

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

TL: Okay, are you ready? Can we start? Okay. So Dr. Levy, tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? When did you move to the United States?

CL: I was born in, in Egypt in 1950. And basically grew up in Egypt until August 1958. The reason why we left is, you know, after the 1956 war between Israel and Egypt and all of its other constituent countries that were involved, it became difficult to remain in Egypt as a Jew, and, or anyone who was of the Jewish faith. And so, my father decided that it was time to leave and so originally our plans were to move to Israel but as that changed, and the decision was made to move to the United States, but before we could do that we had to receive visas to the United States,

TL: Okay

CL: and that took a little bit of time. So the first thing that we did is we took a ship that took us first to Italy, to where I went with my mother to meet her mother and her brother who, had left Egypt a little bit earlier on, we're living in Italy.

TL: Okay

CL: My grandmother was.. had Italian citizenship, so it was not that difficult to do. My father continued with his parents to Marseille, France, and they took another ship back from Marseille, France to Israel, because no ship was allowed to go from Egypt to Israel at that time.

We stayed... We stayed in Marseil- we stayed in... We stayed in Livorno for a few weeks. While my father when my father came back, he tried to find a job there. And we had left Egypt, we were all stateless, because the government confiscated all of our papers. And my father could not find a job there, so he went to France was able to find a job there. And so we were then able to move to France, where we stayed until the end of February of 1959 when we received the received our visas to come to the United States.

TL: Okay

CL: A that time we had to be you had to be sponsored. And so my father had an aunt in.. in the United States in New York, who agreed to sponsor the family.

TL: Okay

CL: So in March of 1959, we arrived... in Brooklyn, And I stayed in the United States in Brooklyn until 1974 when I went into the service for four years 19 until 1978 -78, I went to Stanford, did my PhD. Then after the PhD, I went and did a postdoc in Israel for two years. And then I the first job that I had back in the United States after the postdoc was at FIU.

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

TL: Okay

CL: And that's how we got to FIU.

TL: So you applied for a position here at FIU

CL: Yeah, not, that wasn't the only position I applied for but the second, this is the one I finally accepted. So that was in August of 1985 that's when I came-

TL: Okay

CL: -in Miami

TL: You know, when I, I was going through your CV, which was posted by the College of Engineering and Computing, and I saw that you graduated at Stanford, and then somehow, I figured there was an historical reason why you and maybe your family moved to Miami, even though it was 1985 – I understand 1980s - but I thought there was more any historical reason for a Jew family to move to Miami at that time, or before that time?

CL: No, well, the... the two positions that I got, or that I... which were offered to me, one was in the university at Rochester Institute of Technology

TL: Okay

CL: right in Rochester, where it gets cold, and there is snow.

TL: (Laughs)

CL: And then there's FIU which is in the sun

TL: I know!

CL: and the only thing we have to worry about is hurricanes. So the choice was, you know, you know, do I want to freeze in the winter or do I want to sweat in the summer? So therefore we decided to come here to you know, to sweat

TL: (Laughs) I can totally relate

CL: Yeah, so that's basically why we came to Miami.

TL: Okay, that's good. And so, um, what roles did you cover at FIU?

CL: Oh, wow. So, when I came to FIU, the department was very small. There were, I think, four faculty members at the time. And this was a push for the engineering programs, which

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

were originally technology programs: electrical, electrical, technology, mechanical technology, to convert to a mechanical engineering program. So the... I think the program or the college decided at that time to increase the size of the faculty. And so they hired three or four more people at this at that time. At that time, Dr. Jones, was or became the department chairman. And basically, the people that were there are no longer with us. They're.. they were all gone. As Dr. [?] who was there, Dr. Nwadike, Dr. Wu, who you may have met, but he left in, I think 2012. And then, there's there may have been one more person... Oh, Dr. Leonard, that you've never met. All of those basically left... doctor... There was another person [Dr. Fred Swift] who was the department chairman before Dr. Jones, who was also a member of the industrial engineering program.

