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SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
John Zagurski Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Zagurski, John

Interviewer Name: Clark, Lillian

Date of Interview: 03/08/2022

Location of Interview: Home, Lakeside, TX (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

LC= Lillian Clark

JZ= John Zagurski

Interview Summary

The following oral history of a recorded interview with Whitney Barringer conducted by Caroline Horton on March 8, 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** [00:00:02] This is Lillian Clark with the Schedler Honors College oral history project. Today's date is March 8th, 2022 and I am interviewing John Zagurski at home. What town are you in?

**JZ** [00:00:24] Northlake, Texas.

**LC** [00:00:25] Northlake, Texas. We will be talking about student experience leading up to and during his time in the Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

**JZ** [00:00:37] I'm John Zagurski and I am 34 years old.

**LC** [00:00:41] What years did you attend the Honors College?

**JZ** [00:00:46] 2007 to 2011.

**LC** [00:00:56] Where are you from?

**JZ** [00:01:00] I grew up in Gainesville, Texas, which is not too far north of here. I grew up in North Texas for most of my life.

**LC** [00:01:11] What was that town like? Was it a small town or-

**JZ** [00:01:15] It was small, we lived outside of town. I grew up really, really poor in a trailer park east of there. It was a really small border community that was living outside of town.

**LC** [00:01:32] Did you attend public school?

**JZ** [00:01:37] I actually attended Catholic school. I was in private school until I got to college.

**LC** [00:01:43] What was that like?

**JZ** [00:01:46] It was a small Catholic school. I grew up with a learning disability, so I had trouble reading and doing all that. My mom knew it at an early age, so she worked really hard and found tutoring and a lot of resources like that. I went to a small, private Catholic school because it offered more one-on-one attention with teachers.

**LC** [00:02:08] Was religion also a factor, or was it more the one-on-one aspect?

**JZ** [00:02:16] It was for them, but we were Southern Baptists, but that was a Catholic school. It was mostly just one-on-one. But they did like that there was some religious education in school..

**LC** [00:02:27] Do you think that Gainesville was a good place to grow up?

**JZ** [00:02:32] I think Gainesville was a rough place to grow up. It is heavily impoverished and it's gotten worse. They just built a casino called Winstar, which is one of the largest in the US near there. It's only made things a lot worse. It's added a lot of crime, prostitution, a lot of things like socioeconomically, there's not a lot of means for people to get out of that place.

**LC** [00:02:56] That's very hard. Did that have a negative impact on growing up or your education while you were growing up?

**JZ** [00:03:06] It meant to get a good education, I needed to get out of there. For high school, I went to Subiaco Academy in Arkansas and I got support from some local alumni who had daughters and they wanted sons [too], so they supported me going there. I went there on an academic scholarship and got to go to Subiaco. for that and that led me eventually to the Honors College in Arkansas. I had to seek education outside of public institutions until college.

**LC** [00:03:36] Was that academy a boarding school or did you live with this family?

**JZ** [00:03:42] Yep. It was an all boys boarding school up in the mountains of Arkansas.

**LC** [00:03:46] What town is that in?

**JZ** [00:03:48] It's in Subiaco. The closest town that most people know by is Paris, Arkansas, or Russellville or Darnell, Arkansas.

**LC** [00:03:59] Was that all four years of high school?

**JZ** [00:04:00] Mm-Hmm.

**LC** [00:04:04] Did you have a good time there?

**JZ** [00:04:05] I did, Subiaco is a pretty retreat-esk place. It was a good way to get away from the world. The only thing was you spent those four years and you were isolated from the rest of the world. A lot of things, cultural and pop cultural references that most people grew up with. I didn't understand those when I got to college. It was great in building community and self-sufficiency and it gave me the opportunity to be who I wanted to be there.

**LC** [00:04:36] Can you tell me about who your parents are?

**JZ** [00:04:41] They were both military police officers, so I was an Air Force brat. After they got out of the service, they got divorced. I grew up with my mom and my stepdad in Gainesville. My dad lived a couple of hours south of Dallas.

**LC** [00:05:05] After they were no longer military police officers, did they have a second job or were they retired?

**JZ** [00:05:14] They had second jobs. My dad went into furniture, they worked in office furniture moving when he was in his early 20s before he left for college. He went back to that after the military. My mom worked with my stepdad at a private security firm that helped with drug and bomb dogs, and so they trained the bomb dogs. They sold that business when I was in elementary school.

