



January's Alumni Spotlight features Omar Romandia, Bourgade Catholic High School Class of 2010.

Before Bourgade Catholic, Omar attended Alhambra Traditional School (ATS), a well-known institution with a long-standing reputation of academic excellence for K-8 students. While at Bourgade, Omar was involved in many extracurriculars, including a selection of honor societies and sports. He also developed a passion for music participating in Mr. Smith's band and guitar programs. Despite challenges along the way, Omar would go on to leverage his academic foundation from ATS and Bourgade

into the early stages of a promising career in the world of education.

During Omar's senior year at Bourgade, he recognized the challenges of pursuing his higher education goals. As an undocumented student, Omar was not able to apply for FAFSA or any institutional financial aid making it difficult to achieve his dream of earning an astrophysics degree from Arizona State University. However, Omar's hard work in high school landed him private scholarships to attend Grand Canyon University to study biology.

In 2011, Omar's eyes were opened to the professional world of education and educational policy. While attending GCU, Omar and a friend partnered in a start-up venture that would offer an online platform for buy-and-sell services for students looking to purchase textbooks. In their search for investors, the duo was offered seed funding from Ben Miranda, who was a well-known lawyer and AZ politician before his passing in 2013. In exchange for the seed-funding, Omar and his friend were to work with Mr. Miranda's *Manzana Foundation* program which specialized in providing resources and coaching for undocumented students looking to pursue their dreams of higher education. Omar's personal challenges combined with the efforts of the *Manzana Foundation* program would soon bud his passion for education.

In 2012, Omar became the beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. Through DACA, he was able to apply and be granted the necessary documentation that allowed him to pursue an education at Arizona State University. Omar would follow an unorthodox path, transferring from GCU to Glendale Community College where he finished his pre-requisite credits, before enrolling at ASU as an economics major. Omar's commitment to being a full-time student and a full-time computer technician for the Phoenix Union High School District led to his departure from the *Manzana Foundation* Program. Following his graduation from ASU in 2016, Omar found himself working back in education as an ACE Program Coordinator for Estrella Mountain Community College, a position he holds currently.

The ACE Program is designed to help first-generation college students "Achieve a College Education" by offering college preparatory resources to assist with their transition to higher education. Students enrolled in the program are eligible to take up to 24 paid-for college credits during their junior and senior years of high school. In working with students in the ACE Program, Omar was re-introduced to the complexities of the U.S. education system inspiring him to tackle issues on a larger scale. In the fall of 2020, Omar will be pursuing his doctoral studies in education policy. Currently, Omar has been accepted to the Ph.D. program in Education Policy at the University of Connecticut and is awaiting decisions from other universities across the country, including the University of California, Berkeley.

Nearly a decade after graduating, Omar continues to attribute his success to the experience he received at Bourgade. He often reflects on the mentorship he received from individuals like Carol Caruso and Marianne Moriarty. Omar continues to remain close with fellow classmates and is looking forward to celebrating his 10-year reunion in 2020. Congratulations to Omar on all his hard work and success. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors!