

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?

Samantha Burger - Well my name is Samantha Burger and I graduated from Chatt State this past May - yeh. I was a Political Science major.

Liz Norell - Where are you going?

Samantha Burger - UTC.

Liz Norell - Are you going to UTC?

Samantha Burger - Ya.

Liz Norell - Are you gonna do Political Science?

Samantha Burger - I'm doing the Public Administration.

Liz Norell - Okay.

Samantha Burger - And Nonprofit Management yeah.

Liz Norell - Good.

Samantha Burger - I'm gonna minor in history.

Liz Norell - All right so tell me why you decided to come to Chatt State?

Samantha Burger - Well I definitely did not know what I wanted to do because I had a really bad high school experience and I was very turned off by school, so it took about a year after I got my GED and just worked and worked and I realized I didn't want to just work work work work work, I needed something else to kind of stimulate me I guess but also at that time I was in a relationship with someone who was going off to Military Boot Camp which was scary for me of course, I knew I needed something to kind of occupy my time and he just so happened to be leaving around the same time that school would be starting, so he kind of pushed me to do it which was great, that's why I decided to come.

Liz Norell - Give it the college try.

Samantha Burger - Sure.

Liz Norell - See what happens and you know, why Chatt State and not somewhere else?

Samantha Burger - Well I grew up here, so I was little bit more familiar with it. I was way too intimidated of the idea of university at the time for some reason you know even though UTC is a bit of a smaller university, I was still you know mad as well than Harvard for me. At that point so I just thought maybe somewhere with a little bit more of a cozy environment that you know have to have it all figured out and you're not that's what everyone says good thing about community colleges you kind of have two years so made me figure out what you want to do. If you don't find the right way that's okay, you can get in your way and yeah so that's why I decided here.

Liz Norell - So what was it like to come onto campus then?

Samantha Burger - As in like starting classes or just coming? Okay. Oh terrifying. I remember, I still remember the night before I was like I'm not going, I'm not going, I'm not going.

Liz Norell - What were you afraid of?

Samantha Burger - Well at that point aside from so like I said I've got my GED and you had to take courses or not courses, you have to attend the class like a couple times a week to be able to take the test at that time but aside from that you know before I got my GED I did like a form of homeschooling, so I hadn't been in a classroom environment almost five years and let alone with doctors you know teaching environment and I was just afraid I couldn't hold my own or yeah and I'd not like I was starting with somebody or with kids I had graduated with from high school, it's just me and you know I mean like support system at that time had left for boot camp you know so there wasn't like I could even you know have that confident the you know that morning of phone call or conversation and I felt very on my own which at that time I was I did not like. Yeah, so it was nerve-wracking for sure.

Liz Norell - So your first day of class what was that like?

Samantha Burger - It was very much just figuring out where to go, you know because I don't know why I didn't come look around before I started to find out who are things would be, so it was a lot of just scattering around, asking people to help me which I didn't like doing either but that was kind of a valuable lesson in vulnerability that came from the first day as just like ask for help, if all those fellows asked for help.

Liz Norell - That's some really nice spin you just put on that [Laugh] in exercise and vulnerability yeah.

Samantha Burger - Yeah so I was nervous but you know the first day was pretty relaxed, usually just introduction stuff, syllabus but it was also overwhelming because I say like okay here's how the semesters gonna go and here's what you're gonna do and looking at that you know all right away it feels so close even though you have this next like five months that it's

gonna be broken up into and you're gonna learn how to do it, so it was daunting but it was also exciting. It kind of taught me you know I have these moments of, well I'd rather be here doing this even though maybe it's you know introduction to college all throughout which I did take a first semester, even though math for me is miserable, I realize that there's something valuable in learning something like that it you know 10 a.m. on a Monday as opposed to just sitting at home 10 a.m. on Monday or working in a job that you hate, you know which means maybe do a lot there college but you know it's a means to an end as opposed to just survival.

Liz Norell - Can you describe a time when you feel like you really belonged here?

