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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 I'm going to start by asking you to introduce yourself.

Kimberly Merfert - Well, my name is Kimberly Merfert and I'm a sophomore at Chattanooga State Community College. I'm a Major in Mass Communications and this is my final semester here.

Liz Norell - Wohoo.

Kimberly Merfert - Wohoo.

Liz Norell - What comes after this?

Kimberly Merfert - Right now I'm not so sure.

Liz Norell - It's okay.

Kimberly Merfert - I know I'm going to change for the UTC and I'm going to double up in Major in Mass Communications and Biology and then also I'm going to be going through an EMR certification course for the Fire Department. Right now, I am a recruit for the Tri-Community Volunteer Fire Department in Ooltewah and Collegedale.

Liz Norell - Cool.

Kimberly Merfert - So I'm spending a lot of my time there.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - But this semester, I'm really just focusing on getting my coursework done, acing all of my courses and.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - Really just trying to improve my future because I want to transfer to UTC and I just want to give them the best person I can be.

Liz Norell - Yeah. You're also a Global Scholar.

Kimberly Merfert - I am.

Liz Norell - How long have you been doing that?

Kimberly Merfert - I was recruited in the middle of fall 2018 and I was kind of late so I had to do this year's pinning ceremony instead which is great because then I learned about this podcast.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - And I just think the timing happened when it was supposed to happen and I want to become very involved. I don't know if it's like, oh this is my last semester. I want to do all that I can or if, oh I'm a sophomore now, so I have more confidence that I can go and do these things because I did the same thing in high school. I didn't join my, I went to Central High School and there we have our online newspaper called The Central Digest. Well a friend of mine named Hannah brought videos to the website and we were like the first ones who's ever done it. We brought it in. It was a brand new thing. We had to figure everything out ourselves but we could have had it so much earlier.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - If I didn't join junior year. If I joined when I was a freshman or a sophomore, we could have had three years instead of two but it's still a huge learning opportunity and we pass it off to these two amazing girls that I help succeeding and finding a passion for journalism and inside of it.

Liz Norell - That's great.

Kimberly Merfert - Yeah.

Liz Norell - So tell me why you decided to come to Chattanooga State?

Kimberly Merfert - Always really, you know that's a good question because I was very confused on whether I wanted to just head straight into UTC and just stay there for four years or if I wanted to go to Chatt State and I actually had two friends here named Lacey and Macey who went through the Collegiate High Program and I actually got to shadow them one day and find out what's it like being a student at Chatt State, how are the classes conducted, what kind of homework do you have, what kind of curricular do you go through, what kind of clubs do you offer and I really really fell in love with it and then I applied for scholarships here and I ended up getting one.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - It was an add-on to my Tennessee Promise, called the Tennessee Promise Plus and that's pretty much when I was like, what are you waiting for, you know where you want to go, it's not even something you have to think about anymore.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - Your opportunity is right in front of you, it's like waving a hand in your face like come here see me like and then after that it was really easy.

Liz Norell - Cool. I actually know Lacey and Macey. They both took my class.

Kimberly Merfert - I have known them since I was in first grade.

Liz Norell - Yeah. Can you describe a time when you feel like you really belonged on this campus?

Kimberly Merfert - You know as corny as it sounds, the first time I ever felt like I belonged on campus was the first day of my freshman year, like I never expected the teachers to be so compassionate and welcoming. I never expected that they're gonna be teachers out in the hallway helping students find where they're going.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - It was really shocking to me how friendly everyone actually was because you know you hear these things and then sometimes they never end up to actually be true but at Chatt State that actually is the case, you come here and you're warmly welcomed. People are willing to help you with any problem that you have. They make time for you and they care about your personal well-being and your mental health.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm. That's beautiful. What other things have happened to you since then that have reinforced why this is a good place for you?

Kimberly Merfert - I'm a very nervous person and a lot of things make me anxious and these things that I know shouldn't make me anxious but just feeling like these teachers want to help me succeed, they want me to get an A in their course. They go above and beyond to give me materials that I can use to succeed and understand the information and that's something that my high school never really offered. They were more like go figure it out yourself, we gave you the textbook, these are the pages, just read it again and they never really like took that extra mile to make you feel warm, make you want to learn.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - And you know Public High School as if you have to go, it's the law and so I think college, they're like well you decided to spend your time and money and effort here, so we're gonna give you the best materials that we can to make it the best dollar you ever spent, the best time you've ever used.

Liz Norell - That's great. What kind of relationships have you formed with people at Chatt State?

