

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Samantha Bishop Simmons Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Simmons, Samantha

Interviewer Name: Dodson, Reed

Date of Interview: 04/13/2022

Location of Interview: Lawrence, Kansas (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

RD = Reed Dodson

SS = Samantha Simmons

RA = Resident Assistant

KU = University of Kansas

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

ACT = American College Testing

HCIS = Honors College Information System

LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer

R1 = Doctoral University- Very high research activity

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Samantha Simmons conducted by Reed Dodson on April 4, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

RD [Reed Dodson] [00:00:02] [Audio Cut] Reed Dodson with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is April 13th, 2022, and I am interviewing Samantha Simmons, who is—Where are you at right now?

SS [Samantha Simmons] [00:00:14] I'm in Lawrence, Kansas.

RD [00:00:16] All right. And are you in your home or in your office?

SS [00:00:19] In my home.

RD [00:00:21] Perfect. We're going to be talking about Samantha's experience leading up to, during, and after their time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

SS [00:00:34] My name is Samantha Bishop Simmons and I'm thirty six.

RD [00:00:38] Perfect. What year did you enter the Honors College?

SS [00:00:41] I entered it in 2003.

RD [00:00:45] Perfect. And when did you graduate from the honors college?

SS [00:00:47] I graduated in 2007.

RD [00:00:50] Perfect. All right. That's all in that little script section. So I guess now we can get into the actual sections. So where are you from?

SS [00:01:00] Well, I'm not really from anywhere. My parents were in the military growing up. I was born in Florida, but we lived out of the country. We've lived all across the south and southwest. I moved to Arkansas when I was in 10th grade. I lived in Cabot, which is how I started to learn more about colleges in the Arkansas area.

RD [00:01:24] So what was that like growing up with your parents in the military?

SS [00:01:29] It was pretty good. We came from a really tight knit family and we remain really close. I—It was—School was good depending on what school lottery we landed up in. I skipped first grade, so I was always a year younger than everybody in my grade. So sometimes that could make it socially difficult, just depending on my age and where we were at. But we really enjoyed it. We enjoyed going from place to place and learning new things and seeing new things and meeting new people. Arkansas was a different place than where we had ever been before. It had its positives and its negatives, but overall I liked it enough to where I wanted to stay in state and go to school there.

RD [00:02:20] So what was it about Arkansas that really just stuck with you that made you think, “this is where I'm finally staying for a period of time?”

SS [00:02:30] Yeah, well, that's a good question. I—Honestly—And I know this sounds scripted, but it's a hundred percent not. I did not have the most enjoyable high school experience. I couldn't drive as early as some other people. I wasn't allowed to date as early as some other people. But one thing

that really made a huge impact on me was [Arkansas] Governor School, which I'm not sure. Do they still have governor school?

RD [00:03:04] They do yes, I've heard of quite a few people talking about that before.

SS [00:03:07] OK. OK. So I went to Arkansas Governor School between my junior and senior year, and that had a profound impact on me. I had sort of an attitude about skipping a grade and being smart. Any time anybody wanted me to get good grades, I would not. I refused, I was sort of ornery. And when I went to governor school, that was a chance to talk with other students and faculty and high school teachers who really introduced me to the idea of inquiry for the sake of it. For having some sort of philosophical approach to life, to really considering why and how we did things in a way that I had never experienced before. It was not how my family thought of things, not what we talked about in school, and that just really lit a fire under me. I made some really great connections, made some close friends I still talk with. I even have a colleague who was my RA [Resident Assistant] while I was at governor school, who's at KU [University of Kansas] with me now. I thought, OK, well, this is great. And this is I wasn't sure if other places had stuff like that, but at that point I was like, "I definitely want to go to school here and continue this conversation that I had while I was at governor school."

RD [00:04:25] What was it that pointed you towards UCA [University of Central Arkansas]?

SS [00:04:29] Well, I was the first person in my family to go to college, so it was really just-[laughs]-Well, it was the honors college who recruited me, and I'm so glad they did, because in retrospect, I did college all wrong, so I did very well on my ACT [American College Testing]. I got a thirty five or something like that, and that's a good thing because I didn't realize you had to apply

to colleges. So my senior year, I just started getting recruitment materials from area colleges, and I got a brochure from the honors college and an invitation from the honors college to go have a chat with Scott. He was doing a lot of the recruitment at that time. That—I just I was totally won over one hundred percent won over by Rick, won over by the school, won over by the experience. I'm lucky enough that the first thing Rick said when I came in is—"everybody" –because it was a group it wasn't just me, it was a group of students. He was like, "You're all already accepted." What we're trying to do is win you over at this point. And I was like, "Ooo, okay, fancy." I haven't even applied to any colleges, so I guess I'm glad that they're inviting me in. So, yeah.

