
INTERVIEW WITH PAIGE BUSCHMAN, CLASS OF 2019

Ryan Cox 00:05

All right, this is Ryan Cox, digitization assistant and intern, here with ISU graduate Paige Buschman on Thursday, July 14, 2022. We're just going to be reminiscing about her time here at Illinois State University for its alumni oral history project so that all those who listen can learn about the history of its campus and students. So Paige, I'd like to thank you for coming on today and taking time out of your day.

Paige Buschman 00:32

For sure, yes, thanks for having me.

Ryan Cox 00:34

Sure. Just to start off, I'll ask this: what brought you to ISU?

Paige Buschman 00:41

Bloomington-Normal in general. I was in the area already. So I'm from the south suburbs of Chicago, Lemont, Illinois to be specific, and I went to Illinois Wesleyan for undergrad and when I was nearing the end of that experience, I was looking at different grad programs. I was interested in going into College Student Personnel Administration, you know, student affairs, student services work, so I was looking at a variety of different colleges. I think I applied to five different grad programs and ISU has a great one, a well-known program, a good program. And I actually only visited ISU. I didn't visit any of the other five, even though I was accepted to all of them. So I think I applied to, like, Loyola, UW-Madison, and Ohio State and obviously one other than I'm fully forgetting.

(01:44) And I went to Grad Days is what they call it at [CSPA] which is kind of their Preview, and then they also have these interviews for your graduate assistantship position that comes with the program. So when you're accepted in you automatically get a tuition waiver and that's supported by a graduate assistantship. And so the way they do it is all of their offices that are hiring grads will come in and do these, like, rapid fire back-to-back interviews. And so I engaged in that process and surprisingly enjoyed it and then I just really liked the people, and not only the people who were seeking to come to ISU, so people who would be in my cohort, but also the staff and the campus. I'd surprisingly not been to ISU almost at all, because they talk about the Wesleyan bubble - very real. You truly just, like, stay on campus as a Wesleyan student in a way that I think ISU students probably also do but not necessarily to the same extent. And so I, like, basically visited ISU maybe once, so it was really nice to visit

and see the campus and I really liked it. And it was super convenient, as you can imagine, because I became very used to Bloomington-Normal so to stay was kind of, like, much nicer than the thought of having to pack up and move, you know, hours and hours and hours away again, because I'd already moved. You know, like, every year when you're an undergrad, you're moving around a lot - back home, back to campus, then somewhere else on campus and maybe off campus. And so, yeah, it was nice to get to kind of stay in the area. So that's what brought me to ISU.

Ryan Cox 01:54

Sure. Yeah. And I know you mentioned it briefly that you studied at Illinois Wesleyan. What did you study there as an undergraduate?

Paige Buschman 03:35

Sociology. So I originally went - there's, like, a running joke at Wesleyan that everybody's a bio major because it's a really good school for med school placement. They have like a 98% med school placement rate, so it's ridiculous. But it's also incredibly difficult because they seek to weed out, if you will, people who are not going to make it, and I never wanted to go to med school. I was interested in doing, like, pathology technician, like I wanted to do autopsy prep work. And so I went for - I was a double major in English and bio, I started taking bio and I was doing terribly. Like, I did basically perfect in high school and then I show up here and I graduated high school early in three years, so I took some online classes to get done with that as fast as possible. I was ready, I was academically inclined, ready to go. And then I got here and I hadn't taken AP Bio and I had missed a whole year of, you know, high school that I could have been using to study and develop study skills and college prep and just didn't do that. And yeah, it was - people were just wiping the floor with me as it relates to, like, you know, some people were getting it and I was not and so I had to drop chem because I was even less getting that and so I stayed in bio, got a C, and was like, "Whoa! This is not for me." And so then I switched to just doing English, which was great. I mean, I've always been inclined to writing.

(05:04) But then, I had never even heard of sociology really. At my high school they taught like a sociology of sports class, which, not my thing. So I never really even like knew what that was all about. I took a SOC 101 class because I was involved with the Pride Alliance there and so I had a - there were several people in that group who had done SOC and were like, "You should try this." And I took SOC 101 and I was like, "This is everything." And then just kind of went from there. I, like, immediately - so, in the first semester of my sophomore year, I switched to being a soc major, and just like ran with that. And that was also kind of what informed me doing College Student Personnel, because, you know, a lot of sociology is understanding structures and systems and how they work and institutions - I mean, it's a study of groups of people, you know, whereas psychology is the study of the individual. Sociology is the study of the groups.

(06:06) And so yeah, I learned a lot about systems of oppression and learned a lot about myself and my own experience and realized in that process that education had been kind of like, I say "my liberation," it really brought me to understanding the world in a whole new way. And I was like, "I want to help other people do that," because there were people who made that happen for me. And so how can I give back in that way? Originally, I wanted to

do it through, like, diversity and inclusion work, specifically, women's centers. I did, like, a senior thesis at Wesleyan about sexual violence in higher education and its relationship to masculinity. And so I was, like, really dead set on that. But then I got to ISU and kind of changed my career path within College Student Personnel a little bit. Got way more interested in, like, community engagement work, which was through my GA-ship [graduate assistantship]. I never looked at advocacy as a community service, but it really is, and understanding that and opening my eyes to how community services and just, like, picking up trash, it can be political engagement and advocacy and all that. Like, that, really blew my world wide open and helped me recognize also this kind of thing that we talked about a lot in higher ed of [how] diversity and inclusion work needs to be integrated into everything we do. We can't just have a Multicultural Center and that be, like, it, right? Like, we need to - everybody needs to have a hand in that work because it is so personal, it is so important to individual students that if we're not integrating it into everything we do then we're not doing it. And so it was great for me also to be able to say I'm going to let other people do DEI directly and I can be a part of that change in, like, the individual departments that I end up in, whether that's academic advising or community engagement or something else. So yeah, that's - yeah, Wesleyan really did that for me. So yeah, that was a lot. That was very tangential.