Samantha Burger - I think when I, there's a few, probably when I did decide on a major, it's because then you have that core support system of your division and of an advisor who's just you know interested in the thing you're interested in learning about yet they know you know far more about it which is obviously nurturing to your curiosities and yeah and then when you have that division you can, there's a lot more opportunity as in like you know I did peer mentoring for a semester, yeah and then you also meet other students who are interested in that and that's a really big benefit because those are people that you may see once you leave here you know like I know someone that's going UTC majoring in the exact same thing that I am, so that's really great because you can help each other there and not have that sense of maybe on your own miss that I had when I first started here, so I felt it then. I also felt it you know the first couple professors I talked to about what you know once I decided on the major and what I wanted to do, I was nervous because you know like in game for me is law school and hopefully be a practicing attorney but you know again I got my GED so I felt that way to meet down a lot but the first few professors that I talked to about that because I kind of just hid it for a minute you know you were one of them because you're also my advisor, Professor McCoy was one of them. I would be like well is that you think that's actually possible since I got my GED and everyone was just very encouraging if yeah you know once you get that collage and that's all that you know that matters, you know don't let that weigh you down, so that was really great.

Liz Norell - Yeah and I know you're part of the Global Scholars Program.

Samantha Burger - Yeah.

Liz Norell - Talk to me a little bit about how you got into that?

Samantha Burger - Well my first semester, after that I was on the dean's list and so I made up in it, I think just reached out to everyone that was on there was like, hey here's this opportunity and I looked at the application and you did put your like ACT scores so it was like [Laugh] on there but obviously didn't have them because I didn't take it, so I messaged her and it was like, that was another moment of well I got my GED, am I still eligible and she was like yeah just put ACT score on there and I was like okay great, um so I just applied and I got in, that was another moment of oh boy, another moment of fear because that was again next semester I had another thing to you know how to lay of the land but I didn't know what to expect with honors courses but I loved them, yeah.

Liz Norell - Yeah. What did you love about them?

Samantha Burger - The smaller classes, you know that 15 maybe 18 people you know as opposed to 25, however many, as a lot more intimate and I feel like more concentrated courses as opposed to like your history you know having regular history courses or your like you know American Government for Political Science what we got to do like honors compared to rural politics and honors early world civilizations, so I like that because it's a little more focused and you're also with other students that took it more seriously too because they were also there which means they also put a lot of effort into their education not that other you know people who aren't honors don't but you know.

Liz Norell - It's a different kind of nerdiness.

Samantha Burger - Yes so not only you like, you know I'm sure plenty of people get offered and they just don't think to even apply, there's still great students but it's just that people who are like no, I want to be an honor so you not only haven't, yeah they're doing this for sure but it's great. Sam also liked about them.

Liz Norell - Cool for sure. What kind of relationships have you formed with people on this campus?

Samantha Burger - Interesting ones.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Samantha Burger - I made a few friends here, you know and a lot of them have bled into my personal life too, you know I have friendships that I still actively have and they've someone I became friends with here is now, dating my best friend that I had for many years before again.

Liz Norell - Oh Yeh.

Samantha Burger - Yeah which is cool. I got to introduced to him so that was really fun and I had some relationships here toward the latter end when you know my other relationship was over which was kind of cool but mainly I think the I guess relationship isn't the right word but the connection with some of the professor's I had, was probably the most like domineering once kind of so yeah because I don't know if relationship would be the right word because it's not something.

Liz Norell - Yeah absolutely.

Samantha Burger - You know especially when she graduate it doesn't get as nurtured three, you know three times a week for you know hour or 15 every week but it's what lingers, you know what kind of confidence they help give you.

Liz Norell - Can you talk about maybe one or two of those where you feel like you've got some confidence from someone?

Samantha Burger - Yeah, well you definitely are one of them because you know my professor twice yeah an American Government and honors compared world politics but also my advisor so that was really great and you were great about answering any questions and always you know just set up a meeting with me, we'll talk about anything you want even when it's

probably some of the things I came to you for were not your problem like you were never just like, not my problem, go talk to so and so, that's you know you would give me your advice, your opinion but then also kind of lead me it might be the not better direction but then more appropriate direction but I think that's really good because I think that's we're not in my experience but some you advisors can fall short of being overwhelmed, they're not wanting to do with something that doesn't they're said though with, so that was really comforting and gave me the confidence to not be afraid to ask for help again you know good you know so that was awesome and.

Liz Norell - I guess probably Dr. Bashir too.