**LC** [00:05:48] I know you said your mom really wanted you to get one-on-one resources in school. How would you say that she influenced your education, especially beyond primary education?

**JZ** [00:06:04] She was intent that I was going to go to college and had the expectation for me that I was going to do that. That was a big influence. She emphasized that my disability was not something that was going to hinder me, and I was going to be able to do things that other kids did and go to school like other kids did. She definitely pushed and worked for me, but once I got going, and she was very supportive of it.

**LC** [00:06:35] When you left for boarding school and then also for college, what did you feel like you left behind in your hometown?

**JZ** [00:06:49] The biggest thing was a little sister that was still at home and my family. When I left for high school, my family was falling apart. One of the reasons I left was I wanted to get to a more stable environment because what was in front of me was- I didn't think I was ever going to be able to leave if I didn't. So Subiaco was a path out of there. My sister was still behind and my family kind of disintegrated after I left. My mom was in the military, she got hurt when she was in the military. During the opioid crisis, she got addicted to prescription pills, and my sophomore year in college, she passed away. It was something she was always struggling with, but it was deteriorating even whenever I was in junior high. I knew I needed stability and Subiaco was that option for me. When I left, the biggest thing I was leaving was an unstable environment for a stable one where I could have a lot more control over my future.

**LC** [00:07:51] How much younger is your sister?

**JZ** [00:07:55] She's about two and a half years younger than me.

**LC** [00:07:58] Did she end up following you, or where did she end up going after that?

**JZ** [00:08:04] She was a little bit more free spirited, and she clung to the freedom of that stuff. She bounced around between parents and living in different places. It hurt her because it didn't put her in a situation where she could make a bunch of good life choices. She eventually got back on her feet, but it took several years.

**LC** [00:08:28] Do you think if you had stayed, things would have been different for you and her?

**JZ** [00:08:33] They would have definitely been different for me. For her? I don't know. She was already going down that path even before I was leaving. But she was struggling with some stuff and

it didn't get any better. A girl really does need her mom when she's going through puberty and things like that. My mom just really wasn't able to be there for anybody else. My mom's problems spread, and so I don't think I would have been where I am now if I would have stayed.

**LC** [00:09:02] Can you tell me about some of your friends, either from your hometown or from your high school?

**JZ** [00:09:11] In high school, I met my best friend, Buck Butler, and he was another Texas kid. He was from Lubbock. He was a year younger than me, so it was my sophomore year when I met him. We bonded and became close friends, and became friends with another guy. His name is Seth Buckman and Seth actually came with me to UCA. Both of them were a year younger than me, but those are my two best friends, and I've stayed friends with both of them.

**LC** [00:09:42] Seth, came to UCA with you. Was he also an honors college?

**JZ** [00:09:50] He was not. I had a classmate that did come with me to the honors college and his name was Christopher Rehm.

**LC** [00:09:56] Were you close with him, either pre honors college or during?

**JZ** [00:10:01] I was close to his whole family. I was close to his older brother in the beginning of my high school career. Whenever I wanted to come to UCA to look at it, I actually stayed in his room and he was in the honors college. His name was Jeffrey Rehm and his sister was close to us in high school, too. His whole family I was close to. All three of them attended UCA and the two boys went to the honors college.

**LC** [00:10:27] That's fun.

**JZ** [00:10:29] We were roommates freshman year, Christopher and I were.

**LC** [00:10:32] What were some of your dream jobs growing up?

**JZ** [00:10:45] I kept telling my family I wanted to be an aquatic engineer. For some odd reason I found that really fascinating, engineering and underwater. Texas A&M had a like five people every year get into the program, and I thought it was like, just the coolest thing ever. I kept saying that, then I think I saw Twister as a kid and I wanted to be a meteorologist. That's when I went to college. I was thinking either business or law enforcement. Those were the two things that I kept going in thinking that I wanted to be. Then that all changed when I got to college.

**LC** [00:11:21] I'll come back to that in a second. I'm going to go ahead and start asking about your application process with the Honors College so you can talk about why you applied to UCA and why you applied to specifically the Honors College and how it went.