RD [00:05:50] [Unclear] gonna move that before I kick it again. Let's see. So your major was English, right?

SS [00:05:59] Yes.

RD [00:06:01] What was it that what you wanted to major in when you were coming in?

SS [00:06:05] Absolutely. Absolutely. I have known my entire life that I wanted to do something in English, and sometimes I played around with wanting to be a high school teacher or librarian or a professor or a published writer. But definitely English. And I remember sitting through my English lit [literature] one class with Dr. Anderson with this big, crazy grin on my face [laughs] because I was just so excited that people were talking about things that I just used to look up for fun. So that had always been my major, and I stuck with that all through grad [graduate] school too.

RD [00:06:43] Alright, I'm glad to hear that. So how was moving into UCA? How was—I'm gonna get this. So how was the move to UCA? Was the adjustment to college life difficult?

SS [00:07:04] Oh, it wasn't, really. I will say that the Honors College has, and from what I hear from my sister who went a decade later, it stayed the same. They're very nurturing. They consider students family. We got to visit with our assigned roommates ahead of time, so I knew who mine was. Now I was only seventeen when I started because I had skipped a grade, and I didn't have a driver's license so I was pretty youngish. But my parents only live forty five minutes away, which I thought was the perfect amount of distance to get them out of my hair. [Laughs] But not be so far away.

And I really threw myself into honors had all of these meet and greets, and so did UCA in general. I promptly joined The Young Democrats and went to all of these clubs. And since I didn't have a driver's license and didn't really know anybody, I just did all of my homework all the time my first year. And that kept me pretty busy. I had nothing else to do at that point. Didn't know very many people, some governor school friends. It was a little bit difficult on my parents. My mom used to call to see if I was asleep at 10:00pm and I'd be like, "Really, you have to chill." But I always did like it. I feel I went through my sort of homesick phase when I was at governor school because it was six weeks residential at—What is the school? Hardin? No. The other school that's in Conway, the private one.

RD [00:08:39] I'm trying to think.

SS [00:08:41] I forget— [Crosstalk]

RD [00:08:42] [Crosstalk] I feel like like I should— I feel I should know one hundred percent.

SS [00:08:46] Well, anyway, I had had that sort of a way from home thing, so I really did adopt the honors college as my family at that point.

RD [00:08:56] Right? Did you get to meet Norb that very much at that point or was he already kind of moving out of the teaching game?

SS [00:09:04] He was still teaching? He was definitely still offering classes, and he did—I'm not sure how it's structured now, but at the time your first year—your first year and maybe second year, I can't remember. Definitely your first year, you had your teacher, but then you have these large lectures that weekend and Norb gave quite a—But Norb and Donna and some of the others, but they were the main ones who gave talks then. So Norb gave his big like, “where is the self located?” Talk that he's sort of known for the first day of class. So I—And he was around quite a bit. This is before he started having any diagnosed health issues, and we would go on the retreat. He went on the retreat with us, and he was often around as you remain most of his life. Just sort of puttering around, chatting with people.

RD [00:09:58] That's good to hear. I think—Do you still remember where the self is located?

SS [00:10:05] I remember where it wasn't because everybody would throw their hands up because we're all these overachievers from our high school, right? And we'd be like, “It is in the soul. It is in the cerebral cortex. It's in this. It's in that.” And I think that the point was that it was sort of at the end, it was sort of like, “It's a constructed identity. And here's all of these readings about existentialism and other—here's some **Wendell Berry** and here's where your where your place lives, where your family is. All of this is this construction of a self.” And we were like, “Woah, [laughs] very mind blowing to seventeen year olds.”

RD [00:10:52] I think I saw in the form that your core one and core two instructor was Allison, right?

SS [00:10:58] Yes.

RD [00:10:58] How was your experience in her classes?

SS [00:11:01] It was good. And I was sort of naughty, so I'm glad that Allison was such a good teacher. Like I said, and I sort of started getting over it by the time I was a freshman, certainly by as a sophomore, but I was sort of like, "I'm too smart and good for this", and I used to be sort of annoying and not pay attention, and Allison brooked none of that nonsense. She definitely told me to stop. But Allison, is she still teaching?

