

Liz Norell - You are listening to Tiger Stories, a podcast from Chattanooga State Community College. This is the place to share the stories from our community, with our broader community. At Chatt State, we believe every member of our campus, students, faculty and staff belongs here and because we know that belonging matters, we are excited to share the stories of those who make up the unique, diverse and supportive community on our campus. You will often hear people on this podcast talk about Chatt State as having a feel of a family. We are so proud to be part of an institution that welcomes people from across the community to come here and pursue their dreams. We hope you will enjoy hearing our stories and maybe even some day, you will want to share yours with us too.

I am Liz Norell and I teach Political Science on the Main Campus of Chattanooga State. I feel so lucky that I get to be on this campus, working with our students and my colleagues on the faculty and staff. We get to witness powerful transformations happening on our campus all the time. And so I am excited to get to share this conversation with you. Without further ado, let's get started with today's conversation. So why don't you start just by introducing yourself?

Ryan Tate - My name is Ryan Tat. I'm a student here at Chattanooga State. I'm also a part of the Lead Involvement Team, works with Student Life to bring different events to campus.

Liz Norell - So how did you decide to come to Chatt State?

Ryan Tate - I decided it was kind of on a whim, my senior year, my cousin who did admissions at UCC was getting married and they were coming down for the wedding and she just asked me if I wanted to take a tour of UTC, I was taking a lot of college tours back then so I just say, yes and came down, loved the campus. I looked how small it was, I got to talk to different students and a couple of different professors and I decided I wanted to go UTC. After my senior year, I didn't get in but I still wanted to attend UTC, so I decided I would do Community College for two years and then transfer over and the week of orientation, I'm originally from Detroit, Michigan and me and my mom had came down and I remember the day before orientation started, was the shooting on Amnicola and you could only think, imagine what was going through my mom's head about.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Ryan Tate - Leave her child down here after something like that happens and that happened and that same night, I was at my aunt's house watching TV and one of the churches had opened its doors for people to come in fellowship together during this time and the pastor asked everyone who has a Muslim faith to stand up in the room and it was a large group and they got a standing ovation from the rest of the congregation and in that moment, I just remember thinking that this community that easily could responded with hate or ignorance responded with compassion and understanding and in that moment, I really like I decided Chattanooga as a place that I could like spend my time and I was gonna be comfortable here.

Liz Norell - Yeah and so of you come to Chattanooga State?

Ryan Tate - I came Chattanooga State, the next day was orientation and once again I think it was, whoever the SGA President was, gave a speech in the amphitheater about what had happened and like just saying once again this great community, yeah I decided that this was gonna be a nice fit for me.

Liz Norell - Good. Can you describe a time when you feel like you truly belonged here on this campus?

Ryan Tate - My college career is kind of scattered. I came to Chad State in 2015, stayed a year then I took a year off and I came back and my second time around is when I really started to feel like I belong, I think a lot of people at Community College's, you come in, you go to your classes, you park with every parking spaces closest, you get in and you get out and that's it and that's what I did for my first year but then next year, I had got a job in the Student Life Office working with Dedric Maffett and Delnita Evans and it started as a job, then I got involved with the Lead Involvement Team which was the activities programming board back then and I just started to get in contact with different people on campus and being a part of these different events and seeing the great faculty and staff that Chattanooga State has to offer and slowly but surely the people that worked within the office, also Dedric and Delnita, so long Mary Knaff, they became kind of my family over the year because I am away from home, I don't get to see my family that often but these are people that I see every day and they're not only trying to help me succeed but trying to help any student that once helped, they are offering. Yeah, it was just slowly over time I realized that I get happy to come to this campus and I feel comfortable at this campus and that's when I truly felt that this was like I'm at home that help me.

Liz Norell - How did you decide that you wanted to work on campus or kind of get more invested, was that a conscious decision or did it just happen?

Ryan Tate - I think it was a conscious decision, like I said just started off as a job at first work in the Student Life Office and after a while seeing them put together different events and it was what I did in high school, I was part of our Student Council in our Student Activity so I was right up my alley but I was kind of apprehensive because I don't have the best time management skills. I didn't want to do it unless I can put my all into it but later I realize that having those group of friends that have the same goals as me, they were also in school, they also did these activities what helped me in the long run and it did. It was a conscious decision and unconscious decision at the same time because it was just something that I loved to do and it just came kind of came naturally to me and then when you have a faculty and staff that so dedicated to its students, it makes it even easier I know you'd be my advisor as well has helped me as well somebody that's actually passionate about the same things you are that's always there to listen and always there to help and that makes you feel something inside yourself really that you can actually accomplish these things and it also makes you want to help other people on campus, like we get multiple people in the Student Life Office that will come in, we'll just walk in and have different questions and they won't be in the right office but us being able to, let me walk you over to the Student Center or let me walk you over to the Math Lab so you know where it is and talking to them and hearing their stories. I think that's a lot out and Michelle Obama's book becoming, she has this thing about tolerance and I can't remember the exact quote but it's like, everyone that she meet has a history like your own and that itself deserves some tolerance and I feel like when you put yourself in that position to meet other people that have different walks from different walks of life and people that may not share the same opinion of certain things that you do but once we like learn to talk to each other and better understand each other is the more we grow not just as a society but the more we grow in ourselves.

Liz Norell - That's really beautiful. I'm gonna start crying like seriously. You've talked a little bit about some of the relationships you've formed on campus, can you describe one or two that feel really meaningful to you?

Ryan Tate - Yes off the bed, Delnita Evans is, I call her my mom a lot of the times.

Liz Norell - Sorry mom.

Ryan Tate - [Laugh].

Liz Norell - Second mom, right.

Ryan Tate - Second mom, yeah.

Liz Norell - Second mom [Laugh].

Ryan Tate - But she's always been there for me and we actually worked at Sam's Club together before I start working in Student Life Office with her and she's always had just that mothering instinct of when we walking, how are your classes going, do you need any help, you need me to do something, and if I ever have a problem, her door is always open. I know that's just not for me, that's for a lot of different people. It's been multiple times where she will be out of the office for family obligations or maybe a conference with Student Life and if that doors closed and as soon as people come in our office and see that doors closed their first question is where's Miss Delnita and I think that just is really necessary for you to have that type of outlet. I feel like a lot of students don't have the support necessary to succeed and it's very important to have that support not just financial but just like somebody to understand where you come from, somebody to lend an ear if you have issues, so yes she is if I ever have trouble, if I ever have any problem, she is usually my first call. She checks in on me a lot if she doesn't hear from him for about like a week or so, she'll start texting me and I'll be multiple texts back and she won't stop until I respond to her. So she is one person on this campus I'm truly grateful to have in my life.

Liz Norell - Yeah, that's awesome. What do you feel like is the most important thing you've learned during their time here, so far?

Ryan Tate - I think we'll kind of.

Liz Norell - Yeah, of course.

Ryan Tate - Two, so one is to never be afraid to ask for help. Me personally, I know if I run into issues or different problems, I always try and fix them myself because I'll probably usually be ashamed of the problems that I've created for myself and one thing that I've learned is that large majority of faculty and staff on this campus are here to help you, no matter how many times we messed up, no matter how many assignments you have made missed that they're in go is to make sure you are successful and it's taking me a long time to figure that out, I actually start asking for help but I think that's the one great thing about Chattanooga State that we are a community and if one person can't necessarily help you that we're gonna find somebody that can and we're gonna find a way to help you be successful and I feel that's really important. I feel like something you will not get at a big university because you have so many students per professor and I feel like the tight-knit group here at

Chattanooga State as always just they're always there from faculty members like I said Delnita Evans to you all the way to Sam Smith in lunchroom who was always there to lend a smile and make you laugh if you having a hard day, so yeah like never be afraid to ask for help because the people here are always wanting to help you.

Liz Norell - Yeah and you know I want to talk about that just a little bit because you said you know you feel ashamed of you know whatever's going on in your life and like I did this and I should be able to deal with it myself and I hear that so much and I think everybody feels I mean you feel kind of like you're confessing that you can't do something.

Ryan Tate - Yeah.

Liz Norell - And that feels really like I don't know disempowering and I think it takes a lot of bravery to say I need someone to you know sit with me and help me figure out what the path forward is and so I know that it's really hard.

Ryan Tate - I think you also have to figure out when those things happened, everybody has failed at some point in their life.

Liz Norell - That's right.

Ryan Tate - Everybody is human and there is no body who is perfect even though there may seem that from the outside, they may be but everybody's have their own trials and tribulations that they've gone through and sometimes other people just need more help than others. I'll be the first one to admit that I need all the help I can get, it truly takes a village to raise a child [Laugh] so.

Liz Norell - We are your village.

Ryan Tate - Yeah in Chattanooga State is my village, these my people and I know at the end of the day they're gonna make sure that they not just help me but help anybody that comes in contact with them.

Liz Norell - I also think, I often will tell students that you know when you like go to the Math Lab or you go to a writing tutor or you go to the library for help, it seems like you can often feel like people are doing you a favor and I like to remind people that you paid for that, right, like you paid for me to be your advisor to tell you, you got to do this and you paid for Delnita to be there in Student Life and you paid for the Math Lab and you paid for the Writing Center so if you don't use it.

Ryan Tate - This is money that you wasted.

Liz Norell - This is money that you're paying somebody else to get help, right. So like if you can kind of reframe it in that way and then it feels a little less disempowering, a little more like I'm just taking advantage of some prepaid services.

Ryan Tate - Exactly that's it, I tell people when we do orientations, I saw people all the time, you can go on Chattanooga State's website and look at the tuition breakdown and it will have like \$13 advocated for Student Life, \$12 for food and it's all breaking down, so it's all stuff that you have already paid for that you just need to take advantage of.

Liz Norell - Right.

Ryan Tate - Because and I think that's another thing that we don't lay out all of the tools that we have here at Chattanooga State. I think like and correct me if I'm wrong when I say this but pretty sure as a freshman you get like two or three different kind of advisors because I know you get your advisor for your major, then a college success coach and I want to say it's another one but I'm not sure but sometimes people don't even know that they have those like resources available that I think that will lead me to my second point.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Ryan Tate - Well it's really my first point to is just asking for help, just ask for help is like and somebody would be there to help you out from like said the Math Lab, Student Center, anybody ought to feel like this just a dedicated group on this campus and that we are so fortunate to have but yeah as you're already paying for it, so you might as well take advantage of it.

Liz Norell - That's right.

Ryan Tate - [Laugh]

Liz Norell - Is there anything else you said you had another thing that you had learned during your time here?

Ryan Tate - One thing I'll say personally is that I learned from your right, is to breathe. There been many times I have been stressing out about a small thing or maybe a big thing and I've had more than one professor tell me to breathe. It is going to be okay. I feel like it's very important just to step back sometimes and just breathe and figure out what do I need to do next. I feel that's very important we don't do enough, so one, two, three breathe, that's it.

Liz Norell - One, two, three, breathe, yes. If you were talking to other students either now or in the future, what you do at orientation, what advice would you give them?

Ryan Tate - I would tell them.

Liz Norell - Besides ask for help.

Ryan Tate - Yeah [Laugh], one piece of advice I would give them is time management, is something that I've been trying to learn to do. It is not smart to try and take 15 credits and try to work 20 hours or 30 hours a week.

Liz Norell - It's hard.

Ryan Tate - It is very hard and you're not gonna really retain that much especially if you get up at 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning and go to three classes and then leave here and go to work and then try to cram later on that night, a lot of the information gets lost in between that time. So I really feel like it's important to have a schedule that benefits you, even if you need like a hour break in your schedule between classes, so you can go and sit down and maybe do a little study and are a little bit of homework then, I feel time management is a very very important

skill to have. Another piece of advice I would give, is get involved. I feel I talked earlier about my first year here when I would just go to class and leave and when you start staying on campus, I can feel like you just end up becoming a part of the campus. You meet different people that may have the same interests that you have, maybe people in the same class that you've never talked to before, that you'll talk to staff there and go and get help in the Math Lab or in the Reading and Writing Center and actually become a part of the campus because I feel like when you do that it, when you come part of the campus and you contribute that it like it's a never-ending circle that someone helps you so you help somebody else. I feel that's very important to make sure you give back. I have a guy that I met and when I first came here who actually works at UTC and he really helped me out my first couple months here and I remember asking him why he did it and it was because he said when he moved here I forgot what year but when he moved here from Nashville that he didn't have anybody, he didn't really have anybody didn't know a lot about the city and he always told himself that if it came to the point where he could help somebody else that he would. So I feel that a very important thing to do is after he leaves Chattanooga State and start work or move on to a four-year university that you give back in some type of way. It does have to be financially maybe you come and volunteer during orientation or you come and volunteer during Oktoberfest or something like that but it's always, it's continuing that cycle of people to help each other, to help somebody that you were not that long ago because they're all different people all throughout our lives and that's great, that's good you got to keep moving forward so long as you remember all the people that you used to be and because you were never at this point, you never started at this point that you are now, you started very small and you grew, so I just feel that's really important and I feel that if other students saw that, hey I have those same problems, do let me help you but they'll just, they'll breathe and they'll feel a little bit more comfortable.

Liz Norell - Yeah and that's what you're trying to do.

Ryan Tate - Yeah I try, I try as hard as I can. It's been a couple of times where I've been talking to students and they'll be kind of freaking out about a little couple things. I'm just like, hey I've been the issues before, I'm still here, so you're still gonna be here, it's gonna be okay, let's try to work out like what do we need to do to help you because everything it's gonna be okay. I try my hardest especially I had really bad anxiety when I was a kid and any time I see somebody else going through the same thing that I used to do I kind of get attached a little bit.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Ryan Tate - And I want to help as much as I can. So yeah I try my hardest to make sure that everybody on this campus feels accepted, feels welcomed and feels like they belong because it's a great feeling, so yeah I try my hardest to do.

Liz Norell - Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we wrap up?

Ryan Tate - No, I will just hit my key points again, make sure to breathe, ask for help when you need it and just keep that circle going, somebody helped you so you need to help somebody else.

Liz Norell - You are such a good heart Ryan.

Ryan Tate - [Laugh].

Liz Norell - I'm not just saying in that way. You have a servant's heart.

Ryan Tate - I feel like if we had more of that in the world, we'll be okay, services my head at least is really big deal. We're all on here on this planet for each other and I just feel like if you're not helping out in some type of way and you're kind of doing a disservice to yourself. So yeah service is a really really really big deal and it's very important to me. I've been told a lot that sometimes I care too much but I try to look at it as more as a positive than a negative but yeah that service is one thing that I feel like we've been lacking in these past couple of years as being political science junkies, uh-huh I feel if we had a little bit more compassionate understanding and tolerance that it goes a long way, it really does. I'll even say that was one of my fears of coming down to the South, especially me being an African-American male. I had a lot of preconceived notions in my head of how it would be. I'm happy to say that I have been accepted by from wherever I go, wherever I've gone, I've never been made to feel like uncomfortable in any type situation.

Liz Norell - I'm glad.

Ryan Tate - As like said the more that we just talk to each other and get some type of understanding of why do we think the way that we do and sometimes you'll find out that people really don't think that we're not that different in the end that we all for the most part want the same goal, we just have different ways to get into that goal.

Liz Norell - Exactly.

Ryan Tate - And that's it.

Liz Norell - Yeah. Well thank you so much for your time.

Ryan Tate - No problem at all.

Liz Norell - Those of us who have the honor and privilege to work on Chattanooga State's campuses know that something really special happens here. And it's humbling to get to share a few of those special things with you, our listeners. So thanks to you for joining us here today and a special thank you to the students, faculty and staff, who make this podcast possible. If you are a student at Chattanooga State and you want to be on Tiger Stories, let us know. You can get in touch at the email address in the show notes. We'll be back soon with another installment of Tiger Stories, until then, make it a great one.

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