**JZ** [00:11:43] For UCA, I did not physically fill out an application, we had a guidance counselor there at Subiaco, who applied to UCA for me. I was only going to apply to U of A. I knew some other people who were going up there and so I was going to follow my roommate and go up there. But she said, "Well, UCA's doing a whole lot with scholarships right now," and she applied for me. She applied for me and then told me. Then I later found out that they offered me a two-thirds scholarship. I think it was called the president's scholarship at the time. That was a great opportunity. Later on, Christopher told me about the Honors College, and so I applied to the Honors College as well. I applied very close to the deadline because I found out about it really late. I was told it was a reading, writing intensive program. Those were my weakest areas so I thought it'd be

good if I could get into that, I could do well. It could help me better myself in those areas. If I really focused on it, it would give me a lot of opportunity to grow those skills. I gravitated towards it, but I applied towards the end. My letter for I squared for the admissions days got lost in the mail. My mom was struggling with addiction. Her and my stepdad divorced and then she just kind of wandered and so I didn't have a mailing address. It was at one of her addresses that it got lost. I finally called like a couple of days after and they said, "Oh, you were invited, but you never showed or we never heard from you." I explained the situation, I said "it was lost in the mail," and they said, "Well, we may do another one." I remember the admin at the time, her name was Trini Stanley and I worked with her and I talked to Patricia as well. She was in that office as well. So I remember telling them, "Well, if you just do another one, I'd really love the opportunity to apply." That started me calling every two weeks during the summer, like, "Hey, are you guys going to do another one?" or "Did you guys have any spots open up?" It got closer and closer and closer to fall, and I guess they had a couple of students drop out because me and three others all got the opportunity to apply. We got the opportunity to go through a mini I squared process right before school started. It was just persistence and then a desire to be there, and I was really excited about it. Once I found out that I got in I was going to room with Christopher, who had told me about the program and we were going to be roommates together. I was just super excited because that got me the rest of the scholarship I needed and not having even a place to go home to, it offered me stability during that time because I had a place to live. That was a real, real big opportunity to not have to go into debt for school.

**LC [00:14:49]** What made you so persistent with this was that you just knew you wanted to be a part of this program.

**JZ [00:14:57]** I wanted something to challenge me and I wanted to get better. But also part of it was that if I couldn't afford where I was going, I didn't want to take out a bunch of student loans. It was either that or go into the military, and I wasn't completely sold on doing that. I really wanted to go into this program because I thought it'd offer a lot of opportunity for growth. They also offer travel scholarships, which a lot of my photos actually centered around the travel that I did there. There was just a lot of opportunity there. I saw that there's an opportunity and I was persistent because I really wanted all of those opportunities.

**LC [00:15:40]** Do you remember your first impressions of the Honors College?

**JZ [00:15:47]** My I squared was when Donna Bowman said it was very, very intimidating. Donna has piercing blue eyes and it was one of the scariest things in the entire planet to sit across from her and have her ask you questions about things because it didn't seem like normal questions. It seemed like soul piercing questions, and all of them were intent on getting to your core of who you are. I was very nervous, especially because I knew these were my weakest areas. On my ACT, my reading score was high, but my ratings were still pretty low. I struggled with both of these things so I was super intimidated by it. They showed me this room, I'm trying to remember what the room was called, but they had little library area, sitting area and stuff near the admin offices. I just thought it was cool, it was a place that you could sit, read and just interact. They talked about other programs that they were doing and the readings they were going to do, and I was just amazed and mesmerized and enchanted by it.

**LC [00:16:51]** These readings, were there any specifically either in Donna's core one, or did you say you had Cindy for Core II?

**JZ [00:17:01]** I had Cindy for Core I and Donna was my I squared interview. I remember the Doubting and Believing Game was the reading that we had to write about for the or the I squared admissions. Anyone that starts with a quote from Lewis Carroll, those are intimidating things

because those quotes are hard to understand, very, very hard to understand. It was very interesting, but I thought it was really cool. The idea of the opportunity to learn something by believing things that are untrue, just so that you can think through something. I thought that was valuable.

My Core I was Cindy. I had a lot of conversations with my T.A. because my writing was not where it needed to be, and I knew that. I spent a lot more time outside of class with writing people and other people looking at my work and telling me where I could get better. I used Core I to get a lot of feedback on getting me up to speed on the writing component. I was struggling and funny enough, I met my wife and some of that stuff, like just trying to get other people to look at my writing and tell me where I could get better.

