

INTRO

Stephanie Jackson: Now That's INTAresting. This podcast is about the Georgia Tech Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, its graduates, their careers, and how the Nunn School has helped to shape their future. Take a listen.

SJ: Welcome back. I'm Stephanie Jackson from the Nunn School.

Sydney Piwonka: And I'm Sydney Piwonka.

SJ: So today we have a special guest. His name is Matt Josey. He graduated from Georgia Tech, with a Bachelor of Science in International Affairs and Modern Languages with the concentration in Spanish, and he also had a Certificate in Latin American Affairs and a Minor in Biology.

SP: And while at Georgia Tech, Matt was a part of the Georgia Tech National Model UN team, the Pacific Program, volunteered with the Houston Heart Institute and as a Project Coordinator for Team Buzz, as well as worked as a National Park Service Centennial Intern with the Student Conservation Association. Following graduating, Matt worked as a Centennial Program Assistant and a Partnership Associate with the National Park Service and is currently a Partnership Specialist for the National Park Service.

SJ: So, it sounds like you just got a promotion, Matt. That sounds exciting.

Matt Josey: Yeah, no it is. So, it's always good to have some, some professional development and some vertical mobility.

SJ: Right, right. So, we'll get to ask you about that a little bit. But I want to start our conversation asking you to think back to when you were in school. And you know, you were an IAML Major, so what made you decide that you wanted to pursue a Minor in Biology?

MJ: Yeah, so I knew I had enough credits to add a minor, and I kind of looked at minoring in something as a way to customize my degree to what I wanted to do. I think the International Affairs program is just, it's very broad in the best sense that it just kind of lays the world at your feet. And so, I wanted to choose something that really honed-in on my passions, which was kind of, at that point, going in the direction of environmentalism and environmental conservation. And when I really was ready to make a decision on what I wanted to minor in, I felt like I wanted to choose something from a non-liberal arts discipline to kind of bridge the liberal arts degree that I was doing through the International Affairs program with something more technical or scientific. And so that's kind of how I ended up landing on biology.

SJ: So, that was distinct from maybe, like the Minor in Environmental Science. What made you, I guess, pursue biology versus that if you had an interest in environmentalism?

MJ: Yeah, so I realized, so I guess two parts or two things, really, first was the study abroad program that I ended up doing, which was the Pacific Program, as y'all mentioned. And so, a lot of the coursework on that study abroad program was ecology oriented. And I think that really opened my eyes to just the breadth of coursework that the School of Biology and Tech offered. Because I think, my friends who were majoring in biology at the time, really looking at what they were doing, I kind of had a limited understanding and thought that the School of Bio really focused on Cell Bio and, and more Biochemistry

and Biomedical Engineering. I mean didn't really know much about the, the ecology and conservation side of the house.

SP: Yeah, so since you started talking a little bit about the Pacific Program, can you explain a little bit more about that—specifically since it is, I, I believe a faculty-led study abroad program.

MJ: Yeah.

SP: So, can you tell us a little bit about that structure and what that looked like?

MJ: Yeah. So, it was basically the greatest semester of my life. So, yeah, kind of backing up before I chose a specific program. So, I definitely wanted to do a study abroad as part of my time at Tech. And before Pacific, I was planning to do an exchange semester somewhere in the Southern Cone because I was focusing a lot of my INTA coursework on Latin American Affairs. But I learned about the Pacific Program which went to three dream destinations that I literally thought that I would never have a chance to go to and then saw the coursework and, again, how that would kind of fit into that, that whole direction of doing something environmental and conservation related. And so, when, when kind of all those puzzle pieces came together, I really knew that was an opportunity that I couldn't pass up. And so, what you do on the Pacific program is you spend 12 weeks traveling around Oceania with other Tech students and Tech faculty. The itinerary and the course offerings that are offered change year by year. But when I went, we spent six weeks in New Zealand, four in Australia, and two in Fiji. And so, when we were in New Zealand, we were staying in-residence at a university in Wellington which is the capital city on the southern tip of the North Island. And so, we would have classes for four days a week and then long weekends to go travel and explore all of New Zealand. When we went to Australia, we spent our first weekend in Brisbane. We spent a week out on the Great Barrier Reef at a research station on Heron Island, and then two weeks in Sydney. And then we ended out our trip in Fiji. So, I took courses in Island Biogeography, Ecology and Evolution, Health, and then a lab science for Organismal Bio. So, it introduced me to a ton of people who are still good friends to this day, and I mean yeah, just fantastic semester overall.

SP: That's awesome. That sounds like such an amazing experience.

MJ: It was.

SP: So, obviously you said that this was a big part in helping you decide to Minor in Biology or further that. So, how much of the Minor in Biology was covered by that program, like was there overlap in the coursework that you took for your minor that you took in this program?

