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Good morning. As I stated my name is Susan Patzan. I began at NLU in 2011. I graduated in 2016. I currently am, I work for Illinois Action for Children. I oversee programs that helps recruit Chicago Early Learning for CPS and for Chicago based organizations.

What inspired me to go to NLU was, I was an adult learner, I needed to continue my studies and I originally wanted to go into the classroom, I originally wanted to go into teaching. So back in 2011 I went back into the community college that I was originally going to and that same year my dad heard about an opportunity at NLU- a scholarship opportunity at NLU for teachers and he always said “ Want to go into teaching, you definitely, he said, you’ve got tools go for it”. I had been out of school for many years at that point and he kept saying “Go back, go back, do something. You can do much more than what you’re doing currently”. I’m so glad I heard him. I decided to go ahead and apply for the Harrison Fellows scholarship back in 2011 and I applied to NLU. I was accepted to NLU. Unfortunately, I was not given the Harrison Fellows scholarship right away. It took a year and a half for me to receive it. But still, that was, even though I had not received that scholarship, I was getting all the assistance, I had great student mentors, I had great colleagues, yeah eventually colleagues. Classmates, I’m sorry – the words slipped my mind. It was a great program to see as an adult learner, and I keep saying adult learner reiterating them because I was, I started the program when I was 26 year old. So when I began the Harrison Fellows there were different age groups and I was right in the middle. I will never forget that I had classmates who were already, had children that were in college, who had were heads of families but there were there in classrooms with me, also working till 2:00-3:00 am on our papers. I will never forget being on a text group message with people who, were the same age as my parents asking me “did you do this paper yet?” and me saying yes, let’s do it, what you need help with? “I need help with uploading” and me helping them in that situation and them motivating me to tell me “hey, I’m doing this with all this responsibility you’ve got this going on as well. And sitting in a classroom also with classmates who had just graduated high school so I’m right in the middle of different life perspectives. And that made it very genuine for me because I needed their energy as well. I will never forget, one of my younger classmates always, he always made a point to say “oh yeah forget you’re older, forget you’re seasoned and it became a running joke, but it was, that’s what I love about being a part of Harrison Fellows because we were all coming from different paths of life and different age groups but more importantly, we were coming together saying “hey, we may have not had an opportunity before but we are coming in now or we may not have had the opportunity to be in classroom with students that looked specifically like us which was very refreshing for the Harrison Fellows also. Not only were we, not only was it different, not only were we receiving some scholarship money, it also made it clear that we were there to help each other learn, to grow as a community. One of the things that drew me to it was that there was that conscious of having to serve in your community no matter what you were going to do, had it been business, education, human services and I’m not sure what it molded into afterwards but there was always a sense of community, that sense of what are you going to do to make community better, what are you going to do to serve others and that has always been something that I grew up with particularly my parents have always installed in me that my late grandmother’s saying was “You are a blessing to bless others” and that is something that I like to live my life by, however I can help I like to do so. I like to think that NLU allowed me to continue with my career in non-profits, particularly working in educational policy. I loved the mentors that I had there- dr. Ramos was one of my mentors so was dr. Lopez. They were very instrumental to inspire me to tell me “hey, you can do this, hey, we need your help, we need your assistance”. And at first I’m like what do you mean you need my help, and there was a project that they took on the parent Leadership Academy and I came on as a student worker and I was sitting there,

getting paid to do research, getting paid to read. First of all, I loved that because I love reading. But second of all, I was able to see that they saw in me, in leader, a leader that was going to be taking this on and now in my current role that is what I'm doing. I'm educating families, I'm educating parents and the importance of early childhood education and I absolutely love that, and I have to say that NLU was where I was able to say "hey, I definitely can do this". You know, dr. Lopez and dr. Ramos were both correct, I am capable of doing this. I speak both languages, but to be in the communities and talk to families, and they inspire me to continue to do so. I am grateful for the fact they decided that you know hey, we need to serve students of colors, Latino students who have been underserved before and I do believe that higher education institutions can do a better, a better way of having staff that looks like their students, staff that engages their students and that's one of the things that I enjoyed about NLU is that because it was a small campus you were able to have more one on one communication with your professors and you were able to have and if you couldn't reach them you also had your student mentors. There were countless times when were where in the office with dr. Ramos just saying, man I'm going through this or man, I don't understand this classroom, can you assist me and she was always there to remind us: you've got this, there is assistance, go to the library, how can I help you? What other ways can you do it? Or she'd say you know what, I don't understand the problem either but perhaps sit down with somebody else and we would sit down in her office, multiple students and working on a problem together. It sounds funny but at the same time it was something that was definitely needed because I felt like I wasn't the only one that was going through it. I know that back in 2016 NLU became a Hispanic serving institution and that is amazing. I would like to think that the Harrison Fellows got a lot to do with that. I would like to think that was the push that the institution needed, that a particular scholarship was the push the institution needed in order for us to go, in order for it to become Hispanic serving institution.

