

Podcast 1 part 2 Cat and Shelby

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SPEAKERS

Cat, Shelby

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- S** Shelby 00:04
Hi, I'm Shelby,
 - C** Cat 00:07
And I'm Cat.
 - S** Shelby 00:07
And you're listening to the Illinois Graduate College Podcast.
 - C** Cat 00:10
Where we cover topics related to higher education and offer insight and resources to help you be your best and succeed in graduate school at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.
 - S** Shelby 00:19
In this first episode, we are just like to introduce ourselves and discuss our graduate school experience with you.

- C** Cat 00:24
We are members of sage students advising undergraduate education, which enriches our graduate student community builds leadership skills and strengthens graduate college services and programs.
- S** Shelby 00:34
We would like to thank you for listening, and let's get right into it. So Cat, could you start with introducing yourself?
- C** Cat 00:40
So, again Hi my name is Cat, my pronouns are she/her. I'm a third year PhD student and experimental condensed matter physics. And I do know more about astrology than I do about astronomy.
- S** Shelby 00:58
I bet people ask you about that a lot.
- C** Cat 01:01
Not really, but that just kind of a funny thing is I've spent, I don't know how many years in physics now. When people think of like rockets and I've never taken a astronomy course in my life but I do know my sun sign so at least I have that.
- S** Shelby 01:14
I am Shelby, I go by she/her/ hers. I study kinesiology, I'm a second year PhD student. I cannot write you a diet plan or a fitness plan. I especially cannot prescribe you medicine. But I take adolescents and assess their physical activity and how that affects their cognitive function.
- C** Cat 01:38
Nice so what made you go into your field Shelby?

S

Shelby 01:41

So, studying health has always been something I've been interested in. I grew up wanting to go to medical school. I went to undergrad thinking, I would go to medical school. I started doing research in a lab just to build my resume. And I ended up liking that environment, a lot better than the medical world environment, so I decided to switch my focus to research but still study, you know, health, wellness, stuff like that so I decided that I would pursue a PhD and do research, and you know I come from a family where we have, you know, a lot of health issues heart disease, diabetes, runs in my family. And so, it's certainly a personal thing for me as well. I grew up doing sports at a gymnastics and cheerleading, and so I'm very familiar with exercise and physical activity. So I kind of just blending, you know, my love of sports, my, you know, wanting and need to help people. And that's kind of how I ended up studying, you know, kinesiology, physical activity, and stuff like that. So what what about physics reveals you into that world?

C

Cat 03:08

So, the way I kind of got started was similar to you, where I worked in a lab, because I saw some cool equipment in the hallway of my physics and engineering building an undergrad at the time, I was a civil engineering major. But I was like wow that looks cool and I emailed the professor and asked him if I could help him with it. And he said yes and he got me into his lab for that summer. But for me that was kind of just like a fun side job like physics wasn't really what I was going to do. I was going to be an engineer, it's what I was going to school for. So at the end of that summer I left. And a couple months after that so for the next summer I was applying for engineering internships, which was a typical thing in my program. So at the end of your third year, which was at that point for me. I was applying and I think I applied to about 14 firms, around the city and didn't receive a single offer. So unfortunately I didn't have a job for that summer, and I didn't really know what else to do, so I kind of came crawling belly up to that old physics professor and asked, "Can you please pay me for the summer?" Because I was thinking this is just going to be a part time job type thing. And then as time wore on that semester towards my finals week of that year I realized that I didn't want to do engineering, I kind of couldn't see myself doing that and physics was my passion, all along. I continued to work in a lab that summer and I ended up adding physics as my major because that was at the end of my third year, which was a little bit too late to switch, a major I wouldn't recommend that but that's how life goes. So I finish, both the degrees and then ended up full time in physics now.

S

Shelby 04:54

And then like, could you kind of speak on your area of physics? Because I don't know I guess I hear physics and I think Rocket Ships.



but I



Cat 05:06

So I specifically do condensed matter physics. And that's one of the reasons why I chose Illinois, but it's kind of like material science is a closed category that some people might know, so I really look at materials, how they behave and some people in my subfield will make devices so stuff that goes into your cell phone and into your computer or will in the future.



Shelby 05:27

So for grad school, is that some, a route that you kind of have to go to be, to like for the career that you're interested in, or did you choose grad school for a certain reason? Outside of that?



