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Alejandro (student) (00:00):

As president and co-founder of the Princeton Transfer Association, I've seen people that are raising families as transfer students, as students at Princeton.

Alejandro (student) (00:23):

I've seen people that have served in the military and are veterans, and are adjusting perfectly at Princeton and thriving. And I've seen people like me go from high school to community college, and then straight to a place like Princeton.

Alejandro (student) (00:40):

Yes, the classes are rigorous. Yes, it's difficult at times. But the resources are there for you to get past those challenges. I think it speaks to the type of amazing place this is.

Vivian (host) (01:02):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Meet Princeton, a podcast to introduce prospective students and their families to Princeton University, brought to you from the Office of Admission at Princeton.

Vivian (host) (01:10):

My name is Vivian Slee, and I'm a Senior Assistant Dean in the Office of Admission. I'm so happy that you've tuned in to join us, to hear from current student voices and others about our community, and about what it's like to be a student at Princeton just now.

Vivian (host) (01:32):

It's October on campus, and the air is beginning to cool as the leaves begin to change, and I can't help but think about transitions. One season to another, summer T-shirts to fall sweaters, and in terms of this special episode, the transition from one school to another.

Vivian (host) (01:50):

What am I talking about? Princeton's transfer program, of course. In 2018, Princeton very proudly relaunched its transfer program as an access and inclusion initiative. And I might just add that we are all the better for it.

Vivian (host) (02:05):

Our community has been so enriched, and we have some amazing students on campus who have come through this program. Each year, we've been able to admit transfer students, who bring a variety of perspectives to campus.

Vivian (host) (02:17):

Now, I could go on and on about the many fine details of this program. And my lovely colleague, Alex Bustin, in the Office of Admission, oversees these applications. If you're listening and interested, please see the Transfer Section of our admission website for more.

Vivian (host) (02:33):

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But in fact, we have two wonderful guests on the program, who will give you a much better idea of what it means to transfer to Princeton. First, we're going to hear from Dr. Keith Shaw, who is the Director of Transfer, Veteran and Non-Traditional Student Programs.

Vivian (host) ([02:51](#)):

He'll be followed by our student guest, Alejandro Garcia, a rising senior who transferred from Miami Dade Community College, in Florida. Let's listen to hear what they have to say.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([03:02](#)):

My name is Dr. Keith Shaw. I'm the Director of Transfer of Veteran and Non-Traditional Students here at Princeton. Princeton had a transfer program until about 1990.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([03:18](#)):

In 2016, when President Eisgruber relaunched it, the idea was to re-motivate its purpose. In this case, the idea was we would use a transfer program as an access and inclusion initiative, to look at our own student demographics, ask ourselves, "Who isn't here," and use the transfer program as a way to be able to address that concern.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([03:46](#)):

To me, one of the real attractions of developing this transfer program was that it would be housed in what was then called programs for access and inclusion, is now the being launched Emma Bloomberg Center for Access and Opportunity. That motivation for a transfer program, I think, is really wonderful.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([04:03](#)):

It's the best thing about it, that we can use the program to make Princeton a little bit more representative of the surrounding country, and be able to bring in students, not just student veterans, to be clear, but about first generation and lower income students, community college transfers, that otherwise we wouldn't have. I think that goes a long way towards changing the perspectives of the students that are on campus in a way that's beneficial, for even our more traditional students, both inside and outside the classroom.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([04:34](#)):

We're excited, this being our fourth admission cycle for the transfer program, that is happening at a moment that the Emma Bloomberg Center is launching. We're also in the position where we just graduated our first alumni, which is something I'm super proud of.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([04:49](#)):

One of the things we're excited about this year is to figure out what alumni programming might look like, and how our folks that just graduated Princeton can be an asset, and serve as mentors to our students who are just arriving.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([05:01](#)):