TL: Okay

CL: At that time, we hired like three or four new people. We basically doubled in size. The- we were in the VH building, that's where we were. And... Really that VH building, housed all kinds of programs in there, the electrical was there, civil was there, mechanical was there, as well as things like... I guess apparel, Apparel Management, and... [*Landscape Architecture*] Other things that that really were not related to mechanical, or related to engineering at all. So...

TL: You mentioned last time when we had the first, like, pre interview, that at that time President Maidique was maybe he was appointed, like a few months after you were hired?

CL: Yeah, I believe he was hired in 1986. After I came on board, I think it was Dr. Wolf, I think was at the time the President and then they hired Dr. Maidique, which the hope was that with him things would... would move forward, that FIU would go from just being a more of a teaching institution to a research and teaching. So that's what was happening at the time.

TL: And you witnessed a lot of changes since then.

CL: Yeah, there were, you know, when... When we came on board the college grew rather quickly. There was, I think, at that time, you had to- you had to basically put in a request to build buildings on campus, and this had to be approved. And so the approval was to build what we now know as the Engineering and Computer Science building which were... We were on the main campus at the time. And by... And by the time we occupied the building, which was in 1990. We had already been- We already were too big for that building as well. But no, no one actually put in a request for a second engineering building.

TL: Okay

CL: as far as I remember. And so part of the College of Engineering stayed in the VH building, for example, civil engineering, took over some of the areas that that we had, and electrical and mechanical moved into the ECS building. And there was an attempt to try

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

and have computer science become part of engineering- part of the College of Engineering at that time, under Dr. Hopkins

TL: okay

CL: but even though they put us both in the same building, they occupied I believe they... they're... Yeah, they occupied I think the third- the second floor. It's still you know, you can... As they say, you can... you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. The same thing all true over here. They put us both in the same building, but that didn't mean that we were part of the same unit. So we had connections but, you know, computer science always wanted to remain separate and distinct even in that kind of situation.

TL: Okay

CL: Now because we were growing, were becoming very, very large. The college was- And since they had not put in for a second building for engineering, there was there was always this problem of trying to find room or find labs for faculty that was that were being hired. And so I think I started out with a rather large laboratory, which slowly was reduced in size etc. Until for all intents and purposes, I really had a very small section of the lab- of a lab there in the CS building. And in 1996, I went on my first sabbatical, I came back from the sabbatical, to find out that the College of Engineering was now going to be moved to where we are now. Okay, and which I thought was a very bad move.

TL: Okay

CL: Because we, it meant that the engineering programs would be completely divorced from what was happening on the main campus.

TL: Okay

CL: What it happened was, there was a need for a building, Cordis Corporation wanted to sell this building, you know, it's somebody may have approached somebody else about the building, etc. And so everybody thought that, okay, the Cordis building might be the answer to all the problems that we have. So they plan to move the four engineering programs - industrial, mechanical, civil and electrical - into the Cordis building. But the money that they had in order to renovate the building was only enough to cover a quarter of the renovation. And so, when we came to the building, you just can imagine- just imagine, the mechanical engineering area that we have right now, is having no offices, except for one office, where Dr. Agarwal was, and one office where Zhe Cheng had before I left. Those are the only two offices. The rest was an empty Bay.

TL: Oh wow!

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

CL: Cordis used to, you know, when they do did their buildings and everything else they would modify by reconfiguring the empty bay to achieve whatever they wanted to achieve.

TL: Okay

CL: So the first thing that happened was that they built offices along the windows, which are the offices that you see right now.

TL: Yes

CL: And then they started, you know, adding things in the center, you know, for the students. But that that took time, it took a long time before all of that happened.

TL: So basically, the space constraints never changed over the time

CL: No.

TL: So-

CL: So over time, this is basically what would happen and that's and the other departments basically had to do the same kind of things as well.

TL: And you started as an assistant professor, when you were hired?

CL: I was hired in 1985 as an assistant professor

TL: Okay

CL: I became an associate professor in 1991. And a full professor in 96.

TL: And you became chair of the mechanical engineering department in 20-?

CL: 2009

TL: And before that, did you have any other role at FIU?

CL: I did a lot of the things- I was undergraduate program director, I was in, I basically created the advising- the undergraduate advising system. At... When I came on board advising was being done by individual faculty members and sometimes the advising was not consistent across all the different faculty members. So Dr. Jones asked me if I would take over the, the advising, and so we became a centralized advising type unit in which all affect- all the students who go to one professor. We hired one person for a while to be the advisor. And then after that we trained Carmen [Schenck] to become the advisor. She was an undergraduate student with us.

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

TL: Really??

CL: Yeah, she did her Master's with me. But her Master's was more of a master's related to undergraduate student advising, in which she wrote her master's thesis in which we took two groups very, very much similar in nature. One group, that was an initial cohort from FIU and one group that was a cohort that came from Miami Dade, and we looked at the behavior, you know, what would happen, you know, when you immerse someone from Miami Dade immediately into engineering programs, as opposed to students who were not immersed in, in immediately into engineering courses, etc. And we found differences, statistically significant differences, which we then applied and in the future as to how we would advise students who come from outside until they get acclimated to the FIU mentality, so to speak, before they would start taking engineering courses.

TL: Right

CL: So, so I did that. Then when we, when we started having the [graduate programs, MS and PhD]- I helped. In the 90s, the early 90s. Dr. Ebadian was department chairman. So I helped him with the creation of the Masters and the PhD programs.

TL: Wow!

CL: So I became an advisor, graduate advisor as well, you know, then we had to come up with ways in which to evaluate students whether or not they were ready to go on to [PhD] candidacy. So we came up with the qualifying examinations. So I was involved in in creating the format for that. So, you know, that's what happens when you're, you come in at the beginning of the, of the building of a department, you end up doing all kinds of things.

TL: Yeah

CL: So, you know, I was involved in curriculum, I was involved in library.

TL: So basically, you built up the department the way we know it now

CL: I was... I was involved in that. Yes. Okay. And over time, our department was really an interdisciplinary department, because we had people in the area of robotics, people in the area of Biomedical Engineering, Dr. Shoephoerster was there was part of us. Several of the people that are that formed the biomedical engineering, were part of mechanical to start out with. We had people in materials we had really a fully interdisciplinary program. And in 2003, when Dr. Prasad was here, Dean Prasad, he decided to create the biomedical engineering program and so took people took the people that were biomedically inclined, and moved them into, you know, down on the second floor, made that as a separate department. Of course, nobody gave us back the people that was- that

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

were taken from us. So faculty had to do more with less, so to speak. Yeah, and but that's a different story.

TL: Dr. Levy, so... How about the student population at the College of Engineering -nd computing? Did you notice? I mean, since you've been here for a very long time, did you notice a change in the composition of the student population over over the years?

CL: When I came at FIU in 1985, there are there are 14,000 student 14,000 students, and I think a college had a- I really don't remember the numbers exactly, might have been 1000 students in the college that didn't include computer science. Most of the students that we had at that time were older students that came to FIU in order to better themselves and also to help support their families. So we had the, you know, over time that changed, in that we became more of a regular university where 18 year olds, you know, just graduated from high school, came on came onboard. Now, the older population, to me were better trained in, in the mathematics and the sciences, because a good group of students that we had were students that had come from, from Cuba, and had gone to college before they left and came here to the United States. So what they were trying to do was to pick up from where they left off. And so a lot of things had to be done on, you know, under the assumption that what they were telling you was correct, because at that time, it was difficult to get documentation from Cuba, here. Over time, that became a little bit easier and so we're able to do that. But a lot of times, you know, when you- when you spoke to an individual, whatever he provided you, we sort of had to, you know, to accept as being the documentation. So over time, that changed, where we could get documentation from Cuba and we were able to then use that documentation to make decisions as to where the students would fit into the program. Over time, we went from the older, family oriented kind of student who was trying to better himself so he can do better for his family, to the 18 year old student that came from Miami Dade, etc. So, when I came on board, there are about 15 students in the classroom, as I said, as I mentioned to you the last time I have kept students to, so that I would have no more than 60 students in my upper divisions class. But if you were to talk to someone like Ju Sun, or some of the other instructors, you know, they have 120 students easily in class, that that wasn't the case when I came on board. So the university as a whole has quadrupled in size, or more than that, I guess they're close to 60,000. And the number of students in in this, you know, one engineering course nowadays can be any anywhere from five to six, five to eight times the size of what it was when I came on board. It was a rather large change. The number of faculty however, was basically flat for the from the late 90s all the way through till about, what, five years ago when the present Dean pledged to increase the size of the mechanical engineering and mechanical materials department faculty, you know, because he thought whatever we had was not really well equipped to do the job that was intended. So as you know in the last few years there has been more hiring of faculty than the previous years before that.