RD [00:11:27] Yes, she is.

SS [00:11:28] So Allison is very environmentally centered and she is very interested. She had just come out with a book about the language of bees around the time that I was with her. So I feel like it really impacted some of the ways that I continue to think about place in the environment, especially as we talk more about local movements, and the climate crisis in that kind of thing.

We sort of butted heads at the beginning, but I do think in retrospect that that is because she had an expectation of behavior that I think was really important for me as a scholar. So by the time I had her again, I was excited and I was like, "Yes, this is a person who has intellectual regard for her students. She does not treat them like they're in high school anymore." So I really like that and I

really liked her, and she was really fond of the student who ended up becoming my husband. So we were always– [Crosstalk]

RD [00:12:27] [Crosstalk] Oh! [Crosstalk]

SS [00:12:28] [Crosstalk] coming after that.

RD [00:12:31] All right. Let's see. Do you remember any of the syllabus readings, if any of them stuck out to you?

SS [00:12:40] We had a pretty major unit on existentialism. That was the first time I had ever–We had an existentialism unit in high school where we read Sartre and Camu, and we had talked about some philosophy when we were in governor school, but this is the first time that we really did a unit that made us kind of define what our values were independently.

A lot of people when they're coming into college necessarily this is their first time on their own for the most part. Their sense of self is constructed by their parents, by their school, by their church, by their–whoever they're dating or whoever they're not dating, what clubs they're in. When you start to talk about what your values are, it's very difficult to parse out where you stand on those individually. And so at that point. When–I took it very seriously because I thought that this was worth engaging in for the sake of engagement, not for–not just for a grade. This was really dismantling piece by piece what we believed and why we defined our values the way that we did.

And Norb was a process theologian and talked quite a bit about process theology. And I'm not religious, so this was not something that ever impacted me personally. But I remember that being a

really transformative and important way of thinking about the role of religion and in an intellectual life without discarding it necessarily. But also to question it that was all me and my friends talked about for a semester. So moving—and Kierkegaard and moving from existentialism and trying for a lot of students who were in a largely—who were in a part of the country where religion is such a dominant part of identity that was such—and they handled it so well, they were never dismissive of people who came in and were like, “only the Bible” or “I hate the Bible.” I mean people, “I’m only for [unclear], people who believe in religion are stupid.” They would handle that with such grace and with such respect for us working through those ideas, that has continued to stick with me. I remember those readings like that was last semester.

RD [00:15:09] Did any other professors? Do you have any other professors that stuck out to you, like Allison or anything?

SS [00:15:17] Yeah, I was thinking about some of the classes I took when I was sort of trying to remember what the heck I did. I never had any classes with Donna. But Donna was always somebody who I felt did a really wonderful job of building a sense of community. She was one of the main people that I felt like made the honors college feel like a family. And she was very active in some of those Core I and Core II groups and just hugely pregnant at the time, too, With somebody who just graduated from high school my god.

I always really admired Donna, even though I never end up taking her classes. I did have a class with her husband, Noel Murray, who is—was and remains a critic. At the time he was with The A.V. Club, and now I see him all over. And he really impacted the way that I came to understand different kinds of media as being worthwhile, and as being in conversation about. I think I vaguely tried to do my thesis on ideas of the self and comics, but it was too big. But Noel was great, and it

was really cool to see somebody who wasn't a professional academic still engaged in this kind of discussion and critique. Because at the time I thought the only way you can talk about this stuff or think about this stuff is if you're a professor. And while Noel taught that class, he wasn't a professor. He was a professional writer and reviewer. So that was really impactful.

And I also work quite a bit with **Laura Bowles**. I think she's still there. **Laura [unsure how to spell last name]** now. She was a creative writing and science fiction person. That's mainly what we put together. I know she runs a science fiction honors alumni reading group. And I just really hit it off with her. I liked her as a writer, and I liked her as a person. But there were so many people like **Phil Frana** was there for a while, and he was great. **Philip Melton** was just a gem. Those are the—oh, and Rick. Oh, man, I had such an intellectual crush on Rick. At that point he was starting to move more into administration. He still taught I think his counter culture class, but I never took it. But I thought he was so cool. I was like, “I want to be like this guy when I grow up.” [Laughs] Yeah, those were—I think those are the main people that I interacted with time.