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Princeton is not lacking for support services, and we've been very careful to be able to provide a lot of transition programming for our students. For starters, one thing that we've been excited to be able to do is invite all of our transfer students to Princeton's Summer Bridge Program.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([05:21](#)):

For example, that means this year, they're getting to benefit from seven weeks of academic and co-curricular programming, which is going to prepare them to succeed in the fall. But they also get to take two for-credit courses with Princeton faculty.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([05:36](#)):

This allows them to develop the habits of mind, the study skills, the approach to the work they're going to be asked to do in the fall, when they're going to be taking four or five classes rather than two, just so that they have the experience to know how to succeed.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([05:50](#)):

We have been able to invite, prior to this year, students to some kind of transition programming, but we've never been able to do the full invite for for-credit courses. I think that's going to be transformative. We're really, really happy about that.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([06:04](#)):

Beyond that, all transfer students participate in a required pre-orientation program that I run, and that's designed to get them situated a little bit early on campus. That's especially helpful for our students who are coming with families, to be able to get them settled, figure out the local environment, understand what the Princeton community looks like more broadly, figure out where they're going to go shopping, getting the kids set up in school, all of that.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([06:32](#)):

but it allows them, also, to get to know each other much more closely, before the school year actually starts, since they're going to be working together quite a bit. They participate in all of the regular orientation programming that other students do, so it's not like they're separated from the rest of their student peers. They're in the mix with the rest of them, but we provide them with bits of customized support throughout the year.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([06:59](#)):

For example, they all take the same course together, as a cohort, that meets the university writing requirement. That's a course that I teach, it's a customized writing seminar, and that's designed to do two things that are a little bit different from the normal writing seminars.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([07:16](#)):

One, these students have all taken college level instruction before, right? They're transfer students. A lot of those skills are directly applicable to what they're going to be asked to do at Princeton, but require a certain amount of adaptation.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([07:29](#)):

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And it's important that we acknowledge and respect and allow them to make use of the work that they've already done, but also teach them how to translate it for a new environment. So part of the course is designed to do that.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([07:41](#)):

The other thing it's designed to do, particularly for students who come in as sophomores, is to get them prepared, to be able to do independent work as juniors and seniors. One of the things that's distinctive about the Princeton curriculum is everybody writes a senior thesis. That's a great opportunity.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([07:57](#)):

We have lots of students who've finished Princeton has published authors, and that's great, but it's also a real academic responsibility, and students need to be equipped with the tools to do that successfully. Since our sophomores are arriving the next year, there'll be doing independent research work with a faculty mentor. They need to get up to speed to what that looks like, and that's not always something that our students have independent experience with, and so, the course is designed to do that.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([08:28](#)):

This year for the first time, we're instituting a transfer mentor program, which I'm really excited, about where the students will be paired with an upper class transfer mentor. So, somebody who's gone through the transition process before, and help guide them through that process.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([08:45](#)):

There are a lot of questions and a lot of concerns that I can address directly, but I'm an old person who doesn't live in Princeton, and the transfer students are much closer to them in experienced, and could tell them, what it looks like to go to the gym, and go to the meal hall, and navigate the library at 11:00 p.m., in a way that I'm not going to be doing. So it's valuable for them to be able to benefit from those peer mentors.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([09:07](#)):

That's just a sampler platter of some of the things we do, but really, year round, they're receiving support. One thing that I've really liked about working with these students is, with both the student veterans and the non-veterans, there's a real kind of pay it forward community mentality going on, where the students who have been the trailblazers in the program are really excited to help out the students here who just arrive. And I think that's really great.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([09:42](#)):

Housing and Real Estate Services have been absolute heroes, in terms of being parked there for the program, because it's just the case that Princeton has been operating for a very long time with a traditional understanding of a student who is probably 18 and single, and our transfer students are not. Many of them are coming with families, whether that's a partner or a spouse or children, or even parent or dependents who aren't children, and housing has worked really hard to be able to accommodate those students.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([10:24](#)):

We guarantee housing to students throughout their time here. After their first year, they can make the decision on their own, do they like the setup they have on campus? Or do they want to find something that's nearby and convenient, but gives them a little bit of space?