MJ: Yeah, so the courses that I took on Pacific Program helped me knock out 60%, I think.

SP: Wow.

MJ: Of the courses that I needed to satisfy my minor. And then, when I came back to Atlanta, that fall, I took my last two courses in Conservation Bio, and then they didn't really offer anything else ecology-oriented that semester, so I ended up taking Cancer Biology, which is different, but very interesting nonetheless, and that rounded out my minor.

SP: That's awesome.

MJ: Yeah.

SP: And then I guess going back a little bit back to the Pacific Program. So, for students who may be thinking about studying abroad, whether in the Pacific Program or other study abroad programs, what advice would you give to them? What would you tell them when thinking about pursuing a study abroad program?

MJ: Yeah. So, I think first off, go to the Office of International Education and meet with folks who are, are specialists in these programs and who are the ones that are kind of piecing everything together. Really keep your options open to look at exchange programs. And you know, I mean, I think Tech just has such a solid rotation of kind of long-standing study abroad programs like Georgia Tech Lorraine or the Oxford Program or Pacific Program. And so, I really think that there is something for everyone. If you want to do something that's a bit more familiar then, I mean, there are programs where you're, kind of like Pacific Program, where you're traveling with Tech students and Tech faculty. Or if you really just want to displace yourself and get something totally new then I mean, you can just exchange and kind of build a new community somewhere abroad for a semester. So yeah, I think just ask around. Go to Study Abroad Fairs and info sessions on specific programs and just really come at it with an open mind.

SJ: That's great to hear, Matt. I'm glad that the Pacific Program had such an influence on you and that you had such a fantastic time in Oceana. I'm, now I'm thinking I might want to go visit.

MJ: You need to find your way on there.

SJ: I do.

MJ: Do some International Affairs course, yeah.

SJ: Yes, exactly.

MJ: You can make it work.

SJ: I can, you know I can.

MJ: Oh yes.

SJ: So, I want to ask you a little bit more about the Certificate in Latin American Affairs. So, I know you were IAML Major with a concentration in Spanish. So, tell us about why you decided to pursue that certificate.

MJ: Yeah, so it's just kind of made sense with me focusing a lot of my International Affairs coursework on regional studies pertaining to Latin America and as a way to also bridge that with my Spanish courses that I was taking from the School of Modern Languages. So, I ended up taking four classes which were Contemporary Mexico, Latin American Affairs. US Foreign Policy in Latin America, and then I rounded it out doing an Undergraduate Research course. Where I did, and this kind of honestly bringing Pacific Program into the picture, this was kind of full circle of everything, I ended up taking what I had learned on my study abroad program and for my research, I did a comparative study of the environmental policies of Chile in New Zealand.

SJ: Wow.

MJ: And so, for the three courses that I had taken to previously satisfy that certificate, all of those three were taught by Dr. Jenny Lincoln—who ended up becoming my mentor throughout undergrad. And so,

she ended up being my research advisor when I did that fourth course to complete the certificate. So, it was a really cool way to, kind of, like I was saying, pull everything together from my experience at Tech.

SJ: That's awesome. I know that Undergraduate Research is something that we really encourage our students to pursue, and when they have an experience like yours where they can tie in a study abroad experience, that makes it even more valuable.

MJ: Yes.

SJ: Indeed.

MJ: One hundred percent.

SJ: Indeed. So, what advice would you have for students who might be thinking of adding a certificate to their major?

MJ: Yeah, I think, and I would also say this about minor programs also, just look, look at the courses that you have already taken or plan to take and see if there's anything that already satisfies the requirements for a certificate or a minor program. I think when people think about certificates and minors, they think that they're gonna have to take more courses and it's more of a burden academically, but I think there's ways to find what you have already done and are doing and, and satisfy requirements for these programs. And just go ahead and, kind of, get that mark on your diploma, you know.

SJ: Right, right. It's always helpful.

MJ: Yeah.

SP: For sure. And so, I guess moving into some of your, moving into your internship that you had while you were at Georgia Tech. So, you interned with the National Park Service as a Centennial Intern with the Student Conservation Association.

MJ: Yeah.

SP: So, what was your role during this internship?