**LC** [00:18:08] Was it mostly fellow peers of the honors college that you were going to for help?

**JZ** [00:18:14] Yeah, my roommate Christopher I relied on [him] a whole bunch. They were really good, they had whole length meetings and so we had several papers during the first semester. They had big get togethers where the T.A. is free to all, come to rooms and upperclassmen come there and they would help with the writing. That was very helpful. That's where I got a lot of my peers to look at things I was doing.

**LC** [00:18:43] They have mentors or peer coaches at this point in the Honors College?

**JZ** [00:18:48] Yes, mentors, that's actually what they're called.

**LC** [00:18:52] Did you have any one relationship with a mentor that stood out to you?

**JZ** [00:18:59] No, I do not remember all of them, Whit [Barringer] was a mentor whenever I was—I think she was also a TA. She was a mentor because she was one year ahead of me. She was a mentor during that time and she was really good at reading and writing through stuff. She was great interacting with a number of people through there. I met my wife, probably in December of that first semester, or- I really started interacting with her, probably in October of that first semester. The more and more I got to know her, she was brilliant at reading and writing. She helped me a whole lot and I relied on her to look over my stuff.

**LC** [00:19:41] How did you end up picking sociology as your major?

**JZ** [00:19:47] I was undeclared when I came in and then I chose a business major because most of my dad's family was in business and I thought they had put numerous offers about me going and working for them in business. Even through my first year, I think I was undeclared my first semester, went to business my second semester. That summer I did an internship with one of the competing businesses to my family's business. Which was like corporate furniture, and I realized after that during internship, it was not what I wanted to do. That's when I switched to sociology and because they had a focus in criminology, which I was thinking of law enforcement. The more and more I got into that, the more I got interested in statistics, demographics, social problems, population statistics, demography, like sociology of sexuality, like there is a whole bunch of topics in there that I really just got very interested in, and so I started sticking to that stuff and that's when I switch my major.

**LC** [00:20:58] What was that sophomore year?

**JZ** [00:21:01] Me and my wife both did that, when we talked it through with each other. She was a math major, she wanted to be a math teacher. By the end of it, she wanted to go into environmental science, but they didn't have an environmental science program, so she went into environmental planning.

**LC** [00:21:18] When you made these changes, were you afraid that you would be set back by picking so late?

**JZ** [00:21:26] No, it was we were still doing a lot of gen. ed. stuff, so we weren't doing much heavy major stuff then. I still think we had a good amount of time to be undecided. Even if we did our whole first year, we were just mostly doing gen. ed. requirements. It didn't set us back too much. I probably didn't get to take as many upper level courses as other people who decided their first semester.

**LC** [00:21:53] What was the first sociology class you took that you remember and it really hooked you?

**JZ** [00:22:02] It was an intro to sociology class, and I'm trying to remember the professor's name. He hangs out with Doug George, and I'm trying to read the guy's name. He has a master's in sociology, so he's not one of the Ph.D. professors. He was into organic gardening, and he was a really interesting guy. He was talking about social problems and sociology. It was cool to talk to him and listen to him about everything. Maybe his name is Cliff. I'm trying to remember I don't have a syllabus, I'd probably have it somewhere in some of my notes, but I'm trying to remember whose class that was.

**LC** [00:22:42] I took that class as well. It was interesting. Where did you live during your time in college?

**JZ** [00:22:55] I never left New Hall. So first two semesters, I was in New Hall with Christopher. After that, I became an R.A. for New Hall. I just moved floors in New Hall as an R.A. I was on 1st, 3rd and 4th the years I was there, so I just stayed in New Hall. I love New Hall. It was a neat place and yeah, it was just strange.

**LC** [00:23:34] What about it, did you love?

**JZ** [00:23:36] We had a good mix of students, so we had a lot of students from the military. It wasn't just on honors kids, it was a good mix of nontraditional students, upperclassmen, kids with disabilities. It had a large, broad mix of students. The problems that we dealt with. They were just the weirdest group and strangest things. We couldn't do a program just for honors kids, we had to do it so that everyone would be interested in it. It felt like home there for a good little bit, and I really enjoyed the private room. That was one of the big benefits and perks, but also since I was on a full ride, we got paid our room and board out as a paycheck. It provided income so we could do something on weekends and that I could take summer classes and stay there in the summer.

**LC** [00:24:29] Were you and R.A. during the summer as well?

**JZ** [00:24:33] I did upward bound my junior and senior summers so that I had a place to stay there. My freshman year summer, I went back and was working at Wal-Mart, and then my sophomore year summer, I think I was doing some other stuff, business, internships and things like that. I think that's how that went. Now I'm looking back at that time, and it doesn't make sense. I think I did the business internship my freshman year summer because that's where that photo's from one of the ones in there. I guess I stopped working at Wal-Mart the summer before. I worked at Wal-Mart as a produce supervisor for five years. That was during high school and partly my summer before college. My sophomore summer was when we went to New Zealand. Yeah. We were down in New Zealand for a month. I stayed at my wife's parents house for a good chunk of that summer.

**LC** [00:25:42] You worked at Wal-Mart before and a little bit at the beginning of college and then you were an R.A. and you had a business internship. Were these your only jobs or did you have anything else during this time or any other internships?

**JZ** [00:26:01] I was a work study as an admin for the Honors College my freshman year, and then I was a tutor for upward bound, my junior and senior year. I had a research assistant job, and that was for an anthropologist designing the database in access for a seed bank. I did anything and everything to earn a paycheck while I was there, but most of all that stuff was through campus.

**LC** [00:26:33] The research assistant job was for someone in the anthropology department at UCA or was outside of UCA?

**JZ** [00:26:42] I cannot remember his name, but he was designing a seed bank and he had all this stuff in Excel and wanted to design an access database so that whenever they took in new seeds they could add it in access. I had taken an access class when I was doing my business major and so I knew that I had the technical knowledge and he was going to teach me organic gardening. I made the database, but I never heard anything about organic gardening. I did help him in a couple of events. I really wanted to learn how to garden, but I'd ever got the opportunity to do that.

**LC** [00:27:18] Did you ever take a class with Allison?

**JZ** [00:27:21] Alison Wallace, no I didn't, my wife did. She had Allison for her Core II class. We did do a Laughing Stock play about Allison. Laughing Stock was a comedy troupe that we started or I was a part of it, someone else started it. It was a comedy troupe we were part of during sophomore and junior year at UCA, and it was through the Honors College. We did a roast of all the professors and I can't find any of them, but we made funny videos of impersonations of professors. Allison was one of them. She was known for citing different pages in the Harbrace Handbook. I took some of that from my wife and would joke around and would make jokes and write plays about that.

**LC** [00:28:11] Allison taught organic gardening at UCA. I wasn't sure if you were taking that or maybe your wife did, I took it with her. It was very interesting. I'm sure if you email her, she will send you a very long email explaining organic gardening to you.

**JZ** [00:28:33] Yeah, I kept the book and everything from there. I bought the book and then I did gardening and stuff after grad school. I learned a lot then. But I remember in undergrad, I really was very interested in it. They had groups that did it, and it was just I was trying to find something in there.

**LC** [00:28:52] Back to being an R.A., do you think that affected your relationship with the Honors College since you were in New Hall?

**JZ** [00:29:02] No, because we always had honors kids and so we always did interact with them. I got to do a lot of that stuff and then you have the Honors College right next door. My wife being over there and as an R.A. at the time, she was my girlfriend and always knew what they were doing and coordinating programs. We did a lot of stuff between the two halls together. We had intramurals that we would do and we did sports teams together. I never felt disconnected from the Honors College even being an R.A.. Honestly, it gave me more time to work on studying. Why I really like about R.A.'s...because like my freshman year or so, there was a speaker that they had during student orientation that said, "Find a job that will pay you to study." He kept mentioning desk jobs. When I found out about RA, a lot of it is sitting in a desk during certain times, during certain office hours. I wanted to find a job that I could study at and it'd be counted as work and get paid to do it



too. I followed his advice, and R.A. was one of the ones that did that. Plus you get to meet all the students and I like interacting with people. I enjoy the people I live with. A lot of them were people I went to classes with, so I thought that was a lot of fun too.

**LC** [00:30:17] Did you have a car at your time in college?

**JZ** [00:30:20] I did. I had this awful 2001 gold Ford Taurus that I kept sinking money into. I did end up taking out a small student loan to get it repaired. Paid that off like right after school. But it was an awful car.

**LC** [00:30:39] If you were going somewhere off campus, where were you going?

**JZ** [00:30:48] The Bears Den opened up our sophomore year, so I didn't drive off campus, but most of the time we just walked over to the Bears Den. That opened our sophomore year whenever we were becoming R.A's.. I was already a year older because I was held back when I was younger, because of a reading skill. I was already a year older, so my sophomore year, I could go to have a beer and do that stuff. I really enjoyed having that place across the street. We went to the Bears Den a lot. I also found a group of guys that went to school with my wife. None of them were in the honors college, except when Christopher would come to play. We played D&D. I did that off campus a couple of times. Most of the time I spent a lot of time on campus. We didn't go out too much. It was almost all there. I did go home like my first semester, a lot with Christopher and his family to work on their cattle farm. I spent a lot of weekends going back and forth, but after I met my wife, and we started dating, I spent a lot more time on campus.

**LC** [00:31:55] Did you ever have a bike on campus?

**JZ** [00:31:57] I did, and it got stolen in my senior year. It was the summer after my senior year and I was an RC residential coordinator for Upward Bound that summer and I had it out front and it got stolen my last week there. It was this specialized hard rock that I had gotten for half price from somebody. It was awesome, it was a little mountain bike, I could go get anywhere on campus. I loved biking around campus.

**LC** [00:32:25] Do you think the UCA is a good campus accessibility wise?

**JZ** [00:32:32] It is until it rains. It had massive flooding issues when we were there. There was a bunch of funny photos that people would take where they break out their kayaks. And start kayaking across parking lots. I know they have flooding issues, but like everything else was great. I loved that it was all in one place, which was nice. It was small and I knew it was a big campus, but it was small. Compared to some of the other Texas campuses that I'd been on, like Texas Tech, is just miles and miles. Texas A&M is so crazy enormous. I don't know how people find their way around.

**LC** [00:33:08] How would you say the honors program changed your perspective on education?

**JZ** [00:33:18] It gave me a lot of confidence and changed how I viewed my place in education. I wasn't a strong reader or writer, but by the time I got done with the Honors College, I felt like I was competent and I could hold my own. I felt very accomplished and knowing that I've gotten through that program gave me a lot of confidence. That's how it affected me, as far as the education system. It was just I needed to know that somebody out there was willing and ready to have the same conversation that I wanted. Honors was so cool because you could go do the readings and there were people that really wanted to get together and talk through it. Then we'd still go in small group and still talk it through or within a large group and talk it through. It was really cool to just find a

place where everybody was talking about the same thing and we could go through it and think through it and good ideas, better ideas. It was a really cool place to be able to work through things that were very difficult. It changed how I view things. Education before that had been a pretty arduous thing, and it was “master this task, then move onto the next, master that one.” When it became a lot more of “What can I do with these skills and how does it all connect?” I thought Honors has changed education for me.

**LC** [00:34:41] Do you think you took those skills along with you to post undergrad?

**JZ** [00:34:48] Yes, I took an honors elective called Middle Eastern Literature. This was when I was thinking I wanted to be an FBI agent, and I was like, “Well, I’ll study the Middle East and learn about it.” By the end of that class, the guy walked in and he said, “Well, this is an honors class.” and he gave us 20 books. He said, “We’re going to go through this and every week we’re going to read a new book.” It was the hardest and I’m not a strong reader and now I use audio books and things like that. But then I was like, “I just got to figure it out.” We read a book a week. Stuff like that completely challenged and pushed me. By the end of that, I felt confident enough that whatever education was in front of me, I wouldn’t be the worst at it. I would fall somewhere happily in the middle. That’s all I wanted to be, was not lacking.

**LC** [00:35:42] What would you say was your favorite honors class that you took?

**JZ** [00:35:47] I wasn’t ready for that one. I got to take a class called Strange Communities and it was done by Rick Scott, I’m pretty sure Phil Frana, but I don’t know if you ever got to meet Phil. And then it may have been Donna, but we get to read and do weird things. Just study weird groups of people, in one of them that I thought was really cool was like a gang leader for a day. It was a book about a sociologist who goes into very poor urban Chicago and starts trying to ask people in the projects about what it’s like to be black and poor. What he eventually ends up doing is learning about the whole gang system and doing a whole sort of anthropological study on the gang system and the economics of it and everything else. It was a really cool class, that was that was, really I love that class.

Something I got to do through the Honors College that wasn’t necessarily a class, but it did change a lot of things is the Honors College is a part of the National Honors Colleges Association, and so we’re also a part of the Southern Regional Honors College Association. I went to one meeting that they had and then presented about taking Laughing Stock to another one. At that Rick looks at me and says, “Hey, they’re looking for a student vice president. Do you want to come to this?” I was the admin for honors too, so I got to go to the first [meeting] because of that in San Antonio. I think one of the pictures I uploaded was from that night. I got to go to the second one, which I uploaded a photo of as well. I was going to it in St. Petersburg. Rick’s like, “Not too many people get involved with it, but it would bring to conferences and you can present your own research on stuff.” And I said, “Well, that sounds kind of fun. So I ran and no one ran against me, and so I got to be the student vice president of the Southern Regional Honors Council.” What I didn’t realize was that meant that I was going to every honors college, the regional and the national one every single lecture. Twice a year I got to go. I was expected to bring new research and come and talk and present on that. I wasn’t really big into public speaking at that time, or even now, I had not practiced much of that. I was like, “Well, this will get me better at it.” I got to do that and I’m got to travel more. Honors College was all about travel for me too. I had loved getting to travel because of it, they had great grants to do that. That got me really involved. But that was just kind of like an extracurricular with honors and I got to travel and do amazing things, present my own findings that led to my cut of my thesis and then some of that research being published.

**LC** [00:38:46] Very cool. So you said you went to New Zealand.

**JZ** [00:38:51] Mm hmm.

**LC** [00:38:52] That was sophomore year. Tell me about that.

**JZ** [00:38:56] Yes, that was the end of the sophomore summer, so between my sophomore and junior year. There was a trip and it was being planned by the biology department. The professor at the time his name was Dr. Swanson. He also taught karate classes on campus, which I got to go to as well. He was a great kind of instructor, so I got to do stuff with him. He was putting it on and the other professor did it with him was Starkey. Yes, Professor Starkey, I don't think either of those guys are at UCA anymore. I know both of them are at other places, but they were doing this trip and Swanson was from New Zealand, so it was just kind of a way for him to go home and see his mom. He took in a bunch of the honors college kids that signed up for it, and so a huge group of us signed up and went, including my wife and me. It's still one of the highlights of my life. That was one of the best trips. Never. We spent like almost thirty days in New Zealand and it was mind-blowing. It was beautiful and amazing.

**LC** [00:40:04] When you were there, were you taking a class or were you doing research?

**JZ** [00:40:09] We got three hours of credit for going and there was a lot of education, but we could craft it any which way we wanted to. Some of the stuff I learned when I was there focused on ways that their native population in Maori have mandatory participation seats on their elected positions. When I was studying sociology, representation was a big deal. They have mandatory representation, and so that was a big thing that I really took on and looked at and talked about that whenever I was writing papers. It was really cool. We got to tour a lot of their green initiatives. Some of the things that they were working with, because they were the ones doing cloning and bioengineering, and they were also one of the countries that kicked out genetically modified foods, but they were basically genetically engineering almost all the foods that they were exporting. It was very cool and interesting that we just went all around that country from the North Island to the South Island. It was an amazing trip.

**LC** [00:41:17] What would you say, if you were to go back what would be the first thing you did there?

**JZ** [00:41:23] I would go to the South Island and go do another sailing tour of the sounds. Mountains rising out of the ocean is probably one of most beautiful things ever. I've never felt so humbled by how small you are. I don't know how to describe it because it was just beautiful. It was one of those things like it puts everything into perspective how small you are, what little part you play about how much of a negative effect you can handle things, but also the positive effect. I'd never seen scenery like that. I've never seen beauty and splendor and the outdoor world like that. Just mystical places, like magical feeling places. The Lord of the Rings barely touched the iceberg on New Zealand and how beautiful it is.

**LC** [00:42:19] Did you get to visit anywhere else?

**JZ** [00:42:25] Yes, the first place I wrote a paper for. We had TAG grants. We got to write travel abroad grants, and the first one I wrote was "A Southerner Above the Mason-Dixon." I had never been north of the Mason-Dixon line, and I wrote about so much cultural experiences that came out of New York City, and a big cultural thing for me to experience would be going to New York. I wrote this grant with my wife, Lucy Ferrets, who was in the Honors College with us and Julie McVeigh. All three of them graduated honors college with me. We got to go to New York and saw a bunch of Broadway plays and we got to go to major historical sites and tour around. We did that for a couple of days and planned it all ourselves, and that was our first trip. Then the next when we did

with Lucy, we planned another trip to go to London, Paris and Rome. In 12 days we got to go through London and Paris and Rome, and that was another amazing trip. We did that with a TAG grant and we did part of the New Zealand trip with a TAG grant as well. It was awesome to be able to do those things, and none of that would have been possible without the Honors College.

