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SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
Ashley Hicks Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Hicks, Ashley

Interviewer Name: Clark, Lillian

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Location of Interview: UCA, Conway, AR (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

LC= Lillian Clark

AH= Ashley Hicks

### Interview Summary

The following oral history of a recorded interview with Ashley Hicks conducted by Lillian Clark on March 9, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project where current students and alumni are asked to reflect on their time before, during, and after their time in the UCA Honors College.

**LC [00:00:03]** All right. I'm just going to start with some basic questions we already went over. This is Lillian Clark with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March 9th, 2022. I am interviewing Ashley Hicks at UCA campus in Conway, Arkansas. We will be talking about student experience leading up to and during their time in the honors college. Please state your name and age for the recording.

**AH [00:00:39]** My name is Ashley Jean Hicks and I am 30 years old.

**LC [00:00:44]** What years did you attend these UCA Honors College?

**AH [00:00:48]** I was at UCA from August 2009 to August 2013.

**LC [00:00:56]** Right, and what was your major while you were here?

**AH [00:00:59]** My major was physics.

**LC [00:01:03]** What are your pronouns?

**AH [00:01:07]** She/her.

**LC [00:01:10]** Alright. Where are you from?

**AH [00:01:12]** I am originally I was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, but I grew up in Hot Springs, Arkansas

**LC [00:01:19]** So when did you move to hot springs?

**AH** [00:01:22] I was around three.

**LC** [00:01:26] Do you remember Oklahoma City at all?

**AH** [00:01:28] No, unfortunately, I don't.

**LC** [00:01:31] What was hot springs like?

**AH** [00:01:35] What I remember, I grew up in a single parent household. I lived with my mom and my grandparents. I feel as if I had a relatively sheltered childhood in that sense. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, my great grandparents. And then as I got older, after we experienced some losses in the family, it was kind of like going to daycare and going to school. So a lot of my formative memories of Hot Springs centered around school. And then the academic programs that I was a part of as I grew up, we don't we didn't really interact with the city or other people. We weren't involved in the church. We weren't involved in other places like that. So it was really just get up, go to school, go to daycare, come home [laughing]. And then as I went into high school, you know, you kind of make more friends, get more independence, but still really academically minded. A lot of my experiences with hot springs were centered around the school experience from there.

**LC** [00:02:36] Can you tell me about your high school experience?

**AH** [00:02:40] I was always academically motivated. I went to a high school... maybe there were a hundred and fifty kids in my graduating class, which at the time felt really small. But as I've gotten to know more students and more rural Arkansans, I go, "Oh, wow, I did not come from a rural environment" like I felt like it was a rural environment, but a hundred and fifty kids in a graduating class is a lot, relatively.

The high school is great, so I moved back to Arkansas in eighth grade, that was like high school, junior high. I stayed at one school that entire time, eighth grade to graduation, and it was a very interesting school in that we kind of straddled a financial line. You had very wealthy houses and very wealthy areas and then a very thin line of middle class that I would classify my parents as middle income. Kind of on the edge of the school district line, so it was interesting to be constantly kind of with students who had different opportunities than I did, you know, and based on our parental income.

But I just stuck to the academics and I found, you know, there were other things going on in my home and I found solace in doing academics and I was good at excelling. You know, working on homework was a great way for me to spend my time, and I just kind of kept my nose in the book and kept my head down. And I did have some mentors throughout high school who kind of helped point me in the direction of. First Arkansas Governors School and then after AGS, actually going to college and that involves applying for the honors college and then kind of supporting me through that transition.

I'm a first gen. college student. My mother started a community college, but she had to drop out to take care of family issues. My stepdad started college at U. Of A. But he also dropped out for personal reasons. Neither of them completed a college degree, and neither of them had much information beyond that first semester. And even then, that was outdated information by the time I was going to college, so it was useful to have those mentors along the way. To help me get to UCA.

**LC** [00:05:19] What kind of extracurriculars or clubs were you involved in in high school?

**AH** [00:05:25] A good question. So I did chorus, I was involved in our high school choir for a little bit. Never an audition choir to start our regular women's choir. And I enjoyed that. I enjoyed the musical outlet. And then, like the last few years, I wasn't really involved in much else because I didn't have... I don't want to say I didn't have the parental support, but like the types of opportunities that were available, we didn't really have the access income to fund. My family

wasn't in a place at the time to support that endeavor. I was never interested in sports. It wasn't they were bad, just that it wasn't my thing. I was in an AP chemistry club, so my AP chemistry class had a club and we met for breakfast like once a month. It was cool, but I really wasn't involved much outside of it. I think I may have been on the prom committee like for decorating, but I don't remember how that happened. But beyond that, I was just kind of trying to keep trying to keep my grades and take the AP classes. And I think I did graduate with honors in the end from high school, but I never did sports or newspaper or anything. Looking back, I kind of wish I had, what would I have done if I had been more extroverted in that sense? But I don't regret it.

**LC** [00:06:57] How would you say your mom influenced your education?

**AH** [00:07:03] There are several factors there, and I feel compelled to be conscious of the fact that this is going into the record... my mom always pushed me to learn when I was growing up. My mom was in community college before she had to drop out. We didn't have TV. When she sat down to study being a single mom, she would be like, "Here's what you're going to study and here's what you're going to work on". And so she kind of nurtured, to read a book. I had so many books growing up and I had so many opportunities to really learn. I'm sure if I had ever asked her; "Mom, can I be a Girl Scout?" or "Mom? Can I take piano lessons?" She probably would have been like "great." But it was always, "Mom, can I have more books?" She was like, "This is fine, I know how to handle this."

Then I lost my grandfather when I was eight. My mom, her dad passed, and that hit a bump for our family, obviously. My mom, bless her heart, she tried, but it was the 90s and we didn't talk about therapy and it wasn't as open with mental health. We laugh about it now and say "we probably should have done a lot of family therapy after that." It just became survival in that sense. My mom was always supportive, but she shifted from being like, "Here, read the books" to this. We're going to do this together" to kind of like, "we're literally trying to survive in what this new reality means for our family."

Some other things that were happening at the time. She had my half-brother when I was 13 and then had some mental and physical health issues that disrupted my high school experience and we now know they're physiological problems. That relates back to the education in a sense, that it kind of became a way for her and for me, it was like, "Oh my gosh, I have to get out of this house, right? Because there's all this tension and all this stuff going on. My mother never meant for that to happen. It was just that physiology and those things that were happening that we didn't understand at the time, and we didn't talk about therapy. We didn't deal with it that way.

I delved myself right into academics and thought go to college and get away and go be an independent person. In a way, even though that's negative, and I credit her with that. I have thankfully over the past fifteen years and been able to repair that relationship and have those honest conversations and really appreciate what she was able to do for me. Living with a single mother it's hard to doubt your ability. She was always very much like, "You can do anything you want to do. You don't need somebody to take care of you like you can do this," which came in really handy being a physics major and being in a male dominated industry to have that backup of seeing my mom take names and kick ass, and so I can do it too.

**LC** [00:10:30] When you were growing up, what dream jobs did you have throughout the years?

**AH** [00:10:39] If you ask my mom, she'll say that when I was little, I wanted to be a digger like an archeologist. I don't know where that dream went because it faded very quickly. I think when I realized you have to be outside a lot and I don't like the outside. The next dream job I had in high school and I don't even know if it was a dream or like "this is an achievable path for me. This is what I want to do." I wanted to be a chemistry teacher. I was very influenced by my high school chemistry teacher as a mentor. She was great at helping me understand, navigate and identify challenges and barriers and overcome them. I knew I wanted to be able to provide that for other students who may be in my position. When I came to college, I was going to be a chemistry major

and I was going to be a chemistry teacher, and that was going to be my job. In high school, that was it, then in college things started to shift.

**LC** [00:11:45] Can I ask about your experience at AGS?

**AH** [00:11:49] I loved it. Gov School was at Hendrix, and I went in the natural sciences. It was the first time I had ever been-harking back to that sheltered life-it's the first time, aside from maybe a few weeks in church camp, that I had been away from my parents. My mom and my grandma and then my stepdad for a long amount of time. The freedom of living on your own. Having that dormitory experience, coupled with meeting folks from all over the state who were also academically minded, who were also having these big conversations.

In high school, it was easy to feel separated from your traditional view of what a high school student is. Where they're like, football Friday night and have relationships in high school. Then you go to AGS and you're like, "Oh, all the other nerds are here." It was such a great way to meet people. I met my college roommates there. I loved having the conversations about the films and these big ideas we were getting exposed to. That came with its own pushback, right? That coming back to home after your AGS summer was very difficult because you want to keep having these big conversations and you're realizing kind of how small -even though it wasn't rural- how small where you came from is. There's a little tension there, but I loved it.

I remember I did a botany class most of all, I can't remember what my other two natural science courses were. You meet people there, you get an idea of what the college classes look like. It solidified that I wanted to go to college in Conway. I never really considered any other colleges outside of Conway or outside of UCA, actually. It was a great experience, and I have been heartbroken to see how it shifted over the past 10 years. I'm really privileged that I got to experience it as it was designed to be experienced. My stepdad, who is now legally adopted, my dad, he went to AGS in 1991. He was the one that pushed me to figure out if they still do this because I remember it being a really big thing. He went to AGS and then I was able to go my senior year, 17 years later, and it felt like completing a cycle. Something that connected the two of us, and that was cool.

**LC** [00:14:57] I'm curious what you are talking about in the shift because I also went to AGS, and I I want to know what you would say about it now versus then.

**AH** [00:15:10] It's my understanding that once they shifted away from Hendrix, they took a more tech focused route. A more content area specific cutting the curriculum of what would have been area two and area three less conversation about. All of this was just what I know based on impressions, I haven't actually done the research, but less conversation about philosophy, less conversation about understanding yourself. These ideas that might be brandished by some as encouraging a more liberal thinking. I think they have cut down on those right and made it more like content and technical skills specific. Still a great thing to do, it's great to go learn technical skills, but part of what part of what AGS did, even as far back as I remember my dad talking about it when he was there was encourage you to think about things in a way that you didn't think about them at home. That stepped outside of your traditional religious upbringing, or that stepped outside of your parents' political views. It's where you get the film. I mean, if you went to AGS, you probably heard about it, but you know the guiding hand, right? There's this whole conspiracy that the governor is trying to change all these students and make them like liberal thinkers. It's the same story we hear now about college, but they made active steps to defund the programs that got students talking and thinking about things outside of their purview, so that's a disappointment. Maybe it'll change.

**LC** [00:16:58] What was your application to UCA and the Honors College like? Did you have an i squared day?

**AH** [00:17:09] I did, we all had to. Unfortunately, this is going to be like the start of an era where I

don't remember much. I do know that I only applied for UCA and I applied for the Honors College, and I knew that that was what I wanted from the beginning. I knew that I needed the scholarship because otherwise we had no way to pay for college. I was not aware of how things worked, loans didn't even cross my mind. It was just like, "either you get this scholarship or you don't go to college." I applied for honors. I remember being really nervous about writing the essays. I'm like, "Is this going to answer the right question?" I could not tell you what those essays were about. I remember coming up for i squared, and it was Donna Bowman that gave our group lecture. Then you have to write an essay about it in real time and then you do the small group conversations. It was either Phillip Frona or Philip Melton that ran my small group conversation. It was nerve wracking, but it was exciting. Knowing that this is my "make or break" moment, either you're going to do this or you're not. You didn't give yourself any other outs or any other opportunities. Our family's personal philosophy has always been one thing, if they're going to work out the way they should work out tragedy or not, it's going to go the way it should go. I was putting a lot of eggs in that basket. "It's just going to work out the way it should work out. Just do your best". I knew my academics were sound like I knew if it were just a question of "Was I smart enough right then? Would I do okay," but it's not right, the honors college was about more than that. It was about how can you really think I can do this? AGS helped allay some of that, like if you were having a discussion in Area two or if you were having a discussion at Area three, so it's not this big, scary thing. I did this all last summer so that helped with that. I remember that being a make or break moment, what's going to happen and what's the next thing?

**LC** [00:19:49] What would you say was your first impression of the Honors College?

**AH** [00:19:55] It was this idea that it was a way to extend similar experiences to what I had in governor's school. The idea of not taking your standard core classes and instead replacing them with the honors core classes, the Core I, Core II, Core III, Core IV was really intriguing to me. It fit that governor's school mold of "we're all learning and talking about the same things," and I wasn't interested in an art appreciation class. You know, at 18, I definitely didn't care as much about that. Now, at 30, I kind of felt like, "Man, I wish I had done that". But I don't regret my honors experience.

I liked the idea of writing the thesis. I liked the idea of coming out with some finished product and you also had the minor. At the time when I started the Honors College, I hadn't solidified into doing a thesis that aligned with a departmental honors or a departmental research project because my brain wasn't even at that point. I was thinking, "Oh, I can do a social based education base, maybe an arts based type thesis and really have some fun with it and do something cool." My first impression was making that AGS connection and I love the idea of the community. Going into a dormitory where you're not connected with people in any way other than you're all first year students was a daunting prospect. To be able to see how the honors students, that you at i squared or bear facts day or something interacted with each other and then. Know that you could have that same type of community. That was important to me. I really wanted that. At the time there was enough tension in my family dynamic I was looking for a family, and the Honors College and my roommates and the friends that I made were able to fill that need. But then probably I also needed therapy, to be honest.

**LC** [00:22:31] Tell me about what it was like living in the dorm with honors peers.

**AH** [00:22:37] It was great. I felt incredibly privileged, we have really like the honor code to have really good housing. You still have a good housing situation, being able to have the private bedroom in the suite. I roomed with a girl I knew from Governor's School and then two girls who knew each other from high school for most of my time in the honors college. We got to know each other beforehand. You still had that privacy, a place to retreat. I love the fact that it wasn't separated by sex. Men and women living on the same floor, even though you couldn't have mixed sex

roommates, you could have a group of guy friends live right across the hall from us. Being a person who has always tended to gravitate towards- like being in a male dominated field, a lot of my friends are men. To have an environment like this is normal and this is fine, and we're not like clutching our pearls and going "But what's going to happen?" That was good. I loved the fact that when I was in honors, the people I hung out with were not a big party crowd. Our wild and crazy nights of college might consist of sitting around and sharing a beer and having a hearty discussion about something and that's my idea of a good time. I love that that environment was fostered, at least with the people I chose to hang around with. I'm not saying that everybody else was a crazy partier because I don't remember that being a thing in my class. I tended to find my group and we stuck with my group. I don't remember everything else outside of that as easily.

**LC** [00:24:43] Tell me about some of the people that you would say were in your

group. **AH** [00:24:50] Sure. Like names or -?

**LC** [00:24:53] If you're comfortable using names, you can. If not, you can just describe the relationship.

**AH** [00:24:58] My initial freshman roommate, I think we lived together freshman year, sophomore year and maybe into junior year. If I'm remembering correctly, she was a speech language pathology major and she actually had finished her doctorate. She's teaching in Arkansas right now. We moved in with a different girl our junior year. She's now teaching at a college in Hope. Very much a philosophy driven group. There were a couple other physics majors that I knew that were in the Honors College. The core guy group we hung around with was a physics major and my roommate's boyfriend and a couple of other guys that were kind of consistently hanging out. My best friend throughout all of college, and unfortunately, he and I have since lost touch, we didn't have a falling out or anything like that, but I met him the first day of school. The first day of classes, I go into the cafeteria and there was a group of people from the Honors College, but I recognized that go sit down and I sat down next to him and he goes, "Oh, hey, what's your schedule?" Back then UCA did contract scheduling where you signed a contract that you came in a certain degree and you would be put in a cohort with all these people taking the same class at the same time. When we compared our schedules, we both came in pre-med. We had the same like eight a.m. calculus, 9 a.m. chemistry, 10 a.m. Biology, noon honors. We even had the same for one class, so he and I had identical schedules, and from that moment on, we were joined at the hip. We would try to take our core classes together. He became such a great friend and I'm terrible at keeping in touch with people, so that's why we drifted apart. He became such a great friend and then his friend group by extension. Everybody knows each other. We would leave each other's bedroom doors unlocked and you knock on the door like "Oh hey, their roommates here, I'm just going to go in." One time I came home to my dorm and he's just sitting on my bed with a container of ice cream, playing the Xbox. That was just a great relationship. Because we had those honors classes together and we intentionally tried to get ourselves into similar classes. It was interesting coming back to the faculty and talking to professors about how they interpreted that relationship. It was always like, "We thought you were like an item." We were really good friends. He's completed his residency, he did go to med school. I dropped out of pre-med, but he went to med school and he did his residency up in New England. He's now working as a medical doctor in the Northeast, it's awesome. He had also gone to college a year early, so he was a little young. I mean, I am young for my cohort group, and so I think we connected over that to like, how were the two babies, seventeen, everyone else is 18. I don't remember many folks who are older. I just didn't interact with them as much. I have vague memories of folks who were the PA's I think.

**LC** [00:28:57] Yes there's PA's and they have mentors too.

**AH** [00:29:03] I vaguely remember my PA for core one, because she would always say "good job"

and I don't remember her name. That's what I remember about her. I don't really remember mentors because once I found my core group and then once I switched my major, I started being a lot more active outside of the Honors College, and that's where I met a lot of the friends that I did keep post-graduation.

**LC** [00:29:32] How did you choose your major and why did you switch?

**AH** [00:29:37] That's a good question. I started as a chemistry major and because I didn't know anything about college when I came in for my advising appointment. You're sitting there with advising, and my mom was with me and the lady's like, "Well, you know, what are you interested in?" Well, I remember we'd heard from a speaker at AGS and she had talked about chemical bioluminescence in animals. And I was like, "That's cool stuff like, how do they do that? Why aren't we using that for an energy source?" All this kind of like naive teenager stuff.. I remember telling the adviser I was really interested in that, and she said, "Oh, great, Biochem Premed!" I was like, "Okay," because I'm thinking, like, "you know what you're talking about right?" I stayed a semester as Biochem Premed until it took me to realize I don't want to be a doctor like that's not what I'm trying to do. Then I switched straight to chemistry and do the high school chemistry teacher thing. That's what I came here to do. I did another semester of that, then my sophomore year, I took my first physics class and I very distinctly remember Dr. Will Slaton, who's also an honors college graduate. He was my physics I teacher, and later went on to be my research adviser and now is a great friend, but I definitely remember him kind of issuing the personal challenge of like... I'm interested in physics, but I want to know the why. I remember him issuing the challenge of "Well, I mean, you're just a chemistry major, so you're not going to you're not going to know it, you're not going to know the why." He was able to read the challenge that I needed, that was somebody to say like. "Oh, you think you can do this?" I was able to go like, "You know what? Screw all this uncertainty that comes with not knowing what you do with a physics degree. I'm going to change my major" and I did. I changed it that semester. My parents were probably floored because they're like, "Wait, what are you going to do with a physics degree? What is the physicist to do? We don't know," and I'm like, "I don't know. But this guy told me that I probably can't do it, so I'm going to do it." I switched and I never looked back, I never regretted it. My degree is in physics, but it's a subset, it's chemical physics because the department chair was able to work with me and not have a wasted year of coursework. That was a way to keep me on track to graduate as closely as possible to our plan because I knew I was also running up on that honors college scholarship. Like, no scholarship, no college. I needed to get out as close to four years as possible.

**LC** [00:32:29] What exactly would chemical physics be?

**AH** [00:32:44] I worked with Dr. Bill Taylor on campus and he does physical chemistry. Physical chemistry is trying to understand the physics behind why certain reactions happen, whether that's talking about electromagnetic interactions or quantum interactions and things like that is physical chemistry. Chemical physics is basically physical chemistry, but in the physics department. My coursework was different in the sense of, I took Chem I, Chem II and OChem I. Whereas most physics students wouldn't have that level of chemistry, they would replace it with physics based electives. Whether that's static dynamics, whether that's microcontrollers, they would have a different subset of electives. It was not driven from a desire to be a physical chemist or a chemical physicist. It was just, "you've already taken these classes. Can we utilize them and not make it a wasted year" and at the time, not knowing what the future would hold in terms of career prospects? Knowing that I went on to do engineering school, if I had had the money, would I have said "I'll take some electronics classes" but I didn't know by then..

**LC** [00:34:11] Did you have any other minors other than the honors minor?

**AH** [00:34:15] Yeah, I have a minor in mathematics. In the process of getting a physics degree, you

take one additional math class to get your math minor, so I did that.

**LC** [00:34:26] Were you involved in any extracurriculars on campus?

**AH** [00:34:31] Once I shifted into my sophomore year, I started doing undergraduate research with Dr. Bill Taylor in the chemistry department, and I started doing undergraduate research with Dr. Will Slaton in physics. I also was a really active member of our Society of Physics students for SPS. Dr. Slaton was the advisor at the time, and by the second semester of my sophomore year, I was in an officer position and by my junior year I was the president. I served as president for two years. And the associated things that went with that in the department.

**LC** [00:35:21] Did you enjoy being a part of that club?

**AH** [00:35:23] Yes. I'm currently working on a degree in leadership, and I can identify that the things that I enjoyed about those positions were the leadership aspects that I'm nurturing now. And so I loved being a part of that community. I loved building that community and providing a place for our physics majors to thrive. Starting some traditions with the assistance of other students along the way that are still persisting. I came back and took over again once I started working here. It was a really great experience. My family relationships during college were very tense, my parents didn't quite know what to do, and I didn't quite know how to process all my feelings of being a first gen student. Feeling like my parents couldn't ever understand everything that was going on, I suffered really badly in that first year transition with homesickness and in my mental health. I didn't know how to have those conversations or get the resources that I needed. Through physics, through SPS, and with corollary support from the Honors College and the friends that I made were very buoyant throughout the whole situation. That really gave me the kick in the pants I needed to say, "OK, I gotta figure this out. I want to survive and thrive and be a good college student" or have a good college experience, I should say, in addition to being academically successful. It was very helpful to be a part of extracurriculars.

**LC** [00:37:25] Were you involved in many activities that the Honors College put on?

**AH** [00:37:32] I remember doing a soapbox one time, or maybe two soapboxes. I know I did one on demos and science outreach, my senior year. I want to say that I was involved in a challenge week, but I can't remember to what extent. I would go to lectures and things like that. I don't remember being actively involved in the things that the mentors put on. I don't think that was a knock against what they were doing, I found a niche group relatively quickly when I came to college, even though I still struggled with the transition. I had a group of friends that were hanging out and doing things outside of what the Honors College was planning. There's your fall retreat, that was a wonderful experience. We did a winter lock-in in the student center. You go to the student center and there was some academic stuff and there's some fun stuff and they lock the doors and you can't go back to your dorm. It was so funny because I know why they don't do it anymore, because we were just like, "Are you kidding me? Why do we have to stay here all night? We literally have beds 100 feet that way." All that being said, I still look back and laugh about that experience and how it was really great in building that community. Don't ask me what book we read. Don't ask me what the discussions were about, but it definitely was really cool. We went to Winrock for our fall retreat. That was a very interesting and exciting time. You didn't ever room with people that you were rooming with, so you got to meet other women.

**LC** [00:39:38] What part of the retreat do you remember that you can tell me about?

**AH** [00:39:43] I remember being forced into that hotel room with three women I didn't know. I hadn't met them in any other context. For me, that was a big social risk and it felt very vulnerable. At the end of the weekend to be able to come out with me like, "These people weren't mean." A lot

of times honors college students, and I'm stereotyping, but you might be thinking like. "These kids are probably more likely to have been bullied in high school" or, "Oh, you know, the nerd over there" so you can have that trepidation going into a room full of strangers, I'm like, "OK, are these people going to accept me or are they going to be kind of assholes?" It was cool that they were really nice. Maybe this college thing isn't going to be that bad. It still had its ups and downs, but it was good. I don't remember education wise what we talked about. I vaguely remember having alumni present and understanding you were part of something that extended beyond your four years. This is actually, of course, not an "elite club," but an elite club, you know what I mean? You're actually a part of something now. That extends beyond you and your four years here at UCA.

**LC** [00:41:30] Have you felt like that still remains true as you have graduated, do you feel like you're still part of the club?

**AH** [00:41:38] I definitely am not as involved in alumni events as some of the other people that I know. I will say some of my closest friends on campus are also honors college graduates. It's really nice to have that thing that connects you to alumni and current students. I had some current students coming into the writing center here, and they were doing a writing center tutoring for Senate Hughes. She mentioned she's in the honors college, so you get to have this conversation, "Oh, what's your Core I, your Core II, your Core III, your Core IV? What are you thinking about doing your thesis on?" and so you have this immediate connection with someone and probably because it's not that far removed from me, we still have that like, "oh, I remember when I had, you know, Donna Bowman for a class" that someone 20 years removed or 40 years removed might not have. I work with Carl Olds, who was also in honors college graduate back in the beginning. I think he was in one of the first classes in the 80s in the first 10 years or so. Will Slaton, Jeremy Lusk, Whit [Barringer], people that have gone out and come back. It's a good way to connect and say, "Oh, you did that too. Let's talk about it." I think you kind of when you meet a student or an alumni in the Honors College, you have this automatic thought of like, here's a person I can have a conversation with, like about certain things and they probably won't shy away from it. We all opened ourselves up to an education that involves more intellectual communication. When I need intellectual communication, I know where I can go and knock on someone's office door and say, like, "Hey, let's just talk about what you think about this thing that's happening, or let's just have a chat." and that's been really great.

**LC** [00:43:37] It's great.

**AH** [00:43:39] I would love to get more involved with alumni stuff, I'm socially awkward and I don't want to break into that.

**LC** [00:43:45] Well, this is a very good start. You're being a part of our oral history, which I think that's very interesting. I'm excited, and I am going to ask you if you remember anything about Core I and Core II. If you don't, that's OK. Do you have any particular reading or talk that you enjoyed the most?

**AH** [00:44:12] I don't know if this was in Core I or Core II, and I might shoot myself in the foot, maybe it was all the way in Core III. I remember having a reading, I don't remember the person who wrote it, but I do remember that it was about this idea of the Grand Canyon effect. That you see so many pictures of the Grand Canyon on a beautiful, sunny day or in the perfect scenario that when you get there, it's just underwhelming. The perfectionist that I am, and with the anxiety that I have, that resonated so much. That idea you built up the perfect thing in your head, so much that when even the thing there happens and it's actually really good, and if you could just see it for what it is, it would be beautiful. You just turn around and go like, "it's not good enough, why doesn't it look like the picture?" Maybe that's completely misinterpreting what that reading was supposed to say at the end of the day, but for me, it was very much an eye opening like, what are you doing to yourself when you look at that picture of the Grand Canyon for so long? Like, what are you doing in

preventing yourself from seeing what's ahead of you? I didn't take that lesson to heart at the time, right when I was a first year student or through the rest of my time with the Honors College. As I've gotten older and come to terms with the person that I am and the way I do things, I've been able to look back and go like, "Yeah, that's why that hit really hard. That's why you were like, this makes sense." That's what I remember from that first year the most. Beyond that, the only other real reading moment that sticks out was in Doug Corbett's science and literature class, which I think was a junior seminar. We read a book called *Einstein's Dream* by Alan Lightman. Several books we read in that class are still sitting on my shelf today. Einstein's dreams? Have you read it? [shakes head] No? 10/10 would recommend, it's a series of vignettes about different ways to perceive time or different ways time can be perceived, different theoretical time perceptions interspersed with the story of Einstein trying to write his theory of general relativity and. From the physics side of me, I was totally nerding out, but also this idea of looking at how the different understandings of the passage of time mean for our moral, ethical, personal social philosophies. That's always been very meaningful, the ability to look at things from a different perspective was very meaningful.

**LC** [00:47:16] Was it just that one book from that class that stood out or were there others that you enjoyed?

**AH** [00:47:27] We read *Longitude* by David Sobel. That was a great book about an unsolvable problem. *Longitude* is talking about how we knew how to measure latitude, but we didn't know how to measure longitude. We didn't have a good enough tool, so we had to keep trying to invent the tool and finding a way to keep track of that measurement against all odds. Everything working against you on the sea. How do you keep track of how far you traveled east or west? We read *Basin & Range*. We read a couple of short stories, essays, science communication things and that really spoke to me as a writer. I love science communication. I didn't pursue it as a career, but I love to write and I love science communication, and it inspired my side goal in life, which is to be a better science communicator and communicate science to the general public more effectively.

**LC** [00:48:24] Do you have one professor in particular, either within the Honors College or outside of that you felt left the biggest impact on you?

**AH** [00:48:36] I will give you one for each. Inside the Honors College: Doug Corbett hands down.. I strive every day of my life to be like the most Doug person I can be. I've never met a person who makes you feel heard as much as Doug does and views the whole world— he's the first person I ever heard use the phrase "compassionate understanding." Ever since then, that's been my life's goal, like "how do I have an understanding of things and continue to be compassionate as a person?" Looking at people being strong in your conviction, but understanding where the other person might be coming from and looking at that with compassion. Not just like, oh damn you. Hands down, I clamored to take every class I possibly could with Doug. As I ended my time in the honors college, which ended very tumultuously, he was like the rock that was like, "We're going to pull you through this, we're going to make it happen." He was influential, hands down. I am divorced now, but Doug actually officiated our wedding when we got married. It was my one requirement when I got married, I was like, "I want Doug to officiate my wedding because the way he views the world is the blessing I want to bring to what this will be. Unfortunately, things changed, but that's not what this is about. I still stand by the way that man views the world. He's got more saintly patience than a lot of us. Then outside of the Honors College, the work, hours I put in with Dr. Slaton and I would not be where I am without both of those people. But, definitely without Dr. Slaton. He was the one who saw me in that physics class and he was like, "I saw you and I knew you could do it and I wanted you to do it." We made it happen, and ever since then, I mean, it's been 10 years plus that we've worked together and we've talked to each other and solved problems. He was very instrumental in my personal growth in the sense of dealing with my family trauma and dealing with my mental health and giving me that push I needed to find a solution, and then in my transition to graduate school and my transition back to here. He's always been the shining example of a mentor

right at the end of the day.

**LC** [00:51:29] I want to know, why did you decide to come back to UCA?

**AH** [00:51:36] To say I decided to come back to UCA is a very favorable way to put it. I changed my major and I was going to stay on another year and figure out how to pay for it because I knew I was running out of honors money. Stay on another year and then figure out what, what was life for you after that? My department chair said, "Ashely, you really only need these two classes. So if you take those in the summer, then you'll have met all your graduation requirements and you can go to grad school in August." I said "Okay, how could we turn around and talk to Dr. Slaton about this? How could we turn it around? We got to make it happen because I'm not going to be able to afford a year of college and housing and everything." In fact, I might have had it worked out with honors where they could pay my housing, but they couldn't pay my tuition. I don't remember the details are scratchy. That was in September, I applied for graduate school the next week, took the DRE the week after that and then sent off all my applications. It was a rapid decision, and I decided to go to school in acoustics and get a mechanical engineering degree ultimately, because that's what Dr. Slaton had done. That's what my undergraduate research was in and that was what I felt familiar with. I thought "I'm gonna go get a Ph.D. because that's what you do, you go from physics to do a Ph.D." I got into an engineering school with the intent of doing my Ph.D.. That senior spring, I took twenty three hours, which is a lot. I do not recommend 100%. They should not have let me do that, but it got me where I needed to be, and I took six hours over the summer and then I moved to Austin and I promptly shut down. Like, you're exhausted, I got through two years of graduate school. There were some internal things going on there. Long story short, the Ph.D. wasn't going to happen. I couldn't do it. They would keep me, but my mental health couldn't handle it. I started applying for jobs. I had no experience at all and no teaching experience. I didn't get the job which was expected. I made the short list, but I didn't make the final cut. I didn't get a job anywhere else, and I knew I couldn't stay in Texas, couldn't stay in grad school, so I resigned. I was going to come home, live in my parents basement for a year and then try again. I got home, moved into my parents basement. The day after I finished unpacking, the physics department called me and said, "Hey, about that job. The lady who was supposed to start didn't show up. She just straight up didn't show up, and classes start on Thursday. Can you be at work on Monday?" It was Friday, so I was like, "Well, if it were anybody else, I would say no, but I can't say no." I came back and I went up that Friday and got an apartment and I commuted for a week until I moved all my stuff. I've never regretted it. I came back because of this weird series of events. When I got here and remembered how UCA is truly a special place because of the community it builds with its students, I was like, "Yeah, this is where I want to be," and even in my new job, which I took in 2018. Still trying to build those communities, still trying to be a part of something.

**LC** [00:55:13] That's very cool. How do you think the Honors College has impacted your success post-undergrad?

**AH** [00:55:24] I'm going to pull three different aspects. After I'd been back at UCA for several years and in 2020 not knowing there was a global pandemic on the horizon, I decided to go back to graduate school and I did an online program. I'm doing an online program to get my EDD., and I promise this is related because we have to do a lot of discussion posts. We have to do a lot of talking, and a lot of writing. The experiences I had, rightly or wrongly in the Honors College have helped shaped my ability to write good discussion posts, to write good research papers. I will even add in the asterisk like sometimes that for me, especially in the Honors College, sometimes it meant like I didn't have time to read this whole paper, but I skimmed it effectively and was able to write and have a discussion on it. That skill has been amazing in graduate school. When it's physically impossible. Back when I was married and running a household and trying to do my job and also be in grad school and survive a global pandemic. It's like sometimes you don't have time to read a thirty four page article, but I'm going to figure out how to skim it, get the information and make a logical discussion as well sourced and well-written. Some folks might have an unkind word to call

that, but I think it's a skill. The ability to process information in that way, know what to come back to and know what to just let slide. The Honors College helped with that personally. The Honors College shaped a lot of my philosophy in how I look at what it means to learn and the importance of interdisciplinary studies. In physics or in the sciences in general, we tend to be very siloed. We tend to want to be siloed, but, if we stay siloed, we do not thrive. The interdisciplinary nature of the Honors College is something I've tried to bring to aspects of my job, to aspects of things that I do, that it's not just about physics, it's about how that connects to something else. If you've ever heard of science Wednesday, I'm the lead organizing faculty. We started Science Wednesday in 2012 technically and then with a one off program, and then I graduated, another student took it on. When I came back in 2015, we continued it and I'm now the organizer. It's all about interdisciplinary, it's about let's talk about the science of vaccines. We had someone from public health and someone from biology and someone from psychology. Let's all talk about it or let's stretch it even further. I've had the science of love with a chemist, artist and a historian. It's stretching the idea of what it means to do science and looking at everything with a more interdisciplinary lens is definitely something the Honors College gave me. That is not just about your silo, it's all connected. Back to that compassionate understanding, that's the third thing is that personal moral philosophy of being a compassionate person.

**LC** [00:58:54] How do these three things change your everyday life?

**AH** [00:58:58] If I look at my everyday life in terms of being a teacher, a principle of compassionate understanding means giving grace to my students and requesting grace in return. I try not to be a big stickler. There's always a time and place for a deadline, but there's also always a story. There's also always a circumstance. I'm willing to hear that I'm willing to not be like "my way or the highway." Personally, I don't eat meat anymore. I would say that my own spiritual philosophy is shaped by this idea of connectedness and compassionate understanding. Those things naturally guide your everyday life. So much of my life is my job, and so how I view and interact with students is probably the most significantly impacted aspect.

**LC**[01:00:17] It's awesome. All right, so we're almost at the time. And I wanted to just open up the floor if you have anything else you would like to add before the interview's over, you can go ahead and say that now.

**AH** [01:00:31] I touched on this, but that process of writing an undergraduate thesis was very pivotal and something that I wouldn't have done outside of the Honors College. I didn't publish that work, but I did have two other publications during my undergraduate career and the practice writing and the experience of writing a thesis and defending a thesis, giving your presentation and answering questions. As I went to do my master's degree and now I'm approaching my dissertation defense, those experiences like, "Oh, I've done this once before, it's just the next level up, right? Or I've done this again. It's just the next level up" has been really helpful. I really appreciate that opportunity, even though it happened on a very accelerated timeline. Our research that we were doing for my own business, we thought we're going to have a whole other year. Then it was like, "Oh no, wait, you can graduate in August, so let's shove it all down together, and let's make something happen." That was a very trying time, but in a way that also helped. When you survive when really trying time and you can sit back and go, "Hey, I made it through that thing, even though things really suck right now, maybe I can also make it through this."

**LC** [01:01:58] All right. Well, I just wanted to say thank you so much for joining the interview, and I am going to stop the recording now.