TL: Right. And did you notice any change in the student population? Um, I mean, um, by their nationalities over the years, as you mentioned at the beginning, I mean, we had a large

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

Hispanic, we have a large Hispanic, um,

CL: Yeah, I, I think that the college as a whole had about a 70%, Hispanic population when I came on board and I think that that's pretty much remained - maybe a little bit more over time. We've seen more women being brought on, on board as engineers. We've seen, I think, more hiring of African American students. I shouldn't say hiring, but taking on as students in the program. I think there's- there's an attempt to try and have more minorities come into engineering over time, but solidly the largest group in the college from the time that I was there till now has always been the Hispanic speaking students. And it's always been at least 70% or more.

TL: Somehow with the graduate students this ratio is a little different. I mean, this is what I noticed - I mean, I'm not being with the mechanical department for a very long time because it's only six years, but what I notice is that when we talk about graduate students, the nationalities really, really change, really differ. We don't have that many Hispanics

CL: Well, you have to understand what normally happens. You know, the good Hispanic students, will normally get three or four offers from the better schools to go there. And so if I, you know, if I had my choice of going to, uh, Carnegie Mellon versus staying at FIU or going to, you know, Stanford or Ohio State, or Princeton, or Cornell or Rensselaer or something like that, you know, who wouldn't jump at that?

TL: Right.

CL: So, even though we try to keep and we tried to keep our students, there is no way that the offer that FIU provided, could ever match the offers of some of the big schools whose, who were trying to increase their minority ratios. And so therefore our good students, unless there was some specific reason as to why they would want, they needed to stay in the Miami area would always take the offers and go to those schools or, you know, they had enough of schools, so therefore they wanted to get a job and you know, take off from school for a while so they would take jobs and, and leave the area. So the number of students that we have in terms of Hispanic students in the program, you know, there's this big disparity between the undergraduate versus the graduate students. Now, in order to run a graduate program and to make the graduate program successful, you needed bodies. We couldn't get them from our own undergraduate program. So in the beginning, we began by accepting Chinese students. They became a large segment of the population of the graduate programs, then that switched over and became more Indian students. And then over time now there's- there's a mix more of middle Eastern students are coming into the program, but that, those are things that are happening because as I said, the Chinese students wanted to come to the United States and studying the United States and so they, they accepted whatever they could, but then they found that they could become competitive with other schools as well. So therefore they applied elsewhere, were able to get in to other places. And so the next group that we had to tap was, you know, students from India. So you see that in, in the late 90s, early 2000s, there were a lot of Indian

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

students that were, that were brought on board. And then as time went on in late 2000s, 2010, you'll see a lot of students from, from middle Eastern countries, come on board. Uh, but you know, that's because, you know, if you can't get students from one group, you gotta try and find, you know, if you wanna make your program successful and go since everything is being given to you, based on the number of facul-, not faculty, but number of students that are part of your program and funding is basically that way. Then you know, you do what you need to do in order to bring in students. And that's basically what we, what we did.

TL: And do you believe this is peculiar to the college of engineering or this did this happen also to, you know, main campus, to FIU in general?