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([10:39](#)):

One of the things we've learned about older students in particular is, and I understand this, it's important to them to be able to establish the clearer line between their public work with the university, as a student on campus, versus their private lives. That line is a little bit easier to maintain if they actually have some physical distance. So we want to do everything we can to respect that.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([11:04](#)):

It's probably the case that lots of listeners are thinking, "Sure, that would be great, were I able to get into Princeton, but I would never be able to afford it. So why bother?"

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([11:15](#)):

I think this is one of the biggest misconceptions that potential transfer candidates have. Princeton's Financial Aid Program is extremely generous, and most of our transfer students are coming with nearly all or all of their expenses, both in terms of tuition, and room and board, fully covered.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([11:38](#)):

For the student veterans in particular, we fully participate in the Yellow Ribbon program, and more to the point, it's been the case that none of our student veterans who have come through have been forced to rely on their post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. That's been huge, because it's allowed them to basically save that money for a post-Princeton opportunity.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([12:00](#)):

Some of our graduates are only now drawing on their GI benefits to do things like go to law school, go to medical school, to pursue future opportunities, so that's an enormous advantage. So please don't think that affordability as a reason to not apply. Actually, affordability is a reason to apply, that one of the greatest benefits of being able to come to Princeton is the likelihood that you'll be able to leave without student debt.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([12:33](#)):

It makes a big difference, both in and out of the classroom, to have a student who might be a little older with a different life experience, particularly with student veterans. In some ways it's subtle, but every now and then, it's really stark.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([12:47](#)):

I can think of a time, when I was teaching my class, and we were talking about questions having to do with morality and warfare, and a student piped up who was literally in the second battle of Fallujah. It changes things when it becomes tangible. It ceases to be an ivory tower discussion and becomes something with real world consequences, and that's what the transfer program can provide. It can bring students like that to bear on conversations like that.

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Dr. Shaw (guest) ([13:15](#)):

It's still possible, at this small scale, for a more traditional Princeton student to go through their whole undergraduate career and not encounter, or just not know that they encountered a transfer student. Being able to bring more, we'll be able to bring more of that diversity of perspectives to bear in a way that would affect both the academic experience, but also, the co-curricular experience, in really positive ways.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([13:36](#)):

We're also in a position where, as part of the mission of the Emma Bloomberg Center, is to be able to do more outreach work, so that we could help meet the needs of two-year students that go well beyond being able to transfer to Princeton specifically. One of the things we're excited about is to be able to work with many of our local community college partners and national organizations, like the American Talent Initiative, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, and the Warrior Scholar Project, Service to School, and be able to work with them, to help higher achieving students at these two-year schools find ways to transfer to successful four-year selective colleges, whether it's us, or whether it's any of the other dozens or hundreds of fantastic schools out there where those students can set out a really successful career path. So that's part of the future vision.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([14:30](#)):

Teaching is still my favorite thing I do. I really look forward to being able to work with those students in a physical setting. I think that Princeton has done an excellent job figuring out how to adapt to the COVID crisis, and I think our students have done an amazing job transitioning into a mode of learning that I think everybody would agree is the second best.

Dr. Shaw (guest) ([14:55](#)):

And I'm really excited to be able to look forward to a fall where we can kind of, again, be a community together and learn together. That's what makes it exciting.

Alejandro (student) ([15:22](#)):

Hi, everyone. My name is Alejandro Garcia. I am concentrating in politics here at Princeton. I'm pursuing certificates in Latin American studies and American studies.

Alejandro (student) ([15:31](#)):

I'm a rising senior. This is going to be my third year at Princeton. I transferred from Miami Dade College, and I was born and raised here in Miami, Florida.

Alejandro (student) ([15:45](#)):

I graduated at the top of my class, in a top high school in Florida, here in south Florida, Miami. And it ended up being a scenario where I applied to the Princetons, and I applied to the top schools in the country, and I was rejected by mostly, if not all.

Alejandro (student) ([16:05](#)):

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I was accepted by the Miami Dade honors college program, a renowned honors program, as far as community colleges are ranked. That really provided so many resources for me to then be able to build a profile, that was a Princeton-worthy profile. And I was able to do so much.

Alejandro (student) ([16:27](#)):

I think it gave me an opportunity to really mold a service profile that I don't think I would have been able to do anywhere else. Well, it was a very difficult decision to make, because as I said, there were several rejections, but there were some acceptances, and I did turn down some four-year universities that were good schools, but the financial aid wasn't there.

Alejandro (student) ([16:57](#)):

I knew that I had set for myself a goal to, if not graduate debt free, somewhere near there. And if I had opted for these initial options, I knew that wouldn't be on the table.

Alejandro (student) ([17:13](#)):

When my family came around, and I had to sit down with my parents and, and explain to them that I was opting to go to Miami Dade College, deep in the Honors Program, and my dad looked me in the eye and he said, "Well, so you would prefer to go study politics in Little Havana?" Just to give context, Little Havana is one of the neediest communities in probably the US, certainly in Florida, not a high level, as far as the overall community.

Alejandro (student) ([17:46](#)):

"So you'd rather study politics in little Havana in Miami Dade College, instead of going to Washington, DC, in the nation's Capitol, where you could gain about a better training per se?" I looked at him firmly, and I said, "Yes."

Alejandro (student) ([18:01](#)):

That was probably one of the toughest decisions that I've had to make, certainly going against one of my mentors in life, my father, but I viewed it as a way of reaching the stories that I was hearing, coming out of the Honors Program, coming from a Cuban American family, where I'm the first American-born person in my family.

Alejandro (student) ([18:23](#)):

My parents didn't really know what Princeton was. I really navigated that application process on my own. I, again, really bet on myself throughout that process, and obviously in shock when I received the notification, and the congratulatory letter of admission, and just trying to explain to them, over the phone, the magnitude of this moment.

Alejandro (student) ([18:59](#)):

It was amazing, because it was everything coming together, in a moment of, you took a chance on MDC, made a leap here that might have not worked out, but there's a chance that it will. And now I'm in a place where I never thought I would be.

Alejandro (student) ([19:19](#)):

And so, obviously, tears of just joy and those sleepless nights, putting applications together, and feeding that sense of accomplishment, after feeling a lot of rejection coming out of high school, despite putting the work in. It was definitely an adjustment to make my way to campus and live on my own, just to go through that process with my parents, and having them visit me for the first time, while trying to make that move into to Princeton.

Alejandro (student) ([19:54](#)):

It was a really great experience, because they were just in awe, while walking throughout campus. I mean, my dad, he was just, mouth wide open, and my mom just taking videos of all the incredible buildings.

Alejandro (student) ([20:07](#)):

Because it's like, "Does this place really exist, of how great and beautiful the campus looks?" That was really a fantastic experience, to just share that moment with them, after them really sacrificing a lot, and putting everything on the table, to give me a chance to really reach for that opportunity.

Alejandro (student) ([20:29](#)):

I have to be frank. I first heard about Princeton through just doing research, as far as being that kid that goes to bed, watching the History Channel's videos, and learning about all the incredible people that walked the halls of Princeton. And just knowing that so many people that received that training made such an impact in our country, and certainly the world.

Alejandro (student) ([21:03](#)):

I think that's really what made me dream of one day being part of that. I want to be in a place where I can serve that motto of, "In service of the nation," and I think that's what really lured me into Princeton.

Alejandro (student) ([21:19](#)):

You have to take care of business in class, because that's what we're here for, to learn, and to receive a political training. That's what I'm hoping to take on in life.