Kimberly Merfert - I actually came in with one of my best friends that I've known since church in first grade and her and I, you know we came in together. So we stayed really really close and bonded but we've actually met some really great people because you know she's a Pre-Med Major and I'm a Mass Comm Major. So we had to go our separate ways.

Liz Norell - You have very different schedules.

Kimberly Merfert - Very different. I had to focus in the MTC building mostly and she has to be in the OMN building a lot for her science classes and so we really had to branch out and not be afraid to approach other people and be like, hi my name is Kimberly. I'm a Mass Comm Major. How is your day today? Or like we're in the same class, I would like to get to know you. I feel like we might have a lot in common. You have to put yourself out there and I think that's one thing that's really helped me, get comfortable and deal with my anxiety, is that everyone's in the same boat whether they want to admit not, freshman or sophomore you're still having to find different classes, you're still having to adjust to the different people that you come in contact with and that's one thing that I think keeps Chatt State fresh and like the environment because you're constantly meeting new people, there constantly have clubs being formed and you're constantly try to find a parking spot.

Liz Norell - Yes, you are.

Kimberly Merfert - So people around you like meeting people in the car next to you, we're like wow that parking was really rough and it's like, it really was, it took me 20 minutes and I had to go around the whole campus one time just to find this one parking spot like.

Liz Norell - Yeah. Welcome to the first week of class.

Kimberly Merfert - Yeah, don't worry, it gets better.

Liz Norell - It does get better. Can you think of one or two relationships that feel really meaningful to you that you formed here? Not necessarily with another student but just anyone on campus.

Kimberly Merfert - My comp 1 and 2 teacher, her name is Natalie Pitts.

Liz Norell - She's amazing.

Kimberly Merfert - And she is amazing. I loved her so, I still do love her so much because I've always been told I'm good at writing and she saw that and she builds on it like she was like, oh you're not, how much, I'm trying to think about how to say that. She saw that was good and she wanted me to be better, even though she was like you're one of the best writers I've seen in a while or you know something like that and she'd be like let's see what we can do to improve you even more and it's funny because in my comp 1 class when I took in fall 2018, she was like, oh my gosh, I love your writing but you're using really big words and you're kind of I'm not telling you to dumb it down but you're gonna need to make it, you're gonna need to simplify what you mean and I'm like you can always improve and so she was one of those teachers who showed me, yeah you're great at something but you also have to adapt to other audiences in education levels and if you're talking to a group of kids you can't use super big words even though they really like to use supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

Liz Norell - That's right.

Kimberly Merfert - Which is so ironic because that's a big word but I really have to thank her for that, like she's one of teachers I've had the most impact with.

Liz Norell - That's beautiful. I know she'll be excited to hear that.

Kimberly Merfert - I love her so much like I could talk about Ms. Pitts forever.

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

Kimberly Merfert - How to balance the real world and schoolwork because coming to class and making it on time and doing that is all fun and jazz and you learn to adapt to it but then when you're actually home, you have all this free time, you want to go home and watch Netflix because I had a long day at class or I had a long day at work and I need to get this schoolwork done but I really don't want to or my friends asked me to go to the movies tonight and I really want to go but I have this essay due at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow or anything like that you really have to learn how to balance your work life, your friend life, your social life and your school education life and that was one of the things that I really really struggled with over my summer semester because I took five classes and I did.

Liz Norell - What!

Kimberly Merfert - I did and I didn't realize how compact it was gonna be.

Liz Norell - Oh! Kimberly.

Kimberly Merfert - I didn't realize how compact and like squishing all the due dates were gonna be.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - And so I had to learn really quickly that, my boyfriend was like hey you want to go do this, you want to go do that. My family's like, hey we're celebrating this today, do you want to come and I'm like, I found out that I had a lot less time, so I'm able to do my homework. So it was a really big struggle and it was a really big habit I had to form very quickly and learn constantly.

Liz Norell - I think it's something that we all struggle with, so it's not like you've. Chuck got it, time management good but yeah why did you take five classes?

Kimberly Merfert - I underestimated how much work it was gonna be. I'm gonna be completely honest like I was like five classes, well I've done that during the fall and spring, I can do that and then like I said before it was under estimating the time like you're cutting a whole semester basically in half.

Liz Norell - Yeah, I mean a regular semesters 15 weeks, in most summer school are 10 weeks.

Kimberly Merfert - Yeah.

Liz Norell - So you basically shrink it by a third but it just feels like you just got started and now it's over.

Kimberly Merfert - I feel like I was very egotistical. I was like oh nothing can stop me school so easy, it just comes to me naturally like okay maybe but my hardest class I took was anatomy and physiology one over the summer.