RD [00:17:48] Okay Do you remember who was your thesis adviser?

SS [00:17:53] Like outside of the honors college?

RD [00:17:55] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry I'm— [Crosstalk]

SS [00:17:56] [Crosstalk] Oh yeah—

RD [00:17:58] [Unclear] quickly.

SS [00:17:58] Oh, that's OK. I just for a second, I was panicked. I was like, "Oh God, no, I don't." But I had two ,sort of. I had two help me, both of whom I'm still in touch with. I had Mary Ruth Marrotte, who I think has a different last name now. She's still in the English Department. Mary Ruth Stewart? I think that's who she is now, Spencer Stewart. And Wendy Lucas of the History Department. I did—Gosh, I'm not even sure the exact topic. It was a history of feminism in like eight texts. So it was those two.

RD [00:18:33] All right. Let's see what was the decision making behind that being your thesis? What led you to that point?

SS [00:18:42] That was like my fifth thesis idea, and I asked a lot of professors to be my thesis advisors before I got to them. Not because—and I ended up bouncing around, not because the professors didn't agree. They were like, "Yeah, that's fine," but because the topic was so broad. I was so excited and one thing that I think the honors college does just masterfully—And I kind of keep in mind when I teach now, I do quite a bit of teaching and my job is the interdisciplinarity and the way that everything is connected, and to have a really fully humanist idea of the topic. But what that meant when I was trying to graduate was I was like, "I'm going to write on science fiction," and my advisors would be like, "Well, do you have like a thesis? Do you have like a research question?" And I'd be like, "I'll get back to you," and then I'd float off and do something else.

So ultimately, Dr. Mirante and Wendy suggested that I take—cause I had taken quite a few of their classes. Some research and some work that I had already done across the course of their classes. And synthesizing that into sort of a baby research project. Which in retrospect was great advice in graduate school that is what you do. You take all of your classes kind of keeping in mind and becoming an expert in a certain thing in a certain field. So those two professors helped me take

what I had already shown interest in and boil it down and kind of make a statement about that. So it wasn't very easy. It was really important. It did—I'm glad I learned not later, but it was hard for me to kind of pin down a topic.

RD [00:20:30] Let's see. So you did end up going to grad [graduate] school. What was—Why did you decide you wanted to keep going, especially as the first person in your family to go to college? Was it like a driving reason that just kept you going towards—[Crosstalk]

SS [00:20:50] [Crosstalk] Yeah— [Crosstalk]

Spekaer 1 [00:20:51] [Crosstalk] the finish line?

SS [00:20:51] Yeah. Well, there were a few. There were a few reasons. One was that in the humanities field, you get a lot of advice from your mentors. And this is also the case with my professors in the honors college. That if you want to do a particular thing with that degree, then it is better to get a graduate degree. And that was twenty years ago, it's even more so the case now. So that was one.

Another thing was because I—Dr Marat and I got along fabulously, and I feel intellectually we were very similar. We got each other. She told me I had to go to grad [graduate] school and I was like, “Well, OK.” Also, since I was the first one who was in college, I had no idea how to do the kinds of jobs I wanted to do. So I thought, Well, there's three more years, I'll have to figure it out.

And I finally—So my husband, who I mentioned earlier, I met through the honors college. He was a few years older than me, and he had a philosophy degree which was even more direly in need of

graduate school to be hireable. So we decided together that we would like to get married and go to grad [graduate] school and become professors. So that was sort of a joint decision of how we wanted to move forward in our lives. At this point I'm twenty as well, like, I'm there again. I went to college early. I did—I went through in four years. I'm not even old enough to, like, go to a bar. At this point. This is really delaying life. And also, all of those things that I've said earlier to just about the value that I have and ideas. I mean, grad [graduate] school is it man. If you're thinking, if this sounds good to you, you should definitely go to grad [graduate] school because it's so good I went back twice.

RD [00:22:47] Let's see, did you ever travel abroad during your time at UCA?

SS [00:22:53] I did. I did. I went abroad. I got a scholarship from the honors college. The English Department took a cohort of students led by Dr. Rusty Rogers, who I believe is retired at this point, to the United Kingdom on a literary tour of the United Kingdom for three weeks. So we went to England, Ireland, and Scotland, and we went to places of literary interest, and it was completely fabulous. So amazing.