Alejandro (student) ([21:31](#)):

But also being able to step outside of class, and do ESL English classes for Spanish-speaking members of the community, and being part of that club on campus, and being able to not just do on campus classes, but also traveling to Trenton and teaching there, the local Spanish-speaking community of immigrants trying to embrace the American Dream, and learn English, as I've certainly witnessed my family trying to do it. I think that was a natural fit, trying to serve in that way.

Alejandro (student) ([22:08](#)):

Being selected as one of the SINSI Fellows, one of the core programs of service, certainly for the Public and Foreign Policy School, and the Politics departments, putting together this program, where they give kids and students an opportunity to engage with the federal government, engage with some sort of government agency, and take on a summer internship. I just finished wrapping up an internship over this summer through , through SINSI, with the Civil Rights Division, of the Department of Justice.

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Alejandro (student) ([22:43](#)):

Being able to take on these roles has been really incredible. There's no way to describe it. It's honestly just been awesome. Just having the ability to tap into these resources has been, I think, a one of a kind opportunity, and it's really more than anything affirmed that Princeton is definitely the right place to be.

Alejandro (student) ([23:06](#)):

Honestly, I learned about SINSI through a lunch. My friends pointed it out, because we were having a lunch in one of the great dining halls that we have on campus. There was a little fire that was promoting , and she pointed out, she said, "It'd be a great opportunity," and I started looking into it and I applied.

Alejandro (student) ([23:25](#)):

If you're really invested into just doing a quick five-minute search through one of Princeton's websites for anything that you're interested in, if it's service, if it's art, as far as what you're wanting to shape your extracurricular work, if you want to do sports, it's all out there for you to find.

Alejandro (student) ([23:49](#)):

Certainly, it's promoted all throughout our major Campus C enter at Frist. So I think that's easy to run into these things, and just really find them all over the place.

Alejandro (student) ([24:05](#)):

I wasn't looking forward to the dorms, but I have to say that it was a very, very pleasant surprise to see how great they are. It's like your own little community, that floor, that you live in.

Alejandro (student) ([24:24](#)):

Usually, a dorm is just supposed to be a dorm, but the way it's formatted into being a residential college system, where you have people that are solely working for that specific residential college you're occupying for the year, and hopefully for three years, depending on if you want to take on upperclassmen housing, that you have people that are placed as advisors there to guide you through the process, another set of advising resources to really just help you through it all. I think I've been able to really coalesce with so many advisors, and really surround myself with so many people.

Alejandro (student) ([25:08](#)):

Obviously, Dr. Keith Shaw comes to mind, as the director of the transfer program. He is like Superman. Because he teaches Writing Seminar, which is a required class for everybody coming into Princeton. It's this class where you have to learn how to write, so that then one day you can take on the senior thesis and the junior papers, which is basically a junior thesis during your junior year.

Alejandro (student) ([25:36](#)):

To have him do that class, but also as the director of the program, advise you through the different things that you might experience on a daily basis on Princeton that you're not really sure about. Because you just got here a week ago, and you're still trying to adjust.

Alejandro (student) ([25:53](#)):

You know that you can constantly turn to him for whatever you might need. Now, working with him, after putting together and founding the Princeton Transfer Association, which is really geared towards trying to form a community, and coalesce to help incoming transfer students, and help them facilitate the process of getting settled in Princeton, that was something that's been really great to do, because I've been working jointly with him throughout it all.

Alejandro (student) ([26:32](#)):

I've been able to experience, I guess, different facets of Dr. Shaw. He's really one of the best things that the transfer program has to offer, because it speaks to, I think, the individualized attention we get. We're a sort of given that from the outset. And I think that's a very special thing, as far as advising and an experience that I've had, with advisors here.

Alejandro (student) ([26:59](#)):

Then you have your faculty advisor, which is, the sole purpose of that person is to guide you through course selection. I'm really fortunate to have been assigned to an amazing faculty advisor in Dr. Rosina Lozano, from the History Department, who ended up being my faculty advisor, then my professor, then my boss, as a research assistant.