**LC [00:43:49]** What other opportunities has the honors college given you that you wouldn't have had without it?

**JZ [00:43:55]** An appreciation and love of reading classical things. You see I'm surrounded by books, you can't see the other side, but I've got giant bookshelves surrounding me on the other side too. A love of reading, a passion for continuing my education and curiosity. When I used to be so intimidated by reading, I hated reading because I was bad at it and everything else like that. I don't feel that animosity anymore. I know that I have numerous avenues I can take in information, whether it be digitally or audible or going and sitting down and reading a book. It allows me to be curious about the world and not fearful about knowledge. I can surround myself with books and things that I want to read and spend time learning about. That was one of the biggest things it gave me is the gift of the ability to experience curiosity without fear of liking it or not. I can read most of the things that are in front of me now.

**LC [00:44:49]** Very cool. What did you do for grad school?

**JZ [00:44:56]** Right after I proposed to my wife, our last semester at UCA, and then we got married that December after we graduated, but she got a full ride offer to Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. Growing up here, you know how expensive TCU is and how rare a full ride offer ever comes for grad school. She was getting a degree in environmental science. I looked at the University of North Texas and started a master's degree Ph.D. in sociology. After the first semester, I dropped that and went into public administration.

**LC [00:45:45]** Public administration, is that what you do right now?

**JZ [00:45:48]** Yes, I studied local governments. They had a really great course. I went into it because my last two years I worked with Upward Bounds, which was a trio program through University of Central Arkansas, and helped them. That was to get underprivileged and underrepresented youth to exposure to college. I spent summers teaching those kids about college, showing them college to get acclimated into college life and trying to help them through some of the things that I experienced. After realizing I didn't want to be a professor, I was like, "Well, I really enjoyed and I had a passion for work through kids and education," and so I went and talked to the education department and they basically said, "Well, you're not a teacher, so you're not going to be able to work in schools and a masters of education will do you absolutely no good." I said, OK, then he said "But he says there's a nonprofit route, since you got some nonprofit management experience through the School of Public Administration." They had three routes, which was general public administration, nonprofit management, then they had one more which was the city manager route. They had those three routes, and I was going the nonprofit route because I was like, "Man, I'll go work for a tree organization and do that." My first internship, I interned with a city that owned a charter school. I was really wanting to work in the school they gave me a bunch of projects. I did some different event planning for the school, but they gave me the school budget to do and to help with that. That was a finance related thing, which my masters helped me with a little bit and I had them work on that document. What I quickly grew to realize is I needed a job. After doing their budget, I saw a budget analyst job open up across the street at a city that was right across the street there. I applied and got that and then worked my way up over the next couple of years and became a finance director and then a finance director for a small city.

**LC** [00:47:48] Is that what you do right now? Tell me about it. What exactly is your job?

**JZ** [00:47:56] Finance is over the budget, accounting, utility billing. I manage basically any income that is coming in or going out of the town. Any time money exchanges hands I've created processes and ways of tracking it and affect the ways of managing its and long term planning. Then a lot of what I do is simplifying the complexity of what that is and explaining it to people in a transparent way so that people can be involved in government and don't have to have a whole master's degree in it so it's easy to explain and encourages curiosity.

**LC** [00:48:42] How do you think your job opportunities would be different if you didn't have the honors college?

**JZ** [00:48:55] I think the Honors College allows me to keep feeling that curiosity and that want to grow and keep learning things. If I would have gone into undergrad and not had that opportunity, some of that might have drifted away and I probably would have gone into something that was easier to understand and something that I could be good at and not necessarily something I was curious about. It allows me to pursue things that I'm passionate about. Even though I didn't choose to end up where I am, it was a broken path to get here. But I'm still curious about things I do and getting better and improving. A lot of that was fueled by having a undergraduate career that gave me the opportunity to to grow that curiosity and to explore those things and then expand my reaches of understanding. It just helped me not stop right there. That's the time where education stops in your undergrad.

**LC** [00:49:55] What was your thesis in a short summary?

**JZ** [00:50:02] My thesis was a statistical look at the data from the Honors College admissions model, looking at whether people matriculