By Hunter Kulik

Andre Menchavez is a junior pursuing a major in LSJ with minors in Diversity Studies and English. His dedication to using journalism as a tool for activism recently landed him a spot on the University of Washington's Husky 100 list, which recognizes students who are making the most of their time in college.

Andre's college experience has had its challenges. As a first-generation college student from San Francisco, Andre had little direction starting at UW his freshman year. Andre sought ways he could explore his identity and find his place on campus. "I was always interested in the ways that words and writing can evoke emotion or action in people," Andre says. "I always thought I wanted to be a lawyer because I knew I wanted to affect change. Then I realized there were other ways." He then discovered journalism and activism, a pairing that has been pivotal to Andre's life.

Andre has always been interested in activism, stemming from his initial work with the SF AIDS Foundation in high school. As a UW freshmen, he served as a campus ambassador for GLAAD, a national LGBTQ media organization. Andre got his first shot at journalistic writing when GLAAD asked him to write pieces as a content creator. His first piece highlighted the intersectionality between religious identity and queerness. "At first I didn't think much of it," Andre says. "What made me realize that journalism was something I wanted to do was the response it got." He received messages from people about how his article gave them strength to open up to their community. Hearing of this impact validated Andre's experiences while demonstrating the potential for journalism to uplift others. Andre continued to develop as a journalist, applying to GLAAD's junior editor program, ultimately leading to his current position as lead editor.

Last summer, when Andre did not land the internship he was looking for, he was still determined to spend his summer writing and gaining experience. As a result, he started an activism project called SOGIE Equality Now. Andre aspired to bring awareness of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) Equality Bill, an anti-discrimination bill in the Philippines that was proposed almost 20 years ago and has yet to be passed, to Western media. He spent the first part of the summer learning everything he could about the bill and the barriers to its enactment. Andre came across breaking news in the Philippines regarding a Filipina woman who was denied access to the women's restroom and arrested because of her transgender identity. When a photo of her arrest surfaced, it triggered a wave of polarized responses in the Philippines. Andre's immediate reaction was to get the story in the U.S. media. He interviewed the woman, Gretchen Diaz, and worked with one of the original writers of the SOGIE Equality Bill,
Governor Kaka Bag-ao. Andre was even more determined to bring awareness to the case when his piece was rejected by dozens of publishing organizations in the United States because it didn't fit in their coverage parameters. “I was driven by the fact that in the Philippines these issues don’t matter and in America these issues still don’t matter, just because they don’t fit within Eurocentric standards of what coverage is supposed to be in America.” Andre persisted by pioneering the SOGIE Equality Now social media campaign which united queer and trans Filipinx Americans in Los Angeles to promote awareness around the bill in America.

Andre's experience with media organizations continuously rejecting his piece inspired his column in UW's The Daily titled “Equity Inaction.” He was motivated by organizations making claims about standing for equity and inclusion but too frequently failing to act in accordance with these claims. Andre's column provides him with an outlet to bring awareness to issues concerning marginalized groups and to hold organizations, including the University of Washington, accountable. “I feel like for the first time in my three years, writing this column has been an experience where I actually felt like what I was saying is being heard and creating action.”

Since his first glimpse of journalism, Andre has developed his identity both as an individual and as a writer. He has continued his involvement in GLAAD, applying to the junior editor program and recently becoming a leading editor. He has thoroughly developed his column in The Daily and has taken risks to put himself out there for the benefit of others. For instance, the piece Andre takes most pride in discusses his sexual assault experience in relation to his stance on the 2020 election. Andre never thought he would put such a personal experience on paper. “But I did it,” he says, “and the powerful feedback and reassurance I have received from people that have read it and reached out remind me why I do what I do.”

Andre has been an LSJ major since Autumn Quarter 2019. He likes that LSJ challenges him to contextualize concepts beyond the textbook and teaches him about marginalized communities that he frequently writes about. Andre says, “I get to generate my own ideas and I enjoy that.” Beyond the LSJ major, Andre is engaged in ASUW and the Ethnic Cultural Center. He is also a FIG leader and leads a dance team on campus. With his level of involvement, he sets high expectations for himself for the future. For his senior year, Andre hopes to individualize the concepts learned in LSJ to himself and expand his journalistic experience. “I want to utilize what I am learning to the best of my ability for my career,” he shares.

In the long term, Andre's mission as a journalist is to bring non-Eurocentric narratives to Western media. He plans to continue to write about identity, representation, and highlight international narratives. Andre also aspires to be a teacher or mentor to the next generation of queer youth of color. “I felt like I never had anyone believing in me and I want to be that person that reaches out, tells them they're capable, and help them reach their goals.” And of course, when asked if Andre will keep dancing, he responded, “oh definitely.”

Asking about what the Husky 100 Award means to him evoked a wave of emotions. “Growing up I never felt seen, or appreciated, or celebrated in any way. I had to fight for myself,” he says. Andre's work has not only required diligence but also bravery, as he regularly puts himself in a position of vulnerability and a target for criticism. “Pursuing these projects and covering these stories is not easy,” he says. “It is nice to receive the affirmation and support from the UW. This recognition reminds me that I am capable of being amazing and that the work I am doing is important.”

To view Andre's work visit https://andremenchavez.journoportfolio.com/

See other outstanding Husky 100 recipients here.