CL: I can't speak for the other programs, even though there are documents that will show you, you know, what the composition is for the different, for the different programs. All I know is the programs that I had to deal with, and those are the engineering, programs, specifically mechanical engineering program.

TL: OK. In your opinion, what is the notion... I mean, What is the notion of international at FIU?

CL: I think the word international the beginning was to distinguish us from other schools that were part of the Florida State University system. I mean, there was a Florida Atlantic already in existence, so you can, couldn't take Atlantic, and you couldn't call yourself university of something because, UF would a very strong response to that. So I think the, the word international came into being because Miami is an international city and it made sense to have that word in the- in the title. But when you, if you were to look at the number of students, as I said before, when I came on board, there were about 14,000 students. At that time, there were only about a thousand international students that were part of the program. Now there's probably a lot more students that are international students. And so FIU is living up to its namesake.

You know, everybody, you know, in, in my days, people were trying to change names of FIU because they didn't feel that FIU was... had enough of a presence in terms of a name. I think that's is pretty much... that doesn't, that's not being discussed anymore. I think everybody's accepting the fact it's Florida international and Florida international is doing, it's doing its... its thing, and... its name and it's working through its name to.. achieve whatever it needs to achieve.

TL: Do you believe FIU accomplished this mission in internationality?

CL: Yes. I think the fact that many of the students that are here are children of minorities that came from other places. And so therefore the international aspect is there it's.. it's always

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

going to be there. Where we are puts us in a city that's very international or is a gateway to south America, Europe, Central America etcetera. So therefore, international as a name is really representative of where we are.

Miami is a very international city. It has, if you look at the number of groups, of Hispanic speaking groups, we have become sort of the refuge of, for many South American Hispanic speaking groups because of the turmoil that exist in their- in their country. And so they come here or so you know, their children have got to go to school someplace. So, you know, there are here, there are only basically two schools, University of Miami, where you have to pay a lot to go there, or you come to FIU, get a very good education, but don't pay, you know, don't have to give up your, your firstborn child to be able to go to school.

TL: Right

CL: You know, so...

TL: Speaking about, oh, sorry, go ahead

CL: No, so yes, it, it's, it's trying to do its best to maintain that.

TL: Hm hm, the name. And speaking about minorities, and speaking about you, do you believe your original culture and your beliefs were equally represented at FIU?

CL: I don't know whether or not the number of students that are here, you know, that were, I don't think there were many religious Jews that came to FIU, for whatever reason, I also, you know, I have my own, feelings about how things could have been done better. As I said, there was a Dean of Students by the name of Rosa Jones in the 90s, very nice lady, an African-American who was very cognizant of the needs of religious Jews, Jewish students. And she tried to do the best that she could in order to make that happen. I can't say that for anybody after that. I can't say that for, you know, previous provosts, previous presidents, you know, so I will leave it at that because... it opens up a very bad can of worms.

TL: Okay. So.. Do you believe this, underrepresentation of your minority was, um, was specular to the underrepresentation in the society at FIU? I mean, between FIU and Miami?

CL: I think, you know, if there are young students, religious students that, you know... it's time for them to go to school, they probably would've tried to find schools up in the New York area where there's a much larger Jewish population. For you know, for obvious reasons, number one, if at some point in time, you know, the notion of family and marrying

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

someone who's also a religious Jew, you would find more of that in the New York area than you would down here.

TL: Okay

CL: So they would probably migrate and go up to, you know, Columbia Yeshiva University, New York University, Queens college, whatever, because, you know, they would be within a larger group of religious, Jewish students. And it would be easier to find a match so to speak. If that wasn't available, then it's possible it came to FIU.

