by that point like I told her like I didn't like chemistry and so we planned on withdrawing Then second semester she helped me plan my second semester.

That's when I was taking public policy intro to human rights and She saw like the spark and the joy that I truly had. Like every time we had conversations about that, like she was like, Luis, I can see that you are very passionate about this. You truly want to do law school.

You truly want to do all this advocacy work. Like I don't even know why we even thought pre med was in the picture. And so I feel like it's really important to build that relationship with your advisor because at the end of the day, you like, You can blame them. That class, you can blame her, because this girl's a freshman.

What is she doing in there?

Gabriela: [00:31:00] Environmental 265. Why I was sitting in that class? I didn't realize I was still halfway through the semester. I'm like, whoa. Everyone's a junior. Oh, everyone's in the pre-law track. Oh, okay. It's starting to make sense as to why I flunked my fricking midterm.

Yeah, that's makes sense. But I ended up doing fine in the class. I like spoke to my professor, so it wasn't the worst, but it definitely helped me figure out the fact that I was not gonna be an environmental lawyer whatsoever. I don't like law. I'm sorry. Always so glad. That's too niche, but too much reading.

It's a lot

Gabriela: guys, tap in for the next episode. We will be back and next time we're gonna get into The

actually, no, we're gonna do it after my takeover so that they can put their questions. Let us know what questions you have.

Let us know. And we will answer them. Be candid, be real. We'll be candid, be real. Be raw and real.

Conclusion:

Victoria: Thanks for tuning in. Gabby and Luis show how friendships at duke can truly shape your experience. Supporting each other through challenges and celebrating wins. We dive into their leadership in student organizations and [00:32:00] how extracurriculars often

feel more rewarding than academics, especially for duke life students, still mastering tools for academic success. Luis shares, powerful insight. Strong student advisor relationships are key to thriving academically.

But advice, isn't always the issue. It's the lack of connection. And hearing about Gabby's deep experience advocating for environmental justice in high school. It's surprising that her advisor didn't fully grasp. How lived experiences like hers shape major decisions and highlight the disadvantages. Many duke life students face.

What I've gathered is that both students and advisors need to invest in real relationships that support exploration and academic success. Thanks to Gabby and Luis for this thought provoking conversation in the face of all that's going on in your busy college lives. I hope that you continue to protect your peace. As you show by example, what [00:33:00] duke life students are capable of learning and accomplishing.

Stay tuned for more first gen stories like this.