Ryan Cox 08:07

Well, no, it sounds like it really led to you finding out what you wanted to do, so -

Paige Buschman 08:14

Yeah, I mean, I love Wesleyan. And it's so funny, though. It's, like, hugely different than ISU and I love ISU, too. It's - that's the thing about systems of higher ed, is that they're different for a reason, and different students do well in different spaces, and different departments can thrive in different organizations differently. So yeah.

Ryan Cox 08:36

it sounds like you wouldn't be where you were without it.

Paige Buschman 08:39

Definitely not. And I have a lot of problems with Wesleyan, like, from a political perspective. Just in the past couple years there have been issues, but I serve on the Alumni Board of Directors for Wesleyan - to be clear, not the Board of Trustees, which requires you to have way more money than I'm capable of giving, but the Alumni Board - and so I've been able to kind of understand university from a whole different perspective just by engaging with that. So higher ed is, like, kind of my whole thing.

Ryan Cox 09:10

Cool. Yeah.

Paige Buschman 09:10

Wesleyan definitely, definitely started me on that path and ISU really, like, furthered me. I mean, to the point that I'm still working, you know.

Ryan Cox 09:19

Sure, yeah.

Paige Buschman 09:20

That's one thing you will find about ISU is that they've got a loyal fan base and they're good to their people. ISU likes to hire their alumni and yeah, which I appreciate that. I mean, it comes - it's pros and cons [as in] any kind of process, but I think that a nice way of giving back is by kind of supporting the people you brought up, so -

Ryan Cox 09:44

Yeah, I guess to talk more about your time here at ISU, I don't think you said it, but what years were you studying here for?

Paige Buschman 09:53

I did not. I studied from 2017 to 2019. So I was that lucky little group of people that got out right before the pandemic, which was great. Yeah, so I came right after Wesleyan. I went to Wesleyan from 2013 to 17 and then started at ISU immediately. My time at ISU was super interesting. I was very busy. I, like I said, studied CSPA. So their program is set up that you essentially take night classes for the most part unless you're taking a daytime elective, which I did once, and then you're working your GA for 27 hours a week, approximately. So not quite full time, but close.

(10:43) And then I was one of the few strange souls that decided to also work as a House Director, like a house mom for a sorority. So there were a couple of us who did that. We had - the CSP program kind of has a relationship with some of the sororities/fraternities on campus where during Grad Days, if they were looking for a house director, they would invite those folks to come and interview the students who were applying for the program. Because as you can imagine, these are people who are likely - either they've been in fraternity/sorority life, or they have the skill set from a housing perspective or other administrative perspectives to do housing in fraternity/sorority life, because one thing that people who aren't necessarily super into Student Affairs might not know is that a lot of people come up through housing. So you start off when you're an undergrad doing, like, RA [Residential Assistant] work and then you're like, "Oh, this is kind of cool," so you want to be a resident director or an area director. So you go and get your master's and - or sometimes you do those things at the same time - and then, you know, from housing, you might move on to academic advising, or you might move on into like a disciplinary space, because those organizations often talk to each other, right? Because if there's a disciplinary

violation in the halls, you got to work with, you know, your adjudication board, whatever that looks like at your institution. And so that tends to be kind of a pipeline up.

(12:14) So a lot of people who go into higher ed have some experience in Residence Life. I did as well. Though I did not, I was not an RA, I was a sustainability educator. So I did, like, programming for RAs. I would, like, make bulletin boards and put together activities they could do with their residents. But I didn't actually do that work. I also had some background with that at Wesleyan. I am - my vice president and I in Pride at the time, his name is Avery Amerson. We made gender inclusive housing happen at Wesleyan. So [we] wrote policy, talked to big important people, pushed that through. And so there's like a, they call it the Rainbow Floor, it's in Pfeiffer Hall. And so, anyway, I had some interest in housing work. And then they were like, "Yeah, we'll pay you and you won't have to pay rent, and there's a chef." I didn't do fraternity/sorority life at Wesleyan. It's very popular there. Over a third of the campus does fraternity/sorority life at Wesleyan. But I was just, I was involved with Pride, doing other things, didn't have time for that. I wasn't particularly interested, also cost a lot of money in most cases, dues and stuff. And I am - I don't come from much so I did not really have access. But when they're like, "Yeah, free rent, all that stuff." I was like, "I'm listening. I'm interested. This could be fun." And it was fun! It was really different. I got to learn about fraternity/sorority life, which was, I think, super valuable, again, to my career pathway. But it was another 10 hours a week at least on top of my already 27-hour-a-week job. So I was basically working full time and going to school, which was an interesting choice. But financially it was fantastic because I was getting a tuition waiver from ISU, getting paid for my graduate assistantship, getting paid for my fraternity/sorority life work, and not paying rent or internet or food much on top of all that. So I made good money off of grad school, even though it was probably one of the most, like, logistically stressful times of my life with all the stuff that was happening, you know. But it was fun.

Ryan Cox

It sounds like it was worth it.

Paige Buschman 14:26

Definitely worth it, oh my gosh, like, I always tell anybody I speak to now, like, "Do not pay for grad school." Just don't, just don't do it. Because you can find a program, even if it's not perfect. I would say a free graduate degree from a program that's not perfect is way better than 40k for a program that you think is. No one cares where you went to grad school. I mean, they do and they don't, right? Like, some people might care because they went there too or they're familiar with the program if it is good, but like, how good is it going to be compared to the debt that you have to pay? And I'm blessed because I get to do Public Service Loan Forgiveness. So, like, because I work for an institution of higher learning, a public institution of higher learning - and actually I think that it even applies to private - but because of that I'll get to apply after 10 years of qualify payments for loan forgiveness, which you know I'm doing because I have debt from Wesleyan. It was, I mean, that's a private school, right? Which I didn't know the difference. When I went, I was like, "What?" But, you know, I'm technically first gen, both of my parents - my dad went to, like, took a year of, you know, community college, and my mom did three years at Northern but didn't finish. And, you know, I think Northern was, like, probably the only place she looked and that was how many years ago. So, yeah, it was an interesting choice. I would do it very differently from a financial perspective if I went

again, like, community college first and then do my last two years, because that would have saved me 20k minimum, probably more. So yeah. But yeah, my time at ISU was great. It was action-packed. I have some wild stories from the sorority house.

Ryan Cox 16:07

Yeah. What sorority was it that you worked with?

Paige Buschman 16:10

Tri Sigma, Sigma Sigma Sigma. So they're right there on Willow Street, just across from the Bone Student Center parking lot. So there's Bone parking lot, there's another parking lot, and then there's them. And, yeah, yeah, it was -

Ryan Cox 16:24

Did you work, like, in the house or... ?

Paige Buschman 16:26

Yes, physically, I was residential, so I lived there.

Ryan Cox 16:29

I see, okay. Okay.

Paige Buschman 16:29

Yes. That's kind of how it works with the house moms in particular and then fraternities are kind of a whole different game. Sometimes they have residential live-in, like, dads. More often it appears, and I'm not an expert, but they'll have, like, house moms, but they don't live in, so they'll kind of come in and oversee things. Sometimes they just have a property manager, sometimes they manage from within. So, like, one of the brothers is, like, the president, is basically the property manager or something like that. So it's kind of different. And what's really interesting is that at Wesleyan, Wesleyan owned the property in which all of their fraternities lived. It was a liability choice, which I think is really interesting. Whereas at ISU it's completely separated, like, ISU does not own in any way the houses in which either their fraternities or sororities live. So there is an FSL [Fraternity and Sorority Life] office that works with the leadership inside of the houses but there isn't, like, that kind of direct oversight, which I think is probably - that is on purpose, and also a liability choice. But it's kind of different because of the different styles of campus and the number of students and all that stuff. So yeah, so I lived in a little apartment in the bottom floor of this three-story house and so the women lived on the floors two and three, in either - from doubles to quads, so they could be sometimes with just one person [or] up to four people in a room. And so the rest of

the first floor, it was like a giant living room, a dining space, like, industrial-sized kitchen, the entire basement was finished, and then there were all the other rooms upstairs.

(18:20) So yeah, so I lived there and I followed all their rules. Such as, I was dating my, my fiancé now, at the time and he's a man and you - there, they don't allow men in living spaces. So he was allowed into, like, my office and then we had to keep the door open. And it was awkward and unfortunate and definitely a massive strain on our relationship. But I was like, "That money is too good, sorry! Like, you're gonna have to deal with it." And he did, but my first year he visited all the time. My second year, he's like, "I can't handle it over there." Because I mean, yeah, it is in some ways exactly what the stereotypes might sound like, you know. Like, women running around screaming all the time is a truth of what happens on occasion. Especially during rush, or - I don't know if they call it that here. But they still called it that, right? It's rush. It is rush either way.

(19:20) They had those door jams. I don't know if you're familiar with the concept of a door jam, where, as the prospective women, so they - at ISU they bus the women around and then they - so the prospective women are all dressed up super nice, because it's a competition, essentially, you're competing to try and get into whichever sorority you want. So you're always trying to impress these people and they get on a bus and then they get off the bus at a house and then the women who are in the sorority do door jams where they literally will, out of the windows of the upper section of the house and then out of the front door, will sing, and when I mean sing I mean scream, songs. Usually, like, parody, so it's like a song that you know, but it's with Tri Sigma stuff in it. And all of them do this and they practice for weeks in advance. So, like, couple times a week for several weeks, there's, like, women in the house screaming these door jams. And I'm just like, "Will I ever sleep again?" So, such an interesting time. And I -

Ryan Cox 20:24

That must've been crazy. That sounds so crazy.

Paige Buschman 20:27

It was so wild, but - and that was the wildest part. I mean, there were certainly other wild incidences, but yeah, that - it was something else.

Ryan Cox 20:38

So as far as getting involved in it, did you have to solicit this? Or did they kind of reach out due to your, what you were studying?

Paige Buschman 20:47

Yeah. So, so they come to Grad Days, as I was kind of discussing at the beginning of this, there's that, like, interview day. So there's alumni of the sorority who essentially come into Grad Days because they are somehow involved. So there's, like, administrative - well, there's also national headquarters for these organizations, right? So you've

got national headquarters, those are almost exclusively made up of alumni of the sorority, right? So you've got Tri Sigma nationals. And then those people identify alumni of the local organization. So, what were we? I can't even remember what our, like - Lambda, like, it's, you know, Tri Sigma and then you have, like, some sort of nomer or just your, for the ISU campus.¹ So anyway, they identify, you know, local alumni who then are kind of like advisors, that's literally what they're called, they're advisors to the sorority. So, Jamie Collins was one of them. April Blair was the other one. [April] was the one who came to Grad Days and I was totally into her vibe because she had, like, tattoos, like, sleeves on her arms. And she was like, "Yeah, and I drive a motorcycle." And I was, like, vibing hard, "We need to talk." And so, yeah, so I interviewed with them like the day of and then they offered me the position and I accepted.

(22:18) And I knew not what I was getting into whatsoever. Like, I had no clue because I had seen, again, like, the sororities at Wesleyan but I didn't rush so I didn't know what rush looked like, I didn't know about door jams or any of that stuff. And I didn't understand it on this scale. At Wesleyan, in any given sorority, there might be 100 people maximum. Here, there's like 300 in some cases or more in one sorority. They are huge because there's 20,000 people on campus so they can do that, right? They have the pool. Yeah, it was, it was totally wild. And yeah, and I, like, had to take photos to be on their composite, they take composite pictures. They do, like, professional photos of everybody in the sorority and then you're on this giant photo and they're there in the halls. Like, they lined all the hallways of - like, back till when they founded it at that school. So yeah, it was, like, very much a part of it. At the end, they actually asked me if I wanted to be an honorary member and I said yes. And I was supposed to go through a whole initiation ceremony and all that stuff, because they all have their own ceremonies and traditions. But the girls were unfortunately so disorganized that we never did it. So I actually am not technically part of it but I feel in spirit that I am.

Ryan Cox 23:35

It sounds like you were appreciated still, if not inducted formally.

Paige Buschman 23:40

Yes, I definitely was, especially by a select few. There was certainly conflict. There were women that did not like me at all, which I think was, like, due to the nature of me being an authority figure, not because of who I am, you know what I mean? I mean, yeah, like, did I have to make somebody pour out their alcohol one time, like, I did, right? So people are not gonna, like, love that. And that's not my style. That's why I never did residence life because I really don't like getting people in trouble. But when like, my - so I basically had RAs, like, they weren't RAs but that's essentially their function. So they were students living in the house that were peers, you know, and when they reported something, I had to respond and someone was like, "I definitely know they're drinking in there. I can, like, hear their glass." And I was like, "Okay," so I, like, knock on the door. "Hi. Do you have booze in here?" "Yeah." "Okay, I'm gonna have to, like, pour that out. Sorry." And they're like, "Yeah." I confiscated a shot glass once because it's contraband. Like, they're very strict there about [how] you can't have anything in the house that is against university rules, let alone the sorority's rules, right? Yeah, we had all this stuff about one of the women

¹ The Illinois State University chapter of Sigma Sigma Sigma is Epsilon Omicron.

had a close friend who was a gay man and I was like, "Still a man, like, that's what the rules say." Like, I didn't write these rules. Y'all wrote the rules, like, I could care less who's in here. I'll tell you what I did in college! But, like, you know what I mean? So, yeah, it was super interesting.

Ryan Cox 25:07

Sure, yeah. So it sounds like Grad Days was a big way for you to get involved. Did you say that you were working another job at the same time as doing this?

Paige Buschman 25:19

Yeah. So I had a graduate assistantship in - it is now called the Center for Civic Engagement. At the time, it was brand new, and it was called Cecil [phonetic], but like C-E-S-L, but I can't remember what it stands for.²

Ryan Cox 25:34

And did you get involved in that through Grad Days?

Paige Buschman 25:38

Yep. So Grad Days was for that, actually, it was for getting our graduate assistantship. So the assistantships are all with - usually, like, the Dean of Students Office is the biggest employer of CSPA grads and then you've got a couple of other campus relationships, like the Center for Civic Engagement, where they're maybe not technically under the Dean of Students Office, but they still have a function that is similar. So like, I think even TRIO - TRIO is not under the Dean of Students Office, but they had a presence at Grad Days. And we had off-campus opportunities as well, so we could go to Heartland and even Wesleyan actually had - they would hire - oh my gosh, my cat, I'm sorry about him - they would hire -

Ryan Cox 26:28

It's fine.

Paige Buschman 26:28

- some students to do, like, residence hall directing. So I interviewed with a couple of different organizations, I was specifically interested in leadership programming through the Dean of Students Office and the Center for Civic Engagement, where I ended up doing community service project planning. With the Dean of Students Office, had I taken that one, I wouldn't have been allowed to be a house director because of a conflict of interest with the Dean of Students Office being where fraternity/sorority life is located. I wasn't allowed to do both because it

² Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning

would have been a conflict and because they felt that it was not sustainable timewise. Like, your GA is already so much time and then you're a graduate student so they discouraged you taking on additional employment, whereas CCE was - they allowed it because they weren't technically under Dean of Students Office like that. And, yeah, I'm glad that I chose that because community service projects planning was really rewarding, versus - I think I would have enjoyed and learned a lot from doing more of the leadership programming stuff. I was specifically looking at Leaders for Social Change, which is a program out of the Dean of Students office. I would have been overseeing that program, you know. So students go somewhere out of state and do an immersive leadership kind of experience. I actually ended up going on it as an advisor, because I was friends with the person who ended up getting that job because she was in my cohort. And so she invited me to be an advisor for a trip. So I did do that once, which was a really great part of my experience ISU, and I highly recommend that students who are interested in leadership work do it because it's worth it. But yeah.

So I ended up at Center for Civic Engagement, which was great. I was an AmeriCorps member, which is a really unique experience and actually directly relates to the work I do now. So AmeriCorps is like - if people are aware of, like, Peace Corps, Peace Corps is an international attempt on the part of the US government to create peaceful relationships with developing countries and support them in community development work, community and economic development work. And they send people over there and they offer a stipend to the volunteers from the US and they offer other financial supports as it relates to the work and all that jazz.

(27:11) AmeriCorps is essentially the domestic version of that. So the US government provides funding for the alleviation of social ills, such as poverty, education gaps, etc. So I was funded, in part - not really funded, more - I was able to be classified as AmeriCorps and receive an education award. So I got an extra, like, \$6,000 per year that I could apply towards education. So it's an educational stipend thing, what do they call it, Education Award, the Segal Ed Award. And so I use that towards my student loans after the grad program, but that was a really cool, unique part of my experience. It just required a lot of different reporting and it was funded through the Stevenson Center. So the Stevenson Center for Community and Economic Development is a department here on campus and it is now where I work and that is how I found out about them because they worked with CCE to provide funding for the position I had as a grad student. And so I knew Beverly Beyer who worked there for 17 years as the Associate Director and I knew Dawn DuBois, who is their Office Manager, because she processed my reports.

(29:23) So yeah, so I stayed in that position for two years. In our program [CSPA], you're kind of allowed to take a different position in your second year if you want a new experience or you didn't have a good time, but I was really enjoying my experience and I was being given an opportunity to do a lot of like change-making in my position so I stayed for my second year. And, but, yeah, that connection I made with AmeriCorps lasted because I then applied to work in the Stevenson Center a couple of years ago because I knew of them and I knew kind of the work they did with AmeriCorps and just community development in general and I was interested in continuing on that pathway. So that's where I ended up. But yeah, CCE was great, really opened my eyes as I kind of talked about earlier, you know, to civic engagement as an option for me and as a space to promote social justice that I kind of never considered before.