TL: Okay

CL: But for the most part, I didn't see very many religious Jews, I think, in my time at FIU, you know, I might have seen four religious Jewish students who indicated that they were religious students. So when I, when I applied for the job, I wore my yarmulka, I wore my kippah- when I did the interview and I made it very clear to them that, you know, this is me. And, you know, if you take me, you gotta take me as an entire package. I think in, in terms of students, there aren't that many students who would wear the yarmulka for whatever reasons. And I think, I know FIU is trying very hard not to have involvements in some of the negative things that are happening with student groups, et cetera, in some of the other big cities. But there are also those students who feel that it's not worthwhile to, you know, get involved in shouting matches, with, with those kinds of people. So, it's possible that, you know, they would rather find a place where they felt a lot more comfortable and go to school there, as opposed to, you know, running, having possibility of running into situations like that.

TL: And how about your, um, you remember a few years ago when we had Dr- interim Dean Dr. Ranu Jung, she promoted the, the multicultural faith room, on the second floor. How did you, how did you welcome this decision?

CL: I felt that, you know, that that was catered to a specific group. It wasn't to, to everyone because, you know, not everyone was going to use that room while a specific group of people, and I think it was being done so that perhaps, you know, if people were interested in, you know, in praying in at specific times, at least it's a place where, you know, it doesn't happen in the hallway or, you know, as I've seen it happen in the past. OK. That that's, that's fine. But you know, that's... that was being done in order to, I guess, to minimize any kind of problems that might exist. You know, that, that was fine, but it shows that, you know, why only them, why not others as well. So, you know, and it, it's not so simple to have one room where everybody, you know, the different groups can use it because you know, it's a logistic nightmare if you're not careful with, with how to use it. So...

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

TL: You're right. And speaking of when you were a chair, there were, there was any particular situation with international students that you might recall, or any specific needs that the students might have at that time?

CL: I don't think it was specific to the international students. I think it was specific to all the students is that the size of the student body was increasing and the class sizes were also increasing by a lot. And because of that, it was sometimes difficult to work with the students in a proper manner because the classes were so large, we didn't have enough students as TAs to help et cetera. And so that in itself could be problematic. So... and of course, you know, with us, we have in the sense of... the department, the students that fall into the minority category, and that could include students that are international students as well, perhaps were not... perhaps could have been considered underserved because we just didn't have the right kinds of TAs that could help the students.

And perhaps the number of TAs because in, in my time, the TAs, the teaching, a set were normally graduate students. And for the most part, most of those graduate students were materials graduate students. And they were not... they were not... to back up a little bit, our undergraduate program is a mechanical engineering program. And so there was a mismatch there between the knowledge of the TAs versus what they really needed to know to be a teaching assistant in a particular course. Some students took up the challenge and became good at being TAs. and some students basically, you know, said it's not my area of expertise and so they did minimum in terms of helping the students. So that was one of the problems that minorities, international students, et cetera, had to deal with. But that's not, you know, it wasn't their fault that it happened that way. It just turned out that way.

TL: And in your opinion, what could FIU do better in the future to, for international students?

CL: When I was associate Dean for undergraduate affairs was one of the things that... was done was something whereby. We put a peer to peer tutoring program, which from my understanding is still going on. I don't know how strong it's it's, but what we really need to do is we need to provide students more of that to help them in terms of their understanding of the materials, the different courses that they have to take, et cetera. And... but that's true of all the students in general. International students have an added weight that they have to deal with, and that is number one, they have to, they're coming to a different country that has different ways of doing things, et cetera.

So I don't know if the.. there are, whether this is being done in a proforma method, or this is being done just by, you know, the way it is, but perhaps maybe assigning someone to an international student to help them sort of get used to where they are, where they, you know, those kinds of things, if there is, great! If there isn't, perhaps it should be something that can be done. I'm sure that if you talk to, you know, the, people FIU, perhaps there's, there's a, you know, they can use some of the, what they call the FIU

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

ambassadors, students, student ambassadors, and help them, and have them basically help, you know, whether they have weekly meetings with these people to answer questions or, you know, an assignment of one on one, whatever the case may be, but at least something to help them, you know, get used to what FIU is about what the United States is about, what Miami is about. So and so on and so on- so forth. I think if you do that, it will ease some of the stress on the the international students that come here to go to go to school.