Liz Norell - What!

Kimberly Merfert - I did and.

Liz Norell - Was it a web class or was it in-person?

Kimberly Merfert - It was a lecture in lab class online combined.

Liz Norell - Oh.

Kimberly Merfert - And I passed but I was very surprised I passed and not saying that like oh A&P is so difficult, it's just like I said very time-consuming. You have to put effort into it, it actually deemed to be easier than I thought because it gives you a whole in-depth information on all these things and you're like, oh I'm never gonna do that, I'm never gonna be able to remember all this but they actually make the midterms and finals really easy, like as long as you know this basic information and this basic information and you can put it together and understand how it works then it's actually very simple.

Liz Norell - Hmmhmm.

Kimberly Merfert - So I remember I heard my friend was like, oh there's only 30 percent success rate for A&P.

Liz Norell - That's true.

Kimberly Merfert - And that's only during like the normal semester, I don't even want to talk about summer and I was like, I'm gonna take that as a challenge because I really really wanted to take it but I was like those numbers don't scare me because then that urges me to want to be that 30% that does make it and does succeed in that class the first time and so I really really pushed myself in that and I did it and that was like the best feeling that make the whole summer semester feel worth it.

Liz Norell - I mean you should be really proud of that.

Kimberly Merfert - I was surprised too. I was like, oh all these classes.

Liz Norell - Yeah. What advice would you give to other students either ones who are here now or people who might come in the future?

Kimberly Merfert - Always ask for help and don't be afraid to ask for help because there are lot of aspects from changing into High School into the Community College that are very

different like. I never had a student ID in High School and I never had to go and get it updated every semester and if you don't know where it is the first time then you're gonna have a hard time finding it because people can tell you, oh go to the HPF building and follow the Tiger tracks on the floor but some people who have, many are like what's the HPF building, where is it, what Tiger track, is it literal or is it like stickers, what if they're not on the floor anymore. There are a lot of things you have to figure out. I mean you also have to find a parking pass. I had those in High School but you know High Schools are usually smaller and more compact and so people are like well where's the Student Center, so I know where to get mine are like, where's the Bursar's Office so I can go pick it up. Well how do I even sign up for one? There's just a whole bunch of things that you have to take into account that you didn't have to before. So remember when I came here you know I'm Type-A over here. The first week of school, I'm like no teachers have given me my class list like what supplies am I supposed to go get and then I came in, my first day and they were like you need like a pencil [Laugh], that's it or like just a laptop, I bring a laptop and that gave me a lot of stress just because I wanted to be prepared and I didn't understand coming in as a freshman, why no one was giving me these materials and how to even find my books in the bookstore website, so you really have to ask for help and you can't be afraid to ask for help.

Liz Norell - Can you think of a time where you were a little nervous about asking for help but did anyway?

Kimberly Merfert - Like I mentioned earlier, I am very anxious for no reason sometimes.

Liz Norell - Is just how we are.

Kimberly Merfert - And it just hit me, I mean so I was very very afraid during my intro to comm class my first semester here, I was very confused on how to find the radio booth and if there's a note on the door that tells me that there's a new like oh we're meeting in this class instead of our regular classroom, I was very afraid to like reach out and ask someone, oh I don't know where this classroom is, can you help me, because like I said earlier you're a freshman you're kind of intimidated by everyone else, like oh they've been here more than me, they know more than me. I don't want to look stupid, just wandering through the halls, trying to find a door number, that's the one thing I had to learn very quickly, just don't be afraid to ask, they will help you. No one's really mean like no one's gonna just flat out be like I don't want to help you. So you just have to put yourself out there anyway.

Liz Norell - Yeah well Kimberly.

Kimberly Merfert - Yes.

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

Kimberly Merfert - I know a lot of people transitioning from High School to Community College or maybe just coming from the workforce and you know you're a little bit older, you just went straight into the workforce and said and coming into school where you see all these younger people than you. You just can't be afraid, you have to be yourself and if you want to further your education by going to school or continuing your education then do it because you're never going to forget your experiences here and it's gonna be the best experiences, you ever have. So you have to just be yourself and don't be afraid to be yourself.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - These people will help you along the way.

Liz Norell - Yes, they will well. Thank you so much for coming in and sharing your thoughts.

Kimberly Merfert - Well, thank you for having me.

Liz Norell - Yeah.

Kimberly Merfert - And offering this experience.

Liz Norell - Of course.

Kimberly Merfert - It was very fun.

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, the faculty and staff who make this podcast possible. If you're 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 instalment of Tiger Stories. Until then, make it a great one.

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