

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Madison Sewell Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Sewell, Madison

Interviewer Name: Ray, Brooklyn

Date of Interview: 04/07/2022

Location of Interview: Remote Interview - Zoom Recording

Acronyms:

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

PT = Physical Therapy/Physical Therapist

TAG = Travel Abroad Grant

URGE = Undergraduate Research Grant for Education

ELF = Experiential Learning Fund

ETA = English Teaching Assistant

ISL = International Service Learning

HCOL = Honors College Online

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Madison Sewell conducted by Brooklyn Ray on April 7, 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.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:03] This is Brooklyn Ray with the Schedler Honors College oral history project today is April 7th, 2022 and I am interviewing Madison Sewell, who is at her home and where are you, again?

Madison Sewell [00:00:22] I'm in Urbana, Illinois.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:25] We will be talking about Madison's experience leading up to, during, and after her time in the Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

Madison Sewell [00:00:36] My name is Madison Sewell and I'm twenty eight years old.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:41] What year did you enter the Honors College?

Madison Sewell [00:00:44] I entered in the fall of 2012.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:49] When did you graduate from the Honors College?

Madison Sewell [00:00:52] Spring 2016.

Brooklyn Ray [00:00:57] Okay, now we can get into some questions. So where are you from?

Madison Sewell [00:01:03] I'm originally from Texarkana, Texas.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:08] So is that where you grew up like your entire life?

Madison Sewell [00:01:13] Yeah, mostly so. I lived some time in Paris, Texas, until I was about eight years old and then my family moved to Texarkana. So I went like second to high school in Texarkana, so I consider it my hometown.

Brooklyn Ray [00:01:29] So what was it like?

Madison Sewell [00:01:35] It's like a town at the crossroads. It exists because it's a good stopping point in between Dallas and Little Rock and Shreveport. And so it's a place that has a lot of chain type restaurants and things like that. It's not a small town per say, it's about, I guess, around sixty thousand people live there. So there's things to do. But we're still far from big city, so it was quiet living there.

Brooklyn Ray [00:02:09] So how was your high school experience?

Madison Sewell [00:02:14] I liked high school a lot. I went to a fairly large high school. My graduating class had 399 graduates. And I was pretty involved in high school. I was in a lot of clubs, I did sports and newspaper and things like that. I had a lot of friends and I have friends today still from high school.

Brooklyn Ray [00:02:43] So what kind of family do you have, like siblings wise, I guess?

Madison Sewell [00:02:48] Yeah, I have a younger brother. He's a year and a half younger than me, so we're not that far apart in age. And I have two step siblings, one of them is two years younger than me. And then the other one's, I guess, six years younger than me.

Brooklyn Ray [00:03:15] Do you have any pets?

Madison Sewell [00:03:18] I do have a pet. My cat is behind me right now looking out the window. I got her when I started grad school and I've had her for about two years now and I also have a dog, she's not in here. She's like a pit bull mix. She looks like a lab and both of them are rescues, and fairly new to the household.

Brooklyn Ray [00:03:43] Aww! Okay, well, when you were in high school, when you were a senior applying to colleges and everything, was UCA where you wanted to go? Is that where you always wanted to go? Or did you look at any other colleges?

Madison Sewell [00:04:03] Yeah, that's a good question. I knew I was going to apply to UCA. I have an aunt and she's only six and a half years older than me. My mom was like seventeen or eighteen when she was born. And my aunt went to UCA, so I went to her college graduation when I was a freshman in high school, so I kind of had an early introduction to it. And my dad also graduated from UCA, so I knew that I was going to apply there. It wasn't my first choice. Since I'm from Texas, I was thinking of going to a school in Texas instead of UCA. Before I started undergrad or before I started undergrad, I was thinking I wanted to be a physical therapist and UCA has a really good PT school. And so that was kind of like swaying me to UCA. And then I got a letter about applying to the Honors College. And at first, I wasn't sure that I was going to do it because I saw that it was like quite a bit of extra work than other schools, like applying for their scholarships. But my mom really encouraged me to do it because it was a full ride scholarship. And she's like, "It's a few essays, you're pretty good at writing, you should try it." And so I did, and then found out I got the Honors College scholarship, and so that definitely helped me make my decision about going to UCA.

Brooklyn Ray [00:05:35] So when you applied and everything, what was the interview process like? Did you guys have the I-squared day, the interview and inform?

Madison Sewell [00:05:43] Yes, yes, we had an I-squared day. And I remember, I think it was in early spring, maybe February, something like that. It was pretty cold that day and my mom came with me and I remember kind of learning about the honors program, and I was really nervous about the thesis. And we had some of the current students tell us about that process and also just answered our questions. And in terms of the interview, it was small groups and I remember my small group interview was with Allison. Even then my first interaction with her, she was really pushing our thinking and getting me to think about topics in a way that I'd never have thought about them before, so I thought I didn't do very well because she was pushing me and my arguments. I don't remember what we were discussing, but I remember not feeling super confident after that interview.

Brooklyn Ray [00:06:58] Oh, I know, Allison, I had her for my Oxford class, and she was the exact same way. So since you had her for your interview, I think typically whoever you have for your interview, you get for core one. So what was your core one experience like?

Madison Sewell [00:07:16] Core one was incredible. And it was life changing for me. Honestly, I don't know. I had never been in a class that was like that. The whole seminar style was brand new to me and all my classes in high school there's at least 30 kids in every class, and it was really rigorous in a way that high school wasn't. And we read such diverse essays and excerpts of text that really kind of expanded my thinking about who I am and what it means to be human. And so it was really great and it was really challenging, I think in the best way. I remember I would be kind of nervous about going to

class and having discussions with my classmates, because sometimes they would get a little bit heated. But, even if it was kind of tense sometimes it always pushed me to think about things in a new way.

Brooklyn Ray [00:08:35] So was there any specific discussion or reading or anything that sticks out in your mind?

Madison Sewell [00:08:43] Oh yeah. So many. So some of the first readings we did were about Plato and Socrates and the forms, and something that I remember very distinctly is Allison coming in with a bag of peaches and passing peaches around the class. And before she passed them out, she was like, "Alright, picture a peach in your hand." And so we did that, and she passed around the peaches. She's like, "Does this look like your idea of what you had of a peach?" We were like, "No, these peaches look worse. They're bruised and things like that." And so she used those peaches to kind of explain the concept of the forms and humans have an idea of the divine, like innately and like perfection. And that always really stuck with me. It was very fun that it was hands on and interactive. I also remember when Doug, in large group, was talking about John Paul Sarte and we all came into the lecture hall and we were waiting for it to start, and they were playing "The Wall" by Pink Floyd. And then he gave his lecture and he was pacing back and forth and just rattling off names and dates, no PowerPoint. And it was so captivating to watch. And yeah, there is like lots of little moments like that from classes that really stand out to me, but those are two in particular, when I think about core one as being like classes that I distinctly remember.

Brooklyn Ray [00:10:32] Oh, that's cool! I like hearing about these things because when I started, we had all of our stuff on Zoom, so it's nothing like that. But that's so interesting to

hear that you all had your large group lectures in person and everything. And so, just all the professors have such cool personalities. So was there any professor or a faculty member in the honors college that you became close with or kind of found as you looked up to them or anything like that?

Madison Sewell [00:11:06] Yes, for sure. I looked up to all of them. I thought they were all great. I didn't get to take classes with all of the Honors professors. I took classes with Allison, two classes with Allison, a class with Phil Frana, a class with Doug, a class with Rick Scott. I'm trying to remember. [Pause] And then I had some other honors classes that weren't taught by honors faculty, but other professors at UCA, like Dr. Mehl, I don't know if he ever taught any more classes outside of ours, but it was one of the senior seminar capstone classes. But in terms of people that I had relationships with, I was pretty close to Allison, I had her for core one and then I had her again as a senior. And I would talk to her a lot and go to her office and she would give me books to read and things like that. And after I graduated, I did a Fulbright ETA, and Allison is the Fulbright coordinator. I don't know exactly what the title is at UCA, so she helped me apply for Fulbright. And so when I came back, I met with her and chatted with her, and I like to keep in contact with her. My cat is bothering me. [laughter

Brooklyn Ray [00:12:43] Oh, you're fine. So you're a health science major, did you ever consider doing anything else?

Madison Sewell [00:12:59] Like a different major? Kind of, I don't know. I came into college and I had a lot of credit hours, I think almost thirty, so I was like a sophomore coming in and I was health science all the way through. I thought about changing my major as a sophomore, but I had progressed so far in the degree that I didn't think it would be

worth it. And it wasn't that I didn't like my degree because I kind of changed my mind about wanting to be a physical therapist after I did some observations of PTs. I wasn't sure that it was exactly for me. So I thought about changing my degree to biology or psychology. But I was taking a lot of those classes anyway, and I just didn't think it was worth it to change my major.

Brooklyn Ray [00:14:05] So I have written down on my notes that you did a psychology thesis, I didn't really write anything else down about it, but do you want to maybe just talk about what your thesis project was and just any details about it?

Madison Sewell [00:14:20] Yeah, sure. So when I was at UCA, I worked at the Center for Writing and Communication. It wasn't called that while I was there, it was just the writing center. But I think they changed the name. I don't know if that's still what it's called, but I worked there for three years, sophomore year to senior year, and I was really into teaching and tutoring and really interested in writing pedagogy and practices that help student learning. And so part of that is education based, but I came at it from a psychological perspective, like how students at UCA perceive peer tutors and how that improves their learning. Because it could have been they don't see peer tutors as experts, and so they see them as less credible and not as helpful as office hours with professors. But peer tutors are closer in age and maybe more relatable than a professor. So that's pretty much what I did. I also kind of looked at how professors at UCA perceive the peer tutoring at the writing center. And so it kind of had practical significance for the writing center at UCA, so that they know what departments they need to do better outreach with because some departments had misconceptions about what the writing center's purpose is and how it can help students. But yeah, that was kind of the thesis. I did surveys with students who visited the writing center and sent surveys to faculty at UCA.

Brooklyn Ray [00:16:24] Oh, that's really interesting. Who was your mentor?

Madison Sewell [00:16:29] My mentor was Dr. Jennifer Brinegar. She's not at UCA anymore, but she was a really influential and significant person in my life while I was in college and I really admired her and the work that she did. She was in the psych department. And so she was my mentor thesis advisor.

Brooklyn Ray [00:16:59] So what led you to doing that project?

Madison Sewell [00:17:05] Yeah, I took a research methods class with Dr. Brinegar. And it was required for my degree, but while I was in that class and learning about psychological research methods— this was during my spring of my sophomore year, and so I knew that in the fall I'd be taking an Oxford tutorial and trying to develop the thesis idea, and so it was already on my mind and just one day it kind of came to me. We had been having discussions in the writing center kind of on this topic because sometimes we'd see students that would be very rude to us and tell us that we don't know shit and stuff like that. So that had also been on my mind, trying to figure out ways to make my life easier at the writing center and make my friends slash colleagues lives easier. And I don't know, I had an epiphany about it that that's what I'd do my thesis on.

Brooklyn Ray [00:18:26] So what kind of extracurriculars were you involved in?

Madison Sewell [00:18:36] So I did track and cross country for two years, my sophomore and junior year, that kept me super busy during those two years, I was a part of that and I was also on the Student Athletic Advisory Committee and we were kind of like the Student

Liaison Group to like the athletic director at the university, and we planned events that all student athletes took part in. Other than that, I'm trying to remember. I also worked at the writing center, which I brought up. And so it was pretty busy. I wasn't in too many clubs or anything like that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:19:27] Did you ever get a TAG, URGE, or ELF grant?

Madison Sewell [00:19:42] Yes, I got a tag grant in the winter of my sophomore year, no, junior year, I can't remember. One of those years, I think, sophomore. I went over winter break with one of my friends who was also in the honors college. We went to Peru on a grant to learn about health care, and so we were there for ten days or so, and we learned a lot about tropical diseases and medicine and the health care system in Peru and what that looks like, and we got to see some clinics in some underserved areas in Peru. And then we also did touristy things like visited Machu Picchu and things like that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:20:39] So is that a trip that was like a faculty led trip or is that just something you and your friend went on just by yourselves?