RD [00:23:24] Sounds really fun. Let's see. [Unclear] rooming, did end up staying— Was Farris [Hall] the dorm when you were still here?

SS [00:23:39] Farris [Hall] was built when I was a junior, so we got Farris when it was super fancy. It was very nice and new.

RD [00:23:50] So where did you stay before that?

SS [00:23:53] I was trying to think. The first year I was in a building, whose name I cannot remember. And was that was the last year it was a dorm. My freshman year, that was where all the freshmen in the honors college went.

RD [00:24:07] Was it Wingo [Hall]?

SS [00:24:08] No it wasn't Wing [Hall] that was a building then. Was it Wing? I don't know. It was near a parking lot that's the most- [Crosstalk]

RD [00:24:16] [Crosstalk] I don't even- know where Wingo is at this point. I've just heard people talking about it.

SS [00:24:21] Let me see. It might have been Wingo. No that was the honors college building then. I don't know. It was it was not used as a dorm. The next year all of the sophomores went to Short [Hall] and Denny [Hall.] So when Wingo, or not Wingo, whatever that is-I want to say it began with an R, but I could be making that up. We had four roommates and then in Short [Hall] Denny [Hall] you could only have one roommate cause it was like a room with a bathroom and then another room. And then my junior year Farris was built. And I was there, my junior and senior year.

RD [00:24:54] So did you like so much room mates or at least roommate for the most part?

SS [00:25:00] I didn't, really, and that is because I had an extremely tight knit group of friends when I was in the honors college that were all boys. [Multiple Laughs] So my senior year, I did room with a good friend of mine. We chose to live together, and we had two other roommates, so we were

friendly with. But I imagine it's still the case. I was not allowed to room with men, so it didn't matter to me who my roommates were.

RD [00:25:30] Alrighty. Let's see. How did you feel about the food on campus when you were here?

SS [00:25:39] Oh god I barely remember it, it must have been OK. I had one of those—I had a full ride scholarship where they—I had a meal plan on campus, and there was a cafeteria there. It was fine, cafeteria food. They had a home cooked meal every option, every day. Weirdly—when I have dreams, I dream of the same places. I had a dream geography. And weirdly, the cafeteria at UCA shows up pretty often. So it must have had some impact on me.

RD [00:26:12] Interesting. Let's see. So your friend group, how was it? I guess it was nice to just have that group keep going throughout your college years?

SS [00:26:25] It was incredible. It was truly to where I sort of have like a reality shock when I came to to grad [graduate] school, that people just weren't like this. So I had my core group of friends, which I said was mainly dudes. I don't know why. It just was. They were people I'm still in touch with, even though they're all still mainly back in Arkansas. But everybody was friends. I mean, they may not have been like your close close friend, but I was in marching band when I was in high school, and I feel like it had a similar thing. Like, you may not necessarily hang out with somebody, but you always have each other's back. Like if there is an emergency.

And one thing that I think that is the case about the honors program, that I have to thank is intentional because they talk about it in their readings and sometimes in our common book

selection, we would do that too, was the importance of community. Civic service, understanding what the local was like leaning on each others as neighbors and support. That was always something that they talked very strongly about, and they did an incredible job of providing that. We have what we called the Forum, which is still there. I think it's called something different now? Maybe it got named after Norb? I don't know.

There was the Forum. There used to be food that was a great place to go study and that was right next to all of the main honors people's offices. It was a great place for people to really—To really be in a and in a place where it was idyllically community minded in a way that is hard to replicate, I think now. And at the time, social media was new. I remember [unclear] got Facebook like my junior or senior year. So that's—I mean, it could be because the honors college. It could also be because the way that we interact socially has changed so radically as a whole. But that's the last time in my life I really remember being able to knock on somebody's door at like one in the morning and vaguely know them and be like, “I'm so hungry. Do you have anything I can eat?” I met friends doing that. [Laughs] So yeah, they were very important and a great part of my experience there.

RD [00:28:55] And you said your now husband. Was he a part of that group too? Or was he like just kind of— [Crosstalk]

SS [00:29:04] [Crosstalk] Sort of— he was in the honors college too, but he was a transfer student, so he didn't go through all the core stuff. So is he even really in honors? I don't know. Pretty important. And he was older than me, but I—one of my very good friends, ended up being my now husband's roommate.

And we had gone on a trip for the Young Democrats together to a national convention over the summer. And I was going to visit that friend, and he was smoking a cigaret and had on very short pants. And I thought he looks so philosophical. And I was right. I remember [laughs] it was very dorky, but that's how I met him. And yeah, we hit it off then and been together ever since.