Ryan Cox 31:29

Cool, yeah. So just to go back to just the campus in general. What things stuck out most about your time at Illinois State?

Paige Buschman 31:45

Well, first of all, it's gorgeous. I mean, Wesleyan is gorgeous too, but in a different way. You know, the quad here is gigantic. It's really like your classic college experience in many ways. It is something I think that ISU offers from a physical space perspective. It was also really cool to watch the Bone revitalization happen. Physically, I was here while that was, like, all happening, so I got to see old Bone and new Bone and what they've done is fantastic. So that was really remarkable and also cool because, actually, our cohort was invited to kind of, like, sign a pillar of concrete that is, like, or a pillar that is now behind concrete, that is integral to the structure of Bone Student Center. So like, they, that is a legacy that some people - I was not physically on campus, when that happened, I was, like, somewhere, I think it was, like, in my practicum or something - but anyway, so I didn't get to do it, but just the thought that we got to be involved like that was cool. Also, their [ISU's] Rec Center is just enormous and so, like, bougie compared to especially what we've got going at Wesleyan. Which is funny because Wesleyan even did a renovation, you know, while I was there, shortly after I left, something like that and - no, it was while I was there - and, like, even then it's nothing still compared to what ISU has going on.

(33:05) And this is also the interesting thing about the physical campuses, like, just more people in general. You would see somebody new every day, but you would also see some of the same people over and over again, even if you didn't, like, actually interact with them, because [at] Wesleyan you walk around, you know basically everybody's face [even] if you don't know them personally. I mean, it's not that big. It's as big as some people's high schools, you know, it's only a couple thousand people. Versus ISU, where it's just, like, you could see people - I mean, the community is around a lot more, you know, you got people using the quad to walk their dogs who clearly don't go there. Or maybe they do - I mean, that's the other thing, non-traditional students at ISU, you walk around the campus and you just see a lot more diversity than you do at a place like Wesleyan and starting to constantly compare because it's all they have.

(33:50) But the other thing about Wesleyan [error: ISU], too, is, like, it's not as physically isolated as some campuses, Wesleyan also included, you know, you've got uptown right there, and you've got all that, that strip on Main Street of places that, like - Fusion Brew? Bless that place. If you're listening to this and Fusion Brew doesn't exist anymore, consider yourself totally, totally robbed of a beautiful experience because that place is a gift. I just love it there. And so I'm sure some people feel that way about Avanti's, though I've never quite gotten to it probably because I'm a vegetarian so they don't have a lot for me, you know? But yeah, so I mean there's - and that, right? Like, there's staples of, like, Avanti's is associated with ISU. Even the like alumni, they have, this alumni waterpark day and they're just, like, "Trip down memory lane, we're bringing Avanti's!" And I'm just, like, that's so funny and I know of older ISU alums who just - and I don't feel like there's necessarily the same thing for, for example, Wesleyan. Maybe Mugsy's, but that's - it's not even comparable really. Yeah. I mean, so, the physical campus is definitely different. Also love that bridge in the middle of campus, so iconic, you know what I mean? Over what is that, University [University Street]? Or is that College [College Avenue]? The fact that we have one called College and one called University - it's just like, who did this?

Ryan Cox 35:10

Yeah, very confusing, it almost feels purposeful.

Paige Buschman 35:14

Truly, but yeah, so I mean, there's a lot of a lot of - also, the music hall that looks like a castle,³ that's iconic. Like, there's just a lot of - and DeGarmo even, which is where I studied, you know, because I did education. What a weird - like, that underground courtyard thing. They have a lot of, like, very interesting architectural choices at ISU that I - that give it a lot of character, and it has a lot of history, you know? Hovey Hall versus, you know, the Old Main⁴ hall and yeah, it's cool.

Ryan Cox 35:48

Sure.

Paige Buschman 35:48

Yeah. And like, Dean of Students' marketing now I think is, like, in the old library and so the ceilings are just, like, wildly high and stuff.⁵ It's just a, it's a cool physical space, for sure.

Ryan Cox 36:01

Yeah, must have been quite the difference. I guess, to talk more about, like, stuff that happened, did any major historical things happen during your time? I know you're only there for two years, but...

Paige Buschman 36:16

Well, yeah, I mean, there was #BlackOutISU [#AntiBlackISU], like, the hashtag was trending. And I'm trying to remember, because this was prior to George Floyd. But there was some - I mean, a year has not gone by when there has not been a shooting of some sort, right? To be clear, of a black person by white police. And so there was definitely a shooting that occurred during my time that sparked protests on campus. Also Trump. Yeah, that whole thing! That whole thing. Yeah. So Trump was president while I was on campus, as well. And so there was definitely - also the Multicultural Center was announced while I was on campus, so. And I don't, I'm not an expert on this history, someone can probably explain this much better than me, but there's that whole - there was a whole

³ Cook Hall

⁴ Old Main, the first building on Illinois State University's campus, was constructed between 1857 and 1859. It was demolished due to structural instability a century later in 1958.

⁵ As of 2022, the Marketing & Communications department of the Division of Student Affairs is located in what is today known as Williams Hall. The building was originally constructed in 1940 to serve as the university's library. Following the opening of the current-day Milner Library in 1976, the old library was renamed Williams Hall and retrofitted for use of the business college.

tension of, there was a multicultural center, it was turned into Diversity Advocacy, and then the students were like, "No, we want a multicultural center!," and so then they went back and now there is one. But that was an announcement that was made kind of tangential to or related to the Bone Student Center expansion, so when that was kind of announced, that was another thing they sort of said was, "And we're going to be, you know, moving towards a Multicultural Center space." And also they knocked down that residence hall that was across the street from campus rec [Student Fitness Center] while I was on campus. I don't know what it was called.⁶ I know a lot of people who've gone to ISU felt very attached to that place. I've had conversations actually with folks I work with now who either lived there or knew people who lived there, and so that was interesting to - I got to physically kind of watch that whole space get transformed over time. So that was perhaps historic in a way I probably don't even fully understand. But -

Ryan Cox 38:24

Yeah, so I guess piggybacking off of what you were saying about diversity - talking about you specifically, what was it like as a queer woman attending ISU?

Paige Buschman 38:37

The grad programs kind of keep you separate from the larger campus in some ways and so I think that my answer would be very different if I was a four-year undergrad. Because I, and I think this is notable, like, as a grad student, it was kind of uncomfortable for me because I didn't quite know where to go. I didn't want to join, like, the student Pride RSO [Registered Student Organization] because I felt too old. I kind of, like, I didn't want to encroach on their space, because also as someone in the CSPA program, I, like, personally knew their advisor. So I was, like, good friends with the person that was kind of supposed to be leading their organization rather than feeling like I could be a beneficiary of that space as a member, if that makes sense. And so there was an LGBTQ+, like, faculty/staff group. I don't think it was even the Queer Coalition, though. I think it was called something else.⁷ But it was very clearly more, I think, for faculty/staff, and I didn't quite identify with that either because I was certainly not a faculty [member]. And then the staff piece was kind of, I mean, yes, I was certainly a staff member, but, again, as a graduate student, you sort of have this weird dual identity, so I didn't quite feel like I fit in either those spaces. So it was actually like really difficult for me to find queer community. Now I know that the Queer Coalition kind of makes an effort to, you know, make it clear to graduate assistants that they have a space there. My dog is looking at me goofy and I'm like [inaudible], sorry.

Ryan Cox 40:31

That's okay!

⁶ The Atkin-Colby and Hamilton-Whitten residence halls, as well as the attached Feeney Dining Center, were demolished in 2016.

⁷ Triangle Association, Illinois State University's first sponsored affinity group for gender and sexual minority faculty/staff was established in 1996. Following a period of low activity in the late 2010s, the group relaunched itself as Queer Coalition in early 2021. Queer Coalition welcomes graduate student members as well as ISU staff, faculty, and emeriti.

Paige Buschman 40:31

[inaudible] edit that out. Maybe not. It's the true reality. Yeah, I'm working from home. Anyway. Yeah, so. So what? So yeah, it was really difficult to find queer community. I actually tried to, like, create my own within the cohort, because actually our cohorts in CSPA are super diverse. That is one of the reasons I actually went into Student Affairs, was because it was clear to me that there was a lot of diversity in that field and I wanted to be a part of that, which I think is actually true of nonprofit work in general compared to I think, like, the corporate sector, especially, you know, STEM, which tends to be very white, masculine oriented. And so I tried to kind of start this group of students within CSPA and I called it the CSP-Gay, which was terribly named, but it is what [it is]. I was trying to make it catchy, and I like, invited people over for, like, brunch one time, and that worked out. But then any time after that I tried to do anything, it was sort of like, "Oh, I'm too busy," or "I'll be out of town that weekend," or, "Oh, I can't do that," right? So it was like, it was difficult for - we were busy. I mean, as I've discussed, we were busy and it was hard to find time for that kind of thing. So really, I just kind of, you know, created close relationships with the queer people in my cohort that were, like, down to be my friend all the time. And I'm still friends with those people and that was great. But yeah, it was definitely a huge change for me coming from Pride at Wesleyan, where I was the literal president and I was constantly surrounded by queer people constantly doing, like, LGBTQ+ advocacy stuff. I was planning the drag show, I was like, in it, and then to kind of just sort of like full stop from that is actually one of the reasons also I got involved in the Pride Alumni community at Wesleyan because I wanted to keep doing something with my queer community and ISU certainly was not serving that for me because of, I think, where I fell in the institution.

Ryan Cox 42:41

Sure, yeah. So I think you kind of briefly mentioned some of it, but maybe you could talk a bit about your education itself. As a grad student, maybe there were some professors that made an impact on you?

Paige Buschman 42:58

Yeah, Phyllis McCluskey-Titus. Shout out to her. She's the bomb. She's actually retiring this year, so truly an icon. She actually has been, what is it, recognized by NASPA, [National Association of Student Personnel Administrators] which is a student affairs, like, higher ed affiliation, like a group, like an organization. And so she built this program into what it is now, the CSPA program. And yeah, like I said, a true icon, and just a great mentor really for people looking to do this work. And I'm super sad that she - that people will miss out on the opportunity to continue, you know, to work with her in that way. But Dr. Gavin Weiser has taken over for Dr. Phyllis as kind of the program director. And I think that Gavin is going to move it in the direction that it should go in terms of focusing on social justice and diversity in an even more intentional way. And we are close as well, Dr. Gavin and I, so that's great. I only got to take one of his classes, but that's beyond the point because I think we have a really good professional relationship. And so I think beyond that, I took a couple of courses, so I took an undergrad course for graduate credit with Dr. Julie Webber, in the department of politics, and she is something special. I love her, big fan and really enjoyed taking her class. Who else? Dr. Palmer, who also worked in the College of Education was wonderful. He has also retired. But I really enjoyed taking his class, he taught the history of higher ed, which is, even for people who aren't, you know, as deep into it as someone like me, that class is super worth taking, even if you're

tangentially interested in higher ed as a system. And I think that's about it for like, professors who super impacted me positively. I had a super negative experience with one of my professors. She taught law, higher ed law and she was definitely a sexual violence apologist, which is scary considering the law part. I waged formal complaints about her, I believe she still actually teaches here, but I know that's not because the people in the department want her to, it's because you have a contract. You know, tenure is a powerful thing. So yeah.

Ryan Cox 45:59

Gotcha. So after your two years, after you've graduated, how did you find a career? Because I know you say you still work with the university. Was that pretty much immediate, or - ?

Paige Buschman 46:13

No, no. Yeah. So I mentioned my partner Travis, he is from Washburn, which is tiny, like 1200 people, town northwest of Bloomington, and just slightly northeast of Peoria by about 30 minutes for Peoria about 45 for Bloomington. And so when I met him, I was like, I met him right before I started graduate school. And I was like, "I'm getting out of here. I'm doing graduate school so I can get out of here. I'm done with Illinois. I want to do something different." And so he's like, "Yeah, for sure." And so we dated the two years I was in grad school and then by the time I got out, he's like, "I'm not really ready to, like, move and stuff." And I'm like, "Okay, well, I guess if I can find a job, you know, I'll stay for a little bit."

(47:06) And so I applied to a bunch of positions between Bloomington and Peoria, actually more Peoria, just because ICC [Illinois Central College] and Bradley had a lot of openings at the time. So I applied to several different positions. I did also apply to one job at ISU that I really wanted in Health Promotion and Wellness, doing prevention, sexual violence prevention, education, and like, as you can imagine, kind of like totally my thing, but I didn't get it. And I applied to a couple jobs, I applied to, like, a financial aid job at Bradley and they literally told me at the end of that interview that they thought I was too good for the position and then they didn't give it to me. And I was like, okay, but like, I [inaudible] applied? Like, just, that's so sad. So I applied for a job - like, yeah, right? Like, so strange. So I applied for a job at ICC that was supposed to be in career services. It was supposed to be, like, research-oriented, doing reports on community - well, more so, like, workforce development-related stuff, so, you know, a lot of remedial programming or, like, you know, how to build up the workforce, because, again, talking about different styles of institutions of higher ed, places like Wesleyan and ISU aren't necessarily focused on getting someone the career skills to do something like CNC machining, or like, you know, they're not - it's not technical education. That has always fallen upon, you know, higher - or, excuse me, community college institutions of higher ed, rather than, you know, these kind of, like, state and private schools, so, universities, if you will. So yeah, I was kind of involved in that.

(48:45) I got that job. I didn't think I was gonna get it, but I did. It paid me what I felt at the time was good, which I slowly, more I quickly learned, was probably less than I was worth. But I enjoyed it. I got to work with clients really hands on, we served both the public and the student population. So I was working with all sorts of different kinds of diverse people trying to get jobs. So helping them do their resume, helping them write cover letters,

helping them apply for jobs, in some cases, helping them find jobs, managing, kind of, job posting sites, that kind of stuff.

(49:25) And then they also asked me if I wanted to teach after my first semester, like, "You want to teach this career development class? You can," - because I had a master's degree, so I was technically eligible to teach - and I was like, "I guess!" So I got to teach a class. It was a GED Bridge Program. So people that had their GED and we're trying to help them bridge to college. It's kind of like a course to get them prepared for that, so it helps them increase their math scores and reading scores that they place into less remedial level courses, because that's a huge waste of time for adult learners. When they need to go back to school but they have to pay to take zero credit hour classes, so they're not even getting credit but they have to bump their scores so they take these classes and they have to pay for them. And it kind of sucks because, like, you feel like you're starting at a major deficit, both financially and credit-wise, in your knowledge, and then you're, like, trying to go on through - it's just, it's difficult. So we were able, through a grant, to pay the student to be in class. So they got paid \$10 an hour to attend class for eight hours a day for like 12 weeks, I think it was, so a couple of months. And then they were - the idea was that we would hope they would bridge into our programs at ICC. And so I was the career development person, I had them take tests and write papers and journal about their career pathway and try to decide on a program that would be beneficial for them, or if not us, you know, somewhere else, because that was supposed to be the real - I mean, yes, obviously, we'd like to funnel them into our own programs, but if not possible, it's really about student success.

(51:06) So, that was great. It was a wonderful experience for me. It was definitely challenging. I'm, you know, a 27-year-old white woman, and I was working with a population that was older than me by 20 years in many cases, not all, but on average, probably at least 10 years. Many, about half of my students, were previously or currently incarcerated, like in a halfway house situation, or had just recently been released from some kind of institution. So that was a huge barrier to service. So yeah, it was, like, really difficult. Really kind of, like, emotionally draining sometimes, because I wanted so badly to help these people and there were just things I couldn't control that made that difficult. And I think it was only like a 15 to 20% actual bridge rate. So only, you know, a couple of my students even actually enrolled in courses after the program. So it just felt kind of like, "Eh." And then there was just a lot of administrative problems there too.

Paige Buschman 52:10

So I ended up leaving in order to take this job at ISU, which is kind of like a hard left turn from what I was doing Career Services because now I'm working with graduate students. So instead of working with, you know, people who don't even have college experience at all and trying to get them, you know, into that or working with people who, we're really not talking about their education, we're talking about their career output. I'm, like, working now with graduate students in community and economic development. So there are people who not only have bachelor's degrees, but have 1700 hours of some sort of community engagement work, so they've either done the Peace Corps, they've gone through an AmeriCorps program, or they've done some sort of other social service program full time for at least a year after graduating from bachelor. And they're going - they're interested in going out there and doing, you know, hard-hitting policy work or direct service in some cases. But I mean, these are people who, I mean, we have senators, you know, who have come out of our program, you know, people who are really interested in making change in the world, and they aren't experiencing these barriers, or if they are or have,

they're certainly not letting that stop them and they are seeking to eliminate those barriers for other people. And that's like, that's the -

Ryan Cox 53:28

So you're working with people who are in, who were, I guess, in the same program as you?

Paige Buschman 53:34

In some ways, yeah. I mean, not the same, so not CSPA.

Ryan Cox 53:38

I see.

Paige Buschman 53:39

So, yes, but actually, our programs are very similarly structured, which really helps from a recruitment standpoint, because I do recruitment, advising, I facilitate an internship placement process for the students. So I do all sorts of stuff as it relates to student support, and our programs are structured in a way that they're both free. So tuition waivers are involved, those tuition waivers are gotten by the same means. So it's a graduate assistantship. In my case, I was doing, like, a Student Services graduate assistantship. In the case of my students now, they are TAs, so they're working as teaching assistants or research assistants directly with a faculty member. So I didn't do that. And our students don't do that at CSPA because it's a much more applied program, which is - their first year is very academic in our program and their second year is a full-time intern. So 35 hours a week for 11 months, they do an internship, and they do it with a community economic development organization which I recruit and then there's a whole contracting phase and they get paid, like, double what they get paid in their assistantship almost. So yeah, they make reasonable money. I mean, it's not as much as they're going to make when they get out of the program, which is the point. Their trajectory, financially, is great, usually. I mean, if you're going into nonprofit work you may choose to take that hit, but a lot of them, you know, end up in nonprofit sometimes, but also they do consulting work. They're doing, you know, grant writing, they're research-oriented folks. Yeah, it's great. So not the same program, but a lot of the same work. And I'm still kind of, like, keep involved with CSPA. I still try to, like, talk to students who are interested in CSPA, be available as an alum for that program as much as possible as well. But -

Ryan Cox 55:24

How long have you been doing that?

Paige Buschman 55:26

So, just a year, literally just hit my one year mark.

Ryan Cox 55:29

Wow. Okay.

Paige Buschman 55:30

Last week, I think so. Yeah, I'm loving it.

Ryan Cox 55:35

Yeah, it sounds like you can give back in a way, which I think is really valuable.

Paige Buschman 55:40

Yeah, and in a way, I don't feel like I was really actually accomplishing [much] in my last job. I definitely felt like I was supporting students and I definitely felt like there was a level of giving back happening, but not really, like, in the same way as now. I feel like I'm truly giving back in a much larger sense, really, the service-oriented piece of it. I mean, almost all of my time is spent trying to make this program better for our students and trying to support them in whatever ways I possibly can. And just like, really, yeah, it's just very much more service-oriented. And, I mean, if I'm being real, I'm kind of an anti-capitalist so it was very difficult for me to, like, sit in front of these students in my old job and say, like, "So here's how you have to change yourself in order to look attractive to an employer so that they can exploit you for your, you know, labor." It was like very difficult for me to do that! In this job, I don't have to do that. It's very much like, these people want to do this work, this work is benefiting so many people beyond them. It's just so much more about service and I'm still getting to employ some of those skills of, like, here's how you interview well, here's how you communicate your vision, here's how you talk about your skill set. So I can still do that. But it's, like, not for means of being exploited, unfortunately, it's for, like, the opportunity to get to improve thousands of people's lives. I mean, it's lovely.

Ryan Cox 57:07

Yeah! It must feel great being able to, like, teach efficacy and also help people to, you know, give back, you know.

Paige Buschman 57:17

Definitely, right. Because it's, that's the thing, it feels like my impact is multiplied by the impact that my students are making.

Ryan Cox 57:23

Yeah.

Paige Buschman 57:23

So, you know, I can do this work here, [in] kind of an administrative way to facilitate their education so that they can go out and do the big work, because I don't know that I have - first of all, I don't have the skills. And second of all, I don't know that I have the capacity to do something like, you know, go to Washington, D.C. and lobby. I'm, like, I don't know if I want to do that. I don't know if I want to write, you know, grants, I don't know if I want to, like, do data management, and, like, develop these reports that help policymakers understand the state of criminal justice in Illinois. Like, I don't know if I want to do that. But I would love to help other people get to that place and do that and that's what I get to do so it's fantastic.

Ryan Cox 58:02

Sure. Well, I'm glad you get to do that. I will say, though, we're getting towards the end of our time here. So to wrap things up, I'll just ask one last question. What do you find most valuable about your time at Illinois State?

Paige Buschman 58:17

I think that I found the connections I built probably the most valuable. I mean, it's, like, ultimately helped my career get to where it is right now. And I think beyond that, just the experience of getting my education and not only getting it, but that's the thing about the CSPA program that I really appreciate is I got to not only understand the theory, but because it's an applied program, it's theory to practice. So it's like, "Here, let's learn the thing but let's also use it." And like, they were very intentional about making sure that we did that, that we, you know, found ways to connect what we were doing in the classroom to what we were doing in our work. And it was just invaluable, because I would not be able to have, I would not have been able to go out and seek a job in the workforce and have the amount of experience that I had, the actual experience that I had, without a program that created a lot of space for practicums, the GA, and that kind of thing. So I think that was incredibly, incredibly valuable as well. And also just getting to see a different institution style was like very valuable to me and kind of being able to understand my place in that. You know, before, I always thought: "I'm going to stay in small [private universities]." I really liked the tiny school feel. And coming to ISU, which is not the biggest of the big, you know? It's not 60,000 people, right? I think that would be a lot, even 40 would be a lot, you know. 20,000 students is great. It's a nice amount of people where you can feel like you're part of the community, but not really feel like it's so big, you know, that you, you can't get involved but also - and again, also not have any privacy. Wesleyan was difficult that way. So ISU has given me a lot, and now they're employing me.

Ryan Cox 1:00:09

Yeah.

Paige Buschman 1:00:09

So shout out to them. Like I said, I do appreciate that they care about their alum in that way, too. So, yeah!

Ryan Cox 1:00:16

Awesome! Well, thanks for your time.

Paige Buschman 1:00:20

Yeah, thanks for yours. Yeah, sure. I talked a lot. I bet you I - yeah, I was gonna say, I can't believe it's only been an hour.

Ryan Cox 1:00:28

Oh, yeah. It's fine. We want to hear your perspective so we can't thank you enough for that.

Paige Buschman 1:00:32

Yeah. Thank you. And thanks for doing this. This is a really cool project. And I'm sure you're hearing a lot and I think the greater community will benefit from having this kind of record.