Samantha Burger - Yeah. I had him twice. I had him for Honor's, early world civilizations and then Tennessee history as an elective and that's kind of helped me pick history as a minor you know I loved the way he made connections and help to you make the connections and it was never afraid to start class with something unrelated like a story and kind of get things going and you felt very comfortable around him and was a great person to watch teach you know because it was in a very entertaining way but also extremely brilliant way, so yeah those are things that I think about a lot of I want to be like that I want to be helpful, you know and in life and in maybe a future career even if I don't planning professor but those are characteristics I want to emulate, I want to I want people to be I guess fascinated, and that sounds pretty self-centered, you understand what I mean.

Liz Norell - Yeah, you wouldn't help other people think.

Samantha Burger - Yeah, yeah.

Liz Norell - It makes sense.

Samantha Burger - Because it's far better than being in a classroom are intrigued you know just the same way you were very interactive you had a lot of you know I remember an American Government a lot of group like situations or games where it's like okay if you're on this side of this you know topic you go this way, you go this way, let's meet in the middle of how we feel and then that was great, so yeah sorry when I like a little ran out there, about you know you too were the professor that I wrote thank-you letters to once I left because I felt like I needed some kind of stamps just do same thing so yeah I guess that kind of shows the impact, I mean I have other amazing professors definitely but sure.

Liz Norell - What do you feel like is the most important thing you learned during your time here work a few important things you learned?

Samantha Burger - I guess that's been a common thing that I've mentioned, as you know don't be afraid to ask questions, also that opportunity is everywhere you just have to seek it out and figure out how to make it happen, you know won't fall in your lap necessarily but it's there and you know if you see the study abroad poster, look into it, figure out how to make it happen, I did you know that was something I always wanted to do and then I did it did it here you know which all the people are.

Liz Norell - Amazing.

Samantha Burger - Yeah, thank you, it was great. Which a lot of people don't think is possible especially at a community college level but it is and you know half of it was paid for by the school with a scholarship specifically for that the Tiger Travels Grant and then my Academic Service Scholarship also paid for the rest of it, so you just have to find it, you have to find that opportunity but it's worth it and taught me that for sure.

Liz Norell - What did you find particularly meaningful about studying abroad?

Samantha Burger - There's something indescribable about learning about something where it happened, you know reading The Diary of Anne Frank and then go into the Anne Frank House you know in Amsterdam, I mean it brought me to tears definitely which you know was a story of a bring anybody to tears but just the gravity of it really resonates with you once you're there and it shows you how big yet how small the world is that you know we studied these things that came from all over the world. It should be there but then you also see the common threads in the world, people's behavior which is really fun and it also really helped solidify the idea that education is so much more valuable than potential financial gain which so many people focus on. What's your job once you graduate, which is important you have mean yeah you need to think about that but so many people just harp on, don't majoring this or that because it's not business or it's not a sort of degree in the sense of you know very general, there's a lot of which are great degrees to get and people are passionate about them but it really helped let me see that even more that that's not the main value of getting an education.

Liz Norell - Right.

Samantha Burger - It's a benefit if anything in my opinion.

Liz Norell - So good, yeah. What advice would you give other students either ones who are here or who might come here in the future besides ask for help?

Samantha Burger - [Laugh] I guess if you're already here you know you step one down, don't feel like you have to have it all figured out right away. I mean you don't, take your time, take a class that maybe doesn't seem like you would need it you know even if it's like a photography class or a sculpture class, take it all in to get a little bit of everything or even if you do kind of have a major kind of have an idea of what you want to do, still don't be afraid to maybe take those classes or reach out to people in different divisions and eat up every aspect of it because it's all here you know you pay for it might as well get the full experience, you know and if you're coming here, if you're not familiar with the campus, maybe come before I think it, I feel at the get a feel of the land something I did not do there but just yeah maybe get a head start on seeking those opportunities that I talked about see you at all the school has to offer because there's a lot.

Liz Norell - Very good. Thanks. Is there anything else you'd like to share before you wrap up?

Samantha Burger - Just that I really love the school if I could get a bachelor's here, I would, I really would.

Liz Norell - It's hard to let you go [Laugh].

Samantha Burger - It was hard to leave, it really was but you know the graduation is very you know fulfilling moment but.

Liz Norell - Bittersweet.

Samantha Burger - Bittersweet yes for sure.

Liz Norell - Yeah thank you for coming in and talking with us.

Samantha Burger - Thank you for having me.

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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