Cat 05:38

Right so for physics I don't know how it is for kinesiology. You kind of have to have a PhD in physics to do physics, so you can definitely get a job after you graduate with a bachelor's but you won't necessarily be doing physics so do something technical, but to actually do physics physics, you have to get a PhD, which is why I'm here. Not sure is that the same case for kinesiology?



Shelby 06:00

um, Kinesiology is very very broad, and I came from an even broader, so my undergrad degrees in human nutrition foods and exercise, so you kind of dip your toes in a little bit of everything but any degree within that realm, so nutrition or exercise or kinase or something like that, you have a wide range of options, they all of those things set you up pretty well for like physical therapy school nursing school medical school, you know, you might have to take a few extra classes here and there but normally that's the route that people go is one of those like professional schools, physical therapy is very common among kinesiology students, for me, I was interested in doing research, and to do research you kind of had to stay in graduate school, get a PhD, I'm interested in you know one day having my own lab and doing my own research. And so that's kind of why I chose to stay

in graduate school, because I really like school. And, you know, sometimes people ask me this question and I kind of joke I'm like well I don't know what else I would do. So, you know I like the academic environment I guess so that's why I chose graduate school.

C Cat 07:12

Even though we have very different fields it's I guess a really similar situation, remember, I was kind of freaking out before coming to grad school and I was talking to my mom, and she was like, "Well, what else would you be doing right now? You'd still be doing physics. Just go there and do physics like what's the big deal?"

S Shelby 07:28

So I think that, you know, grad school is definitely something where, if you're in it, you definitely want to be here, you know like, everyone chooses to go to grad school because they really love what they do. Well I hope everyone chooses that I should have put everyone in one category. I hope that people are choosing grad school because they love what they do and they want to, you know, take a deeper dive in that and that's what I decided to do so.

C Cat 07:55

Right. So now let's take a break to say something about graduate college highs and lows.

S Shelby 08:00

Where we talk about our highest and lowest points in graduate school and reflect on how we got past our lowest points and learn how to reach our potential and achieve our highest points in grad school.

C Cat 08:15

So, Shelby could you give us your high-low?

S Shelby 08:18

Yes. So, I'll start with my low, so we can you know get better from there, go up from there. So, I started graduate school. Summer of 2019, and then a few months later, COVID hit. And so when COVID hit that wasn't technically my low yet. It wasn't until later maybe like May when we found out that we could not do a physical activity summer youth program

that we were working on for particularly targeting children of lower socioeconomic status, so that was a low that was very disappointing because I was really excited to do that and you know give back to the community, but a high came from that. So, because of COVID we couldn't do that. We found out later, when the fall semester started that we could do a virtual version of that summer program, so we were still able to provide those kids with some sort of engaging activities that taught them about health and wellness. And, you know, taking care of yourself, we'd focus on stress and sleep and physical activity and so, social emotional learning. So that was really exciting that we were able to put something together virtually that they could just go online, they got tutoring sessions from undergrad students on campus and that was you know really exciting and I'm glad that we were able to give back to the community, even, you know, during these hard times I know that a lot of the families really appreciated that. So those are my highs and lows so far.



Cat 10:00

It sounds like something that everyone needs these days, especially kids probably.



Shelby 10:05

And so what about your highs and lows?



Cat 10:07

So I'm gonna do the reverse of you unfortunately with my high coming first then my low. So those came in very rapid succession for me so last fall sort of in the fall of my second year of grad school is fellowship application season, or at least it is for physics, I worked really hard on this I've spent like six eight weeks I submitted to my department for a pre competition, I sent it to previous like fellowship awardees. I went to the graduate college Office of External fellowships and had some of the people there read it for me and give me advice, and then I sat there and waited, and four or five months later it was right in the middle of quarantine I think it was the first week of April, so not super great feeling in the world, but I got an email from the NSF, and I opened it first thing in the morning, and the first lines first words are, "We are pleased to inform you that..." and I just like that was it, I was like I did it all that time I said work to paid off. This is the high of my grad school, and then the rest of the sentence is, "...that you will make an honorable mention in the competition." And that was my low. It's still a very good honor obviously I spent a lot of time got to use graduate school resources got to understand my research better, learn how to write a proposal, but a little bit of a crushing blow in the wording of that rejection letter. NSF if you hear this please reword your emails.