MJ: Yeah. So, ultimately, I kind of fell into this internship at the right place at the right time, and it's a very unique internship and position. So, the Park Service at the time was approaching its hundredth anniversary, which was in 2016. And so, the Park Service, kind of as an agency, we divide ourselves into different regions geographically, and so, the Southeast Region is headquartered in Atlanta. And we manage all the National Park units and programs from the Caribbean up to Kentucky and down to Louisiana. And so, for the Southeast Region, and gearing up toward this big hundredth year anniversary of the Park Service, there was an effort to staff up a team to basically kind of manage this big celebration, and we had a bunch of special initiatives that kind of, in our minds, helped us prepare for our second century as a, as a government agency. And so, there was this big push around relevancy, around public awareness, and we had this ultimate goal of building this next generation of park visitors, supporters, advocates, and employees. And so, yeah. A lot of it was communications, both internal and external. So, just a lot of working with different Centennial Coordinators at all the parks around the Southeast. I did a lot with social media management and graphic design. We did a lot of special events we did a lot of, we kind of explored some strategic partnerships with new organizations that we had never really previously worked for. We partner with a lot of local universities to try and do job fairs and

create career pipelines for college students. So really kind of all over the place. Yeah. So, I think maybe that's the best way to summarize kind of what my internship was.

SP: That sounds like such an awesome experience, and especially because you were able to not only do stuff with the National Park Service, but also, you know, add in some social media aspects to that too. And some of that.

MJ: Yeah, for sure.

SP: Some communications. That's awesome. So, was, why did you pursue an internship with the National Park Service? Was it based off of your Minor in Biology that then you decided to look there? Or was it something that you just came upon? Yeah. Why did you, why did you choose that?

MJ: Yeah. I still kind of laugh at myself to this day. I, I knew by the time that I was finishing up at Tech that I wanted to do something in the public sector, and I wanted to do something anywhere in the realm of environmentalism, whatever that looks like, and for whatever agency. I have no idea why I wanted to go into public service. I really don't have a good reason. But, yeah, I don't know, maybe I'm just kind of an idealist at heart and it appealed to that. But yeah, so I, I was looking at different government agencies around Atlanta, because I was still taking courses on campus. And I wanted to find kind of a part-time internship that allowed me to balance both, saw the Park Service had their regional office, and ended up getting an informational interview which led to this internship and everything kind of fell into place really beautifully. And, and oddly, smoothly, I guess. So, yeah, I don't really have a good answer for that, but that's, that's the best that I can say.

SP: No, that's awesome. That's great.

SJ: Yeah, and it's interesting that you said, you know, that the National Park Service has an office in Atlanta. I don't think a lot of people realize that the federal government has regional offices all around the country, that everything is not based in Washington, DC.

MJ: Right.

SJ: And so, it's important that when they start to look for jobs or internships that they, offices might be in Atlanta. And you know, I for one wasn't aware that the National Park Service was here, but I am aware of other offices, other federal agencies that have offices locally in Atlanta. So that's a good point.

MJ: Yeah, definitely. So, our offices are downtown in the, ironically, the Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center.

SJ: Yeah.

MJ: And so yeah, I mean, tons of different agencies there. There's an EPA regional office, Social Security, Department of Labor. So, I mean, yeah, you're right, Stephanie, so many different federal agencies in and around the metro Atlanta area.

SJ: Yeah, the Peace Corps office is there, down there as well.

MJ: Yep.

SJ: Okay, so following graduation, you were hired, I imagine then at the National Park Service as a Centennial Program Assistant. So how did that differ from your previous internship?

MJ: Yeah.

SJ: What was the work like?

MJ: Yeah, mostly, I would say it was kind of a continuation, just I was formerly on the federal government's payroll. I did take on some other responsibilities relating to some other big special initiatives that we had going on at the time. And one of the big ones was, it launched in 2015, but it was the Park Service's Urban Agenda. So, it was taking a look at how we, basically how we interacted with as an agency with big urban centers. And I think a lot of people don't realize that a third of national parks around the country are in major cities. And I don't think that's something that we tout really well when we think about how we kind of portray what we do as an agency to the public. A lot of people really think about the Yosemite's and the Yellowstone's and these really remote places that you have to save a lot of money for and travel to, but they don't think about the backyard parks like in Atlanta, we have the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park.

SJ: Right.

MJ: Yeah, and so really thinking of different partnerships that we can pursue to kind of elevate the fact that we have a really big footprint in cities all across the country. So that was I would say, beyond what I did in my internship, that was the big responsibility that I took on when I got my first role with the Park Service.

SJ: Okay, so seeing that you know, you're, you're one of these students who had an internship that was parlayed into a full-time job.

MJ: Yeah.

SJ: What strategies or advice would you offer students who may be wondering how they can get their internship to become something full-time?

MJ: Yeah, I would say the biggest thing is to be an avid learner, and to ask tons of questions. I mean, I think I was really fortunate in that the internship that I started in, it, it just gave me such a broad overview of the Park Service, and I got to interact with folks in all different disciplines. So, it helped me network, and so I would definitely say pursue that where you can, also, as an intern. But just, you know, make an effort to really put your best foot forward and show up. I mean, there's just so much potential to make something of an internship, and I think what you do for those few months really counts and can pay dividends in the future. So.

SJ: Right.

MJ: Yep.

SJ: Right. So, over the time you've been at the National Park Service, like I said earlier, you've recently been promoted, and congratulations on that.

MJ: Thank you.

SJ: So, what is your current role? And how is that different than what you were doing previously?

MJ: Yeah, so my current title is Partnership Specialist. And, you know, after we moved past our hundredth anniversary in 2016, and after the Urban Agenda that I was talking about kind of wrapped up,

it transitioned into the field of partnerships in the Park Service, which is similarly very, just kind of all over the place. So primarily what my job entails is working with nonprofit partners that are directly supporting national parks. And so, we work with nonprofits that fundraise for all sorts of Park projects, we work with different nonprofits that are land acquisition partners where they will help acquire land and hold it for us until we can accept donations of that land. We work with nonprofits that help us lead educational programs and bring school students to parks. So, beyond working with partner organizations like that, I also manage around \$2 million every year in cost share funds that accomplish partnership projects in national parks. So, every day is kind of different in my role. So, one day, I mean, I can be working with architects in our facilities program on a project where we have a nonprofit partner who's fundraising to build a new visitor center and a park, and I will say, you know, I thought I dodged, you know, elements of like Civil Engineering and Building Construction in my time in Tech, but I've learned way more about that than I ever thought I would ever need to know.

SJ: Right.

MJ: In my working life.

SJ: Right. Yeah.

MJ: The other days I can be reviewing partnership agreements with our in-house legal counsel, or talking with ethics counselors about different fundraising ideas, or leading trainings to help federal employees better understand the nonprofit sector. So, every day is different, which I really like. It makes me feel kind of frazzled at times, because we just have so many projects going on at the same time. But I think, as a, as an agency, we're kind of pivoting to really realizing that partnerships is the way of the future and, and so I think it's just a discipline within the Park Service that's going to continue to grow over time.

SJ: So, you, you brought up a couple other things that, one that I kind of, I want you to elaborate on for me a little bit.

MJ: Sure.

SJ: So, you mentioned know, when you were first interested in the National Park Service, it was because you were drawn to environmentalism, but you also mentioned that, over the years, your, your skills have, the skills that you've used or the responsibilities you've been given have involved other skill sets, you know. You mentioned something about social media, and events, and partnerships, and then, you know, learning a little bit about building construction. So, my question for you is, for students who might want to either pursue a career with the National Park Service or even a similar organization, what skills would you think they would be well intentioned to try to build while they're still a student?

MJ: Gosh. I mean, I think really, I think communications. And I know that that's broad to say, but I think really learning how to write effectively. I mean, first off, I have been told that that's largely why I got both my internship and my first permanent gig with the Park Service is because I could communicate well.

SJ: Right.

MJ: But also exposing yourself to different public speaking opportunities and working on verbal communications. Beyond that, and kind of going back full circle to the beginning of our conversation talking about minors, I mean, I think it really helped me to pursue something in school that was so

different from what I was studying because it taught me and challenged me to think in an interdisciplinary way. And so, I think if you find something like that, where you can kind of challenge your brain to rewire then that'll come in handy later on in your career. Yeah, so I think, that would probably be what I would say.

SJ: Right.

SP: Yeah. And so, looking back on how your Minor in Biology has kind of changed and shaped your career path, what advice would you give to students who are thinking of pursuing a minor, whether it be a Minor in Biology, or just a different minor, in addition to their major?

MJ: Sure. I mean, just look into it. And definitely, you know, be open to the idea. Kind of like I said, I mean, I think a lot of people think that doing a minor is taking on more work, but I think that there are definitely ways to satisfy minor requirements with what you're already doing. And I think it's something that can definitely tee you up for career success once you leave school and enter the workforce. And overall, it's just a really great way to specialize your degree and delve more into your areas of interest. I think, I don't know maybe, I don't know if either of you would agree with this, but, or this is just my personal thoughts, but I think Tech's degree programs across the board are pretty broad. I mean, I think you look at other schools, other universities, and I feel like a lot of other places have more specialized degree options. And I personally view that as a benefit of Tech, because I think it just teaches you a lot of different skills, but then doing something like a minor or certificate really allows you to kind of hone in on that one thing that you're, you're really going after.

SJ: Right, right. Well, thank you so much, Matt, for your time today.

MJ: Yeah.

SJ: And for joining us for Now That's INTAresting. It's been great to have this very informative and inspiring conversation with you.

MJ: Aw thanks, Stephanie, really appreciate the invitation.

SJ: Certainly.

SP: Thank you so much.

SJ: We wish you the best in the future, and we are excited to hear about what might come next.

MJ: Yeah, thanks, likewise to y'all.

SJ: Alright, thanks Matt.

SP: Thank you.

MJ: Alright.

OUTRO

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