Madison Sewell [00:20:47] It wasn't through UCA. We found it on online. I can't remember the full name, but the acronym is ISL. And we found that and it was a full program. We went and there were students from different universities who were there, a lot of students from Canada. Believe it or not, McGill University. So yeah, we wanted to do study abroad, but it would have been hard for me to do it during a semester because I was running track and cross-country, and it would be hard for me to do it in the summer, so we were looking at things that on winter break that we could do. And so that's kind of how we found ISL and their programs.

Brooklyn Ray [00:21:44] Oh, okay! I wrote that down because I'm interested in that too. I haven't had the opportunity to go on like a faculty led trip, like they're going to Italy this summer. But anyways, that's cool. I am glad that I asked you that because now I kind of have a resource, but that's really cool. So you had told me you had a folder from core one. I think it was core one. Do you want to show it or talk about that?

Madison Sewell [00:22:26] Sure. This is my folder. [Holds up folder with printed honors journals] It has all of my writings for core one. I think it's something like, I don't even know how many pages, like eighty, I don't know. But it's really nice. You're going to appreciate this since you've had a class with Allison, but if you ever get handwritten things from Allison— it's inverted on here—but you see like the 6b, 15, 12a, that was always one of my problems, grammatical error things. But yeah, this doesn't have any of the readings than it, because our readings were on HCOL, which I don't know if other people you've interviewed have talked about HCOL, but we were kind of the last group that had it. It was like a forum. And so all the readings were on HCOL and some professors did discussion posts, but Allison had us turn in our writings to her, printed. And so I have all of them with all of my grades on it. I have my final papers and I kept it for so long because it's really funny and sweet to see what eighteen, nineteen year old me was thinking, reading all these things and seeing what I thought about, where's the self located, my ideas about religion and things like that is very endearing, and sometimes I'm like, "Wow, that I said some pretty profound things," but other times I'm like, "Okay, that's a little bit cringey and a little cliché," but I don't know. It's almost like, I'm not someone that keeps a journal or a diary, so this kind of feels like a diary in a way. So I've always kept it, and sometimes I take it out when I'm feeling sentimental.

Brooklyn Ray [00:24:44] We did all of ours online, so I wish we had something like that because that is something really cool to look back on. I was going to ask you something, but it kind of slipped my mind. Oh yeah! You had mentioned where is the self located, did you ever come up with an answer? [laughter]

Madison Sewell [00:25:08] I don't know. It's weird to think about that question now as I'm in grad school. My studies are in developmental psychology, and so it's pretty much a study about where is the self and how does the self come to be? And how do people differ from each other? And why do those differences develop? And so, yeah, I would say my answer would be, the self is a product of 100 percent nature and also 100 percent nurture. All of it comes together. Our genetics and experience determines who we are.

Brooklyn Ray [00:26:08] Yeah, it was a really cool conversation. Do you remember talking about that? We had that as our first reading, is that what you had as your first one as well?

Madison Sewell [00:26:23] Yes, yes. And Rick Scott led the first large group lecture, , very first Monday of class. And I'm in there, and he is talking, and it's just like all going over my head and I'm like, "This guy is so smart." And he is asking for volunteers to speak on where this self is located, and I was like, "I'm not raising my hand." But I remember that lecture distinctly, and it wasn't my first class that I had as an undergrad. I had biology that morning. And so it was kind of like my last class of the day. I was like, "Wow, our college is something else."

Brooklyn Ray [00:27:11] So when you had classes for honors, were they pretty much all in McAlister?

Madison Sewell [00:29:22] Sorry about that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:29:24] Oh, it's fine. You were talking and then it kind of froze. I didn't know if it was something on my end or not, but then you had left, so that's okay. Yeah, it's fine. So I kind of forgot the last question I asked you.

Madison Sewell [00:29:43] You asked me, like if I had most of my classes in McAllister.

Brooklyn Ray [00:29:43] Oh, right!

Madison Sewell [00:29:56] Yeah, and so mostly, yes, I also had classes in Farris.
[redacted] Yeah, in the presentation room I had like the Beatles class. I don't know, does Chad Terrell still teach that?

Brooklyn Ray [00:30:10] I don't know if it's a Beatles class. I know he's teaching a core four right now, it's on music. I don't know if it's a rock and roll class, but he still teaches. Oh, I think you're frozen again.

Madison Sewell [00:31:04] I'm so sorry.

Brooklyn Ray [00:31:06] You're fine! It happens all the time! I would say it's a Monday, but it's a Thursday. [laughter]

Madison Sewell [00:31:15] It might as well be Monday. I turned off my wifi, so it shouldn't kick me off anymore.

Brooklyn Ray [00:31:24] Okay, it's fine. Unless you are on a time constraint, it's fine. If it keeps cutting out and we have to go over the time a little bit, that's totally fine. So you just said that you lived in Farris for two years. Where did you live your other two years?

Madison Sewell [00:31:51] My third year, I lived in Erbach, which is apartments close to campus, and I moved in with some of my cross country team mates, and then I lived in Bear Village my senior year.

Brooklyn Ray [00:32:05] Did you live there in the honors ones?

Madison Sewell [00:32:08] Yes.

Brooklyn Ray [00:32:09] Yeah, that's cool. I live off campus now, but sometimes I wish I still lived there because you can use a scholarship to pay for it and everything. How were your roommates? Did you become really good friends with them, or maybe not?

Madison Sewell [00:32:32] Yeah, I was pretty good friends with my roommates. I still chat with them every now and then, I'm closer with some compared to others, like my senior year roommate and I, we're really close and she's the one that I went to Peru with on the TAG grant. But overall, I think it was a good experience.

Brooklyn Ray [00:33:04] So did you make any other friends in honors that are still your good friends today?

Madison Sewell [00:33:10] Yeah. Surprisingly, I made some friends with people who joined the year after me. They were also on the track and cross-country team. So they

were like freshmen coming into honors and I was starting the team when I was a sophomore and so I was new to the team. They were new to the team and new to honors. So I was like, I'm going to be friends with them and I'm still really close with the three of them that came in. And we all kind of live far apart now. But we try to schedule Zoom phone calls to keep up and plan to visit each other. So it's really nice.

Brooklyn Ray [00:33:57] Oh, that's cool. This is kind of switching a little bit. But besides getting a TAG grant or anything like that, what other kind of opportunities did you have while you were in the Honors College?

Madison Sewell [00:34:25] A lot. I think my college experience would have been very different if I wasn't in the honors college. I got the job at the writing center because Allison recommended me to there. One day in core one when she asked me and two other people to stay behind after class and told us about the opportunity to work there and that she would be our reference. And so I kind of got the job through Allison and through that job, I got the idea for my thesis. And then I went and did an English teaching assistantship, which is a lot like tutoring. So a lot of it, it was kind of a snowball effect. Outside of that, I wouldn't have been able to do my study abroad, I think if I didn't have the TAG grant that offered financial assistance to do it. And so that was really incredible. And I recognize how generous the Honors College is because lots of people don't get funding to do their study abroad. So that was really nice. In my senior year in my Capstone Course, I took a class called democracy and civic engagement or something like that. I don't remember the exact name and that was taught by Dr. Mehl, and we had a service learning component of that class and for our service learning component, we did voter registration drives because I took that class in 2016 in the spring, so the primaries were happening. And so through that experience, I got some campus award for excellence in service learning, which is

really nice and kind of unexpected. So, yeah, the Honors College gave me lots of opportunities to get some real world experience.

Brooklyn Ray [00:36:50] Oh, yeah, that's awesome! When you had core two, did you guys do a service project?

Madison Sewell [00:36:58] Yes, we did. Our topic that we did ours on was literacy, and so we had an idea to build little free libraries. People have them in their yards or they can be in parks. And it's like a place where you can donate books and also take books. So it's like leave a book, take a book, and we built two of those little libraries. We weren't able to put them up, which was kind of disappointing, but it was a fun project because we all did our papers on things literacy related. And then we also got to do creative things like making the little free libraries, designing them, painting them, etc. and then finding books to fill them with. So it was pretty fun.

Brooklyn Ray [00:38:04] Oh, interesting. When you were in the honors college, you had mentioned that you guys used the HCOL. I don't really know what that is, the other people I interviewed were graduates from the early 2000s, so that wasn't around yet. So what was that? And how did that work?

Madison Sewell [00:38:32] Yeah, that's a good question. I can't remember his name, I don't even know if he's still at the Honors College, but he's like the tech wizard, do you know who I'm talking about? I think his name is Tim. I'm not 100 percent sure. Don't quote me on that. He made it, I think. Nowadays, the website would be like, retro, I guess. Like in the early 2000s, mid 2000s, people would frequently be on forums and stuff like that, so it kind of had a forum setup where you had your profile and you could make discussion

posts in the larger thing. And so people would play games in it and have random topics of discussion you could make a thread about like sci-fi movies, whatever you want. And our classes would also be on there. And so we would be a part of a class group. And for my core two, and I believe core three and four, we would post all of our journals on HCOL. And that's where we get our grades, like our professors could respond to our posts and things like that. I believe now you all have a website and it's not HCOL, and it's actually connected to UCA, but like beforehand, it's like you didn't need an institutional log in to join this page, I don't know if that makes sense. [laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [00:40:31] Yeah, we have something, it's HCIS. We don't have the posts like what you're talking about, but that's where we access all of our readings and stuff, so I guess it's kind of similar. It looks kind of older. I don't know why they kind of changed it because that sounds really fun. But we use a GroupMe now, and that's where a lot of discussions go on. So I guess it kind of brings up a new topic like what kind of social media was around because I don't think Snapchat or Instagram are really that big of a thing until later.

Madison Sewell [00:41:16] Snapchat came out when I was a freshman in college, and so that was a big thing. It's really funny now because I'm in grad school and I take classes sometimes with undergrads, like my first semester, I had a class mix of graduate students and undergrads, and we're talking about social media and there is an undergraduate who is a junior and she, like, I remember Snapchat came out when I was in middle school and I was like, "Middle school?" [laughter] I was in college, when it came out. So yeah, it's really funny. But yeah, Snapchat came out and. It was really interesting then, because that's back when you could see who people had a snap streak with and that would feed a lot of drama. But other than that, Instagram was pretty big and people had Facebook and Vine,

which is also a defunct app now. But that came out when I was a freshman as well, and we would make short little vines and stuff. [laughter] And now TikTok is kind of like taking over that niche that Vine had, but those were kind of the big ones that we had.

Brooklyn Ray [00:42:47] Oh, I guess I never realized when Vine came out that. I guess I'm eight years younger than you, but I remember I never had Vine the app, but I remember I would see Vines on Instagram or YouTube. And so I could quote a lot of vines still. But that's interesting. Like I said earlier, we use a GroupMe where we kind of get some announcements from other students and mentors, even Patricia will send messages. So what kind of platform, I guess, did you guys use to kind of communicate between your peers like?

Madison Sewell [00:43:35] Yeah. We used GroupMe as well, and it was more like peer communication, like we never got GroupMe's from professors or Patricia or anyone like that. But yeah, we would make a GroupMe if we had a class project, like the people in our class or just my friends in honors we would have GroupMe. And that's mainly what we used because group text back then was terrible. It's not as nice as it is now. Yeah, so the main group communication app was GroupMe.

Brooklyn Ray [00:44:23] So we kind of have a list I'm looking at, but I'm trying to think of other things. So how do you think Honor's impacted your life now, so like your opportunities after you graduated and just where you are now? How do you think honors had an impact on that?