S

Shelby 11:42

You know, that's always, you know, applying for anything is always a good learning experience, especially in graduate school because you go through all these ups and downs and, you know, back and forth with your advisor about like what sounds good and what should be included and what's not and it feels really good to turn it in and then it doesn't feel so good when you're rejected, but, you know, now you have, you know, all these documents that you can use later maybe for another application or something like that so oh yeah absolutely always recycling and scavenging other things. Yeah.

C

Cat 12:18

Okay so, Shelby, Why did you choose Illinois for grad school specifically?

S

Shelby 12:22

Doing kinesiology work on children is difficult. And it's not very common. And so to find not only a lab but an advisor, that was just as passionate about working with kids as I was was just so exciting. And so I just, you know, I left my visit, and I was falling back to Boston and I was just thinking, what would happen if I said no to coming here and I just was thinking, I will miss out on so many opportunities and I just would not be able to like sit with myself if I chose another school you know and I had one other option for another school in a different state and you know it was a great opportunity but I just could not say no to University of Illinois so that's why I'm here today.

C

Cat 13:12

Finding the advisor that fits is I think such an important part of grad school because that's like, that'll make or break you and your career in grad school so that's great. So, I am for me one thing that's really unique to Illinois, is how collaborative it is. So a lot of the professor's work together, doing joint PhDs in two groups is really common, and also the graduate students that just want to help each other. I don't know if that's the case and other programs but there's absolutely none of that like cutthroat stuff here like there's a hallway of first year offices, and everyone just hangs out in there and they work on their homework and you can go grab coffee and go grab lunch with people so just the the environment because you really don't need any more extra stress in grad school having that support system was just...I would never go anywhere else.

S

Shelby 14:00

I totally agree I mean the kinesiology department is the same exact same way I mean, the amount of collaboration that is also something that really drew me in to University of Illinois was that, you know, I was not going to be advised by one person, right, I'm going to have my main advisor, but because there's so much collaboration, you know, you're working with so many different people in to speak on you know the size of the program. That just talks about, or that just shows how much opportunity there is, you know, to work with all different types of people different areas can easy all day is the exact same way. Last year, I believe it was ranked number one the kinesiology PhD program was ranked number one at University of Illinois and the amount of work that comes out of University of Illinois, you know just speaks for itself in terms of like you know what you can do here. So, yeah, totally agree. So speaking of work and collaborating and opportunity, where are you at right now in your research so like in your third year so you know are you coming to an end? Do you still have some more time to go?

C

Cat 15:04

Right yeah so I'm a third year, my program is a straight to PhD so I don't have a Master's I came straight from undergrad. So because of that it takes a bit longer so, I think, on average, it's six to seven years experimental people tend to take closer to seven so I'm kind of like smack in the middle, in the thick of it. But so the last fall. So fall of 2020 was the first semester that I didn't take courses and I was able to really get my hands dirty with my research dive in there start coming up with a project that will be my prelim coming up in the next year so that's where I'm at. So you already have your master's does that put you further ahead in two years or are you...How are you doing?

S

Shelby 15:52

I don't. As of right now I don't stink, COVID has pushed me back. Because like working with human subjects during COVID is pretty difficult. I don't know if anyone could guess but I've slowed down quite a bit. The main project that I was interested in when I came here was the summer physical activity program that got cancelled. And then this year we're not really sure if it's going to be online or in person yet and obviously, for my benefit for studying physical activity, it would be great for it to be in person. So we will see where I'm at in my research, you know, throughout this podcast I will keep you guys updated in terms of where I'm at, we'll see. We will see that's what I have learned throughout. Honestly, COVID has really made me learn it. But even before COVID grad school just in general it's kind of just like, we'll see what happens, you know, set of things gets in the way. My old advisor used to just look at me and be like, Oh, well, you know, you never know. You know I'm sure that, well I actually am not sure, but if physics experiments tend to not always go your way and, you know, start over.

- C** Cat 17:08
Oh yeah, that's so my advisor in my group the saying is if everything worked right the first time a PhD would take six months but it doesn't take six years. Yeah, absolutely.
- S** Shelby 17:21
Research all around just expect the data to be one way and then it ends up being in our way and you're like, Oh, okay. How to problem solve.
- C** Cat 17:32
Well I think we reached a good point to end our conversation for now.
- S** Shelby 17:36
Again, we would like to thank you for listening and please be on the lookout for more graduate college podcasts in the future, on our website@grad.illinois.edu, and until next time I'm Shelby.
- C** Cat 17:47
And I'm Cat, and you just listened to the Graduate College Podcast.