Alejandro (student) ([27:21](#)):

As a politics concentrator, I've really been enjoyed taking these politics-based classes, because that's what interests me. But this past semester, I took a class called The Disney Industrial Complex. Never in a thousand years did I think I would take a seminar about Disney, and it was amazing. I got to know the different facets of a major corporation in the US, and how it's taking over so many aspects of American life, and how it's being ingrained in American culture.

Alejandro (student) ([27:54](#)):

Within politics itself, I think I've had this liberal arts component attached, as well, because the Politics Department makes you take, or at least I should say, requires you to take, what they call Poll Stats, it's colloquially referred to by the students. But it's a statistic-based class that facilitates the process of gathering research for politics projects like our junior paper, or senior thesis.

Alejandro (student) ([28:22](#)):

That in itself, I think, was a part of the liberal arts experience, even though it was within the domain of politics, because I think it was really stats heavy. It made me learn a coding language, which I never in a million years thought I would be doing, but I certainly was pushed in that direction by Princeton. And I think it was a great experience.

Alejandro (student) ([28:45](#)):

As far as taking classes, I think there's something for everybody, and fits everybody's interests. Certainly, Princeton does a good job of pushing you, so that you can at least dabble in exploring these interests. And it's encouraging to have these requirements, because it sort of nudges you to take a step in that direction.

Alejandro (student) ([29:10](#)):

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Being around people that are publishing articles for the New York Times, and to see that that is your faculty advisor for the Politics Department, and being able to talk about that article with him, and debate on what you're learning in Constitutional Interpretation class that semester, and sort of offering your own take of that article, and how fascinating it was, being able to walk through campus around six, seven pm, right when it's starting to get dark, but not too dark, and right where that background you have in back of you, I think it's one of the best spots on campus.

Alejandro (student) ([29:52](#)):

Because that building, the Administrative Building, at Princeton, it's the first building you see, if you walk through the main gates. It's just so beautiful, because the way it lights up at night, and then you turn around, and you see those historical gates. I think that's also a pinch me moment, and I certainly have pictures of that.

Alejandro (student) ([30:17](#)):

Then, when you turn around, and seeing those gates, and how we have this quirky tradition where you can never go through that main gate, because there's the theory that if you walk through it, you won't graduate, which I'm not willing to test. So we all take the side gates.

Alejandro (student) ([30:36](#)):

That's another pinch me moment, in a way, because a beautiful spot on campus to really admire. Then you turn around, and it's also a humorous spot on campus, because it still makes me, you know, laugh a little bit about it.

Alejandro (student) ([31:02](#)):

If you are undecided at all, and if you have any questions about what it looks like to be a Princeton student, I think the best thing you could do is just have a 30-minute conversation with Dr. Keith Shaw. If you're undecided, or just making your way through this acceptance when you get it, or thinking through the application process, this 15-minute, 30-minute conversation with Dr. Keith Shaw will show you what I've tried to illuminate throughout this conversation.

Vivian (host) ([31:36](#)):

We hope you enjoyed listening to this very special episode of Meet Princeton. As I said earlier, this podcast was created with prospective students, both first year and transfer, and their families in mind.

Vivian (host) ([31:47](#)):

With that, I'd like to direct all of our listeners to our admission website, at admission.princeton.edu. There, you can watch read, engage virtually, and learn more about Princeton university.

Vivian (host) ([32:03](#)):

Meet Princeton's audio engineer is Nick Donnoli, of Orangebox Pictures, Mary Buckley and I, Vivian Slee, are executive producers. Brian Blount is our co-host and consultant, and original music was composed by Molly Truman from the class of 2024.

Vivian (host) ([32:16](#)):

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We'd also like to give a special thanks to Dr. Keith Shaw and Alejandro Garcia for their fantastic contributions to this episode, and a big thank you, especially, to our listeners for tuning in. We hope you'll join us next time on Meet Princeton.