Madison Sewell [00:44:51] It had a huge impact. When I was in honors, I had this idea of what I wanted to do, I wanted to work in health care first, like be PT or be a doctor. But I

had professors in the honors college that told me that they thought I would do a good job as a researcher and a writer, so that kind of gave me the confidence to get my Ph.D. and it was all kind of a snowball effect. I joined the honors college, I was recommended by Allison to work at the writing center, I worked at the writing center, that got me interested in teaching and after I graduated I did kind of more teaching experience and I did the English teaching assistantship through Fulbright in the Czech Republic. And so that kind of got me thinking about how education systems differ around the world, so that kind of led me to apply for a Ph.D. in educational psychology. Yeah, I would say it was very instrumental because one of the things that the Honors College prioritizes is research, doing the thesis and taking the research class, and I really, really enjoyed that experience and didn't think that I would. I had been dreading it when I learned about the Honors College and went to I-squared day, but actually going through the process, I figured out that I really liked it. So if I hadn't been in the Honors College and maybe had just come to UCA and been like a health science major, I wouldn't have that experience of doing the research and learning more about my own interest in what I like and getting the opportunity to have those experiences.

Brooklyn Ray [00:47:05] So when you left the honors college, was it a big change going to grad school because the Honors College is kind of different from any other undergraduate setting. Was it kind of a shock when you left, or did it help you, or how was that transition to grad school?

Madison Sewell [00:47:36] Grad school for me is kind of similar, but not in a way. My grad program isn't a cohort like the honors college is, and so that was the nice part about the honors college, is like having like a group of people that are going through the same thing as you. But my classes in general are small, like seminar style. And lots of reading and

discussions. So it's very similar to the Honors College. But the institution that I'm at, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is really different from UCA. It's a huge research institution. There's like forty something thousand undergrads, ten thousand grad students.

Brooklyn Ray [00:48:27] Wow! [Laughter]

Madison Sewell [00:48:35] It's huge! It's really, really interesting because I mentor undergraduates. They serve as research assistants with me. And so some of them are juniors and they're kind of preparing post-grad plans. And so one of my undergrads asked me, "How do you develop a relationship with a faculty member?" And it was just not the case at UCA like being in the honors college, you have these close relationships with faculty because you're with them all four years. But here at UIUC, like the undergraduate I was talking to, the majority of her professors or instructors had been grad students. And so she didn't really know professors that well because they would teach like one large group lecture. And then small group lectures are led by grad students, so she knew the grad students. But getting a letter from them is not the same as getting a letter from a faculty member. So I'm really grateful to have the experience that I did at UCA and have the relationships that I did, especially now being at a huge R1 institution where it's less personal and being an undergraduate here is like being in the sea, like a huge sea, and it's hard to have those kind of relationships with professors. But yeah, in terms of my own experience in grad school, it's very similar to the Honors College because I have small classes, like maybe averaging about 10 students in each class, so we do get to know the professor and get to know each other, so in that way, it's similar, but the undergrad experience here is very different from that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:50:45] Oh, yeah, that's interesting. I've thought about going to grad school. I also interviewed someone else and they said kind of the same thing. They thought that it really prepared for like— it was kind of easier going into grad school because you kind of were already used to some of the stuff that goes on. So I guess I don't know for sure, because I don't know if Norb was still in the honors college. I don't know if he was still active doing stuff, but did you ever meet Norb?

Madison Sewell [00:51:26] He wasn't super active, he didn't teach or anything like that, but he would come to core one large lectures, and so I've met him before. I don't really have a relationship with him and never really talked to him. But I did know who he was, and he was around frequently. He would sometimes come to soap boxes and things like that. But yeah, he wasn't around as much.

Brooklyn Ray [00:52:03] Is there anything, like any specific lesson maybe you learned from the Honors College that you can still apply to your life?

Madison Sewell [00:52:27] Hmm. Something that I apply quite frequently is the believing game. I don't know if that was your essay that you had to write on when you joined.

Brooklyn Ray [00:52:39] Yes.

Madison Sewell [00:52:45] Peter Elbow. And I think of that essay a lot. I think of it in graduate school when I'm reading articles and stuff and learning about different theoretical perspectives on human development. I try to play the believing game, and I sometimes I bring it up in my classes when people are kind of being overly harsh to a perspective. So that, I say, was very influential and I think about it a lot. Hmm. Are there more lessons? I

don't know. I would have to think and reflect on that a little bit more. But I guess the main lesson is, when learning about something new that you might not totally agree with, I think in order to fully understand it, you can't come into it with a closed mind and automatically be dismissive of it because it's not what you believed. And so I try to keep that lesson in mind.