TL: I totally agree. Uh, what about when you were a student at Stanford? I mean, you were, you are right. How many years before in New York, before becoming, um,

CL: I went to Stanford in, oh, gosh, let's see. I was at Stanford from '78 to 1983, so I was already in the United States all almost 20 years before I went to Stanford.

TL: Oh, ok.

CL: Okay. So.

TL: It doesn't apply,

CL: You know, it doesn't apply. I was also in, I was also in the service, so I was, you know, exposed to people, you know, different cultures...

TL: Right

CL: So for me, it wasn't so much for me, the situation was to try and find a Jewish community that I could connect with. And now, thank God. There was one in, you know, in Palo Alto that I was able to do that with, but the - it wasn't... And before I- you know, before I went anywhere, one of the things that I tried to do was to see if I could find a telephone number or get someone to provide me with a connection where I could connect with that individual and, and speak to them about, you know, what I would find where I would, you know, Jewishly, uh, when, when I got there.

So I think the same kind of things over here, I'm sure that people want to find a group, that is very like-minded. So, you know, perhaps con-contacting, you know, the, uh, students for, or whatever, and you can put in whatever label you wanna put in, you know, contact, maybe the president or whatever of that, student group and have somebody from that group, perhaps connect with the individual so that it helps them get over, this stress of moving to a different country and moving to a different city, moving to.. to a school that you, you don't know how they operate. I think those kinds of things are important. And,

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

and this sort of fits with this idea of the work that Carmen did for our masters, okay? Because as we said, you know, take, it's great that an individual may have a 3.7 from Miami-Dade community college, but when they come to FIU and they don't know what's what to expect, it's... it's a culture shock. So, so if you have someone there that can help you get over, get over that culture shock, it makes it much easier to fit in or, or learn to fit into the group of students that you're joining.

TL: Yeah. So true. Dr. Levy, we are running out of time and I'm, I'm loving talking to you and listening to all your, all of your memories and suggestions. So I have one last question. What are your hopes and dreams for the future of FIU based on your experience here?

CL: Well, I'm hoping that students in general learn tolerance for their fellow students and for people who are not of the same mindset as them. Dialogue between people is very important because, you know, you get to know somebody, you know, is not some amorphous face somewhere who may not have the same way of dealing with things as you. And so, by talking to them, you know, sharing, then, you know, you can get to understand the other side as well, and become more tolerant of differences between each other. I am hoping that FIU does not fall into this radicalization that comes, that I see in a lot of schools elsewhere. And, you know, perhaps people may not agree with what I have to say, but you know, I find that, uh, intolerance is a more of the problem that causes the things that you're seeing in society in the now.

I'm just hoping that, uh, um, the faculty and the students learn to be more tolerant and accepting of others and not, you know, automatically make snap judgment calls. Personally I think that the internet has run amok and that was that wasn't the whole point of the internet, but it's really... The fact of the matter is in the old days, you were allowed to put in your comments, you know, on what somebody has said to say. Now, you know, you have to register so that people know exactly who you are otherwise. You know, you're not allowed to make any comments. So in some ways I find that that's, you know, in abridgement of freedom.

I don't know what else I'm just hoping that FIU will be, will produce tolerant students and tolerant faculty. That's it.

TL: Do you think this is for, uh, because FIU has a large, international population, or you're talking about the changes in society?

CL: I think changes in society, I think, that really are spilling over into, into the university. And, you know, if you don't, you find that if you don't, oh boy, here we go. If you don't, if you don't think, the way that the majority thinks then you're you're ostracized or you're not accepted or your opinion is not considered. An opinion that anybody wants to hear.

TL: Dr. Levy, thank you so much for your time. It was a great pleasure talking to you.

Interviewee: Cesar Levy
Interviewer: Tiziana Leoni
Date: April 15, 2022

CL: No problem. Take care of yourself.

TL: Take care of yourself, you too.

CL: Bye

TL: Bye. Bye-bye, Dr. Levy.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Tiziana Leoni