RD [00:29:46] Nice. Let's see.

SS [00:29:52] I don't know if Donna still says this, by the way. Do you guys still—when you are doing—when you are just starting in the honors college, do you go on a retreat at the beginning of the year?

RD [00:30:03] Yes.

SS [00:30:05] Donna and Rick used to have this speech that they gave—cause I was a mentor too when I was a senior, and they gave it to the freshmen too. Where they're like, “some of these you'll discover yourself, some of these you'll find your best friends, and some of you might even fall in love.” And I was like, “That's ridiculous.” But sometimes I think that when I think of meeting my husband through the honors college.

RD [00:30:27] That it's such a nice story.

SS [00:30:31] Yeah.

RD [00:30:32] So how did you end up accessing your honor's readings? Was that on the HCIS?
[Honors College Information System]

SS [00:30:39] Oh, bless your heart. It was a notebook they gave us.

RD [00:30:42] Oh!

SS [00:30:35] It was just printed out. It was in a binder. By the time I was— by the time I was a sophomore or junior, they had the thought that this—I think that form you're talking about where you could post responses and things. And Whit and I actually, she was a year under than me and we had many classes together. And I remember Whit was very involved in that [unclear] And I think is continuing to kind of keep an eye on it. But yeah, we just had binders given to us.

RD [00:31:15] That sounds so much better.

SS [00:31:17] It is. I mean, even now, I feel like taking notes. I'm better by hand. On the computer it just right through my brain.

RD [00:31:26] I wished they hadn't adjusted with the times on that. Let's see. I'm trying to find new questions. Diversity in the honors college, how was the—how did the honors college handle just diversity in general towards the LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer] community or people of color? How was it back then?

SS [00:31:56] I—It's hard for me in my memory to sort of differentiate what UCA did versus what the honors college did. I will say at the time it was a very uniform looking group of students. I'm trying to look back and think of people of color who were in my cohort, and I can only think of a handful. There was a very supportive atmosphere for LGBTQ+ students. Very supportive. I

remember I had a friend who ended up dropping out of school, but not because of honors. It was—Things happen who would often go to the professors and talk about ways to broach subjects about his extracurricular activities with his parents? He wanted—he felt like maybe he wanted to come out, but he wasn't sure if they already knew. Was very concerned about like safe sex activities and practices, and he had no qualms going to—I'm not—I don't remember which professor it was. It was one that he felt pretty close to. So I feel like in terms of that kind of support that that was well documented, but I honestly don't feel like there was quite a bit of racial or ethnic or even religious diversity when I was there.

On the other hand, that also reflected the admission practices of UCA. I mean, UCA and probably still does is actually a more diverse campus than where I'm at now. I live in the Midwest, which is even more white than the South. But I remember things were sort of de facto segregated. We had friends—If we were in the honors college it was one thing, but there would be very racially segregated groups of people on campus hanging out in a way that actually here in this whiter spot, I don't see as much. And that could just be time. That could be time [unclear] but I do know that by the time my sister came a decade later, that was a conversation that they had more actively in their core readings. Was stuff about—was more stuff about social justice than what we learned.

RD [00:34:20] Let's see. see. So do you think that being in the Honors College, like do you think that affected your resume when it comes to getting jobs afterwards?

SS [00:34:32] Yeah, I do. I do. I've been I've worked in academia all my professional life. I am a I'm in a tenure track position now, so I'm a librarian, but it's a faculty librarian position. And I have quite a bit of outreach with the honors department. They don't have like a special college at KU, which is a shame because it was so awesome. But the size of UCA, I think, made it more

manageable. KU is a lot bigger. So I think that that knowledge of that particular learning community that we were within has really shown up not just like on my resume, but then when I'm interviewed and people talk to me about what the impact it's had. I'm able to say these academic practices, I think, were really high impact. This was something really concrete and good that came out of this. So I've been—And like I said, that interdisciplinarity has really influenced how I approach just my critical practice in my own research too. So I mean, yes, it did. But I'm also at a university, so I know how much that has an impact on it. It certainly the way that it taught me to think has all the impact in the world.

RD [00:35:50] Heck, yeah. Let's see. So are you still in contact with any of the faculty members regularly, like check in with any of them?

SS [00:36:02] I'm Facebook friends with most of them?

RD [00:36:05] Okay.

SS [00:36:06] And some of them, I interact with on stuff in person. Some of them when I dropped in to visit my sister in college, I would go say hello to. There's— So I'm in the—Lawrence is right outside of Kansas City, and the Kansas City area will sometimes have honors alumni gatherings. And I think like Rick was here last time. And **Laura Bowles**, I do keep in pretty good touch with. Yeah, I will say that every professor that I've had, I at least follow on social media and we like each other's stuff. Donna sent me a hat when I had my first baby that is like in my baby pillbox. It was very sweet of her

RD [00:36:52] That is so sweet. I love Donna.

SS [00:36:54] Oh I do too.

RD [00:36:56] Let's see. So do you think the honors college—Do you think that the standards that Norb had put into it, everything that he breathed into it, do you think that even when he was beginning to leave, that his influences stayed?

SS [00:37:18] I do think so. And he used to joke something [laughs] I got to get this story right cause it might sound weird. He used to joke that the best way to start a cult was to have really recognizable things about the cult leader, and he used to point at his sneakers and his bow tie which shows up in marketing even now that he's gone. So clearly it stuck ground. And there used to be a group of people who would jokingly call themselves “A cult of Norb,” which I thought was kind of gross. But whatever. The point is that Norb was very charismatic. He was very intentional. He had this really great mix of his theological training, which I think gave him the ability to sort of preach with a really rigorous academic mind, and a sense of care that I think totally use it. And I think that Rick and then now Donna, and whoever are sort of in positions of administration, I think that they embody that fully and wholly, and I know that they worked with him. So I'll be curious how that continues when faculty come in who have not directly worked with him. But I do think that for sure, it's still there. The cult of Norb lives on.

RD [00:38:45] And I think really the last major question I have for you is, do you think that being in the honors college impacted your life in a positive way?

SS [00:38:55] Absolutely. I mean, just to sort of summarize which I hadn't really put together until we talked about this. It's shaped how I think, it gave me a sense of identity that I didn't really have

until, like I said, I moved around a lot, which was fine it didn't bother me. But that was the place where I felt like I had a home. It gave me a sense of safety and community that I have continued to try and imbue with my students. I not only met my husband through the honors college, but that is also the way that he was trained up academically as well going through the process. I think that that impacts our family, that impacts the way that our children are raised. Working for big tech companies. He's about to interview at Google. And I think that those sort of values and sense of community are things that continue on professionally and kind of ripple out. But most of all, there are so few things I think as you get older, where you have like a really positive memory. You look back and you think, "Oh god, I was such a dork" or like, "Whoa, that wasn't right, maybe that was kind of gaslighty" or like, "Well, that was unhealthy." And in honors, I feel like the professors and the students. We're so earnestly pursuing this vision of this community of care and thought. That it's like one of the few things that I have truly positive memories of, and as I get older and I am more entrenched in academia and work with more students, the higher my regard gets for it.

RD [00:40:52] I like that answer, I'm very—I think that's like the pinnacle of the honors college. I think like your life experience and how it's affected you, I think that's kind of the major goal of what they're trying to do for the students. And I just think you're an honor success story. I just really like that.

SS [00:41:13] Oh, thank you. Well, it's so funny, too, because I'm at an **R1** [Doctoral University-Very high research activity] university and people are like, "University of Central Arkansas? Is that the one in Fayetteville?" And I'm like, "No, it's not. It is a local [laughs] college that is mid-sized." But the size of UCA is what makes it. The fact that there can be this community of connection. It's in this real magic spot where a smaller school, maybe that's what the whole school is like. I don't know. And in a school, like I said, at KU, the honor students barely know each other. They may go

[unclear] together, but they don't have a community. It feels like something out of time in a way, it's like a rare jewel that I don't see reflected very often in other places and in central Arkansas of all places, which is ridiculous, but whatever. People in Kansas have to hate on somebody, I guess, cause everybody hates on Kansas. [Multiple Laughs]

RD [00:42:15] I mean, I guess so. Yeah. All right. I don't think I have any more questions unless you have any like just pressing stories, you just really have been thinking on that you just wanted to get out there.

SS [00:42:30] Not ones I probably want recorded. Mistakes were made and we were given grace to grow. I'll say that.

RD [00:42:39] we'll perfect and I'm going to go ahead and wrap up this interview. Thank you so much for your time, Samantha. This concludes our interview.