Brooklyn Ray [00:54:05] Yeah, for sure. So I don't remember if I asked you this before, like in our pre-interview, but I guess I'm kind of curious, what drew you to Illinois?

Madison Sewell [00:54:30] Hmm. Yeah. So. For Ph.D.'s, how it works, it's more than applying to school, you're applying to work with a specific person. And so my Ph.D. advisor, the way that he approaches development is through something called a positive youth development framework, and that really appealed to me because something that's been prevalent in the field of psychology and just in general, is deficits framework and viewing people in a way that emphasizes the problems they have and not their strengths. And so using deficits perspectives is pretty bad. It can be very dehumanizing. When I read about his work and how he approaches his work from that framework where all adolescents have strengths and if their strengths align with their environment, they thrive. That was really appealing to me. And I wanted to do work that eventually would improve people's lives. And so I applied to work with him and met him during the interview and really liked him and came to visit the school. I like the school. The grad students here seemed really happy. And so that's how I got here.

Brooklyn Ray [00:56:09] Oh, okay. So do you ever think you'll come back to Arkansas?

Madison Sewell [00:56:14] Maybe. I am not a fan of my hometown, but I really enjoyed my time living in Conway and I really love Arkansas. I consider Arkansas to be one of my homes. And yeah, it would be great to come back. I would love to be a professor somewhere in Arkansas and just be the person for my students that honors faculty were for me, so I don't know. We'll see.

Brooklyn Ray [00:56:52] Aww! Is that what your plan is, like when you graduate from graduate school, is a professor, is that your main focus right now or is there anything else you've been interested in?

Madison Sewell [00:57:10] Yeah, I would say definitely my number one choice is to be a professor. I've also considered working in evaluation and what that means is, a lot of people with my degree in educational psychology will do things like evaluate the effectiveness of academic interventions or different programs and non-profits, things like that to determine their impact. And so I've had a few classes on that, and it seems really interesting. But I enjoy working with students and mentoring and teaching, so a faculty position would still be number one for me, but I want to keep my options open.

Brooklyn Ray [00:58:06] Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you wanted to talk about, like about the Honors College? I can ask some more, I just think we've really talked about a lot, but is there anything you'd like to talk about?

Madison Sewell [00:58:20] I don't think so, I think I could go on and on, but I know the interview has been kind of chaotic because my cat is being chaotic and then my wife went out. I think I'm good, but if you need anything else for me, feel free to email me and I don't mind sending paragraphs or anything like that.

Brooklyn Ray [00:58:53] OK, yeah, we just ask at the end of our interviews if there's anything else that you want to talk about. You've already told some stories that were pretty memorable, but if you have any other stories or anything like that, you can go ahead and tell them now if you want. If not, that's OK.

Madison Sewell [00:59:20] Yeah, no. [laughter]

Brooklyn Ray [00:58:53] That's fine! Well, I've enjoyed talking to you. It was really cool to hear your perspectives and everything in your stories. Your stories are a lot different from the other people I've interviewed, just because of the really even a 10 year difference. Like how much of a difference it made, even the people who were in the Honors College in the beginning of the 2000s, they all knew Norb really well. And then it's like ten years later, you had a totally different experience. And now, another ten years later, I'm having a totally different experience, so it's really cool. That's really why we're doing the project, just to keep, or to preserve, the history of the Honors College through kind of like personal storytelling, I guess. Kind of. So I try to make our interview as much of an opportunity for you to kind of reflect and tell more of a story rather than me just sort of asking you questions. I've really enjoyed our interview, so thank you so much for your time.

Madison Sewell [01:00:43] Of course. I really enjoyed it. And I think this project is so cool. And the Honors College really meant a lot to me, and I know many other people feel that same way. So it's really nice to have these stories to memorialize the feeling in the stories themselves. So I'm glad that I got to be a part of it.

Brooklyn Ray [01:01:10] Yeah, thank you so much for your participation. We really appreciate it. So I guess that concludes our interview.