One of the many highlights, I would have to say is being part of Harrison Fellow back in, 10 years ago, back in 2012. The end of this month –November we went to Guadalajara, Mexico and we were able to be immersed one in knowing how gets run out there. Dr. Ramos is alma matter is actually there, Univa and we were taken to Univa, we were taken to other campuses. We were also taken into rural, excuse me, I don't like that word, rural schools. We were taken to alternative schools and regular schooling out there and it was such a beautiful experience for the ten of us who went, to be able to be immersed in what the students were learning, and the reason for this trip was because originally the people that went we were all going into education. We were all going to become Chicago Public School teachers and because of that we knew that also needed to be immersed in a culture that students were coming from. A lot of the students that CPS serves now, even more so now are immigrant students who have just come from their native nations. Most of them tend to be from Mexico and dr. Ramos said "You know what? I think you all need to understand where they are coming from, understand what they have learned in their native country and understand where that sense of patriotism comes from". And it was such a beautiful thing to witness, to be able to be there and one of the schools that we went to we saw them give the pledge of allegiance, I would roughly translate it there that way. The pledge of allegiance, the national anthem and just the way they marched around the flag to me was like wow, now I understand where the sense of patriotism comes from, from my Mexican friends and family. Not being Mexican I never quite understood it here in Chicago. I knew that it was a beautiful thing but I never really fully understood it until I saw it firsthand. That trip was, that trip was beautiful. It was, we were able to sit down with the secretary of education of the state of Jalisco and it was beautiful, wonderful experience to be able to sit there and dialog with them and engaged in conversation about education

and seeing how a lot of the same struggles seem to happen in different countries but you are now discussing them with people that you are like wow I would expect things to be, they expect things to be different for us and we are saying you know what, no we understand why. We understand things differently now. It was also beautiful to be able to see it happen in Spanish see it happen in another country and it was, definitely reminded me how it bonded us that once but it also made us grateful for what we had and it made us understand more -why students oftentimes act the way they do, right and I think that was a great idea for dr. Ramos to go ahead and take us there, I am very appreciative for that. It was definitely one of the highlights that I have from that, from being a Harrison Fellow and I do have multiple pictures that I will be willing to share from that trip and lastly it allowed me to see the different types of schools which was something that I thoroughly enjoyed. I will never forget that we were taken into an alternative night school and this alternative night school was for children who work on the street and who are the ones that are selling the gum on the street, who are cleaning the windshields on the street, who are you know clowns on the streets and they are doing this to support their families and when you think about that you think of children that are actually anywhere between as little as five, sometimes younger as little as five all the way to 17-18 years old, 18 you are an adult but it was a space where it allowed children come in, they were allowed to come in no matter what time. The school was, can't remember the times anymore so I'm going to say between 5 and like 9:30. Students were able to come in between those time, yes they would, somebody if they came in late they would just say "Maestra, I'm here" (teacher I'm here). The teacher wouldn't reprimand them but it gave them a sense of wanting to be a child and I loved how that classroom opportunity allowed that. There was a young lady that came in and she came in a little bit later but she sat down, she started doing her craft and you could see, you could see on this young child's face that she had had a rough day and you could see, personally all I wanted to do was hug her and say it's going to be ok but of course one i couldn't do that and two, it made me, it made me think wow, this place in itself is here, yes, it is teaching you curriculum. It's important to know how to read and it's important to know how to write of course, but it allowed this child a space to be a child and I was very appreciative to be able to witness that, to be able to witness for her to take out her cardboard and start doing the craft that the other students were doing the and in that classroom were multiple students of different ages, again there were some as little as 6-7 years old some as older in their early twenties and one of the teachers had said that the reason why they allow them to come in was because particularly some of them didn't have in essence a real childhood, right because they were there helping their families doing their day to day life and that again, that experience it was a beautiful experience, it was a great trip. I'm very grateful for that opportunity. I have had the opportunity to go back to Guadalajara another time after that and it still remains one of my top favorite trips and one of my favorite, most fun moments of being a Harrison Fellow not just because we were able yag go on a trip. No, but because it impacted me, it impacted us and impacted me particularly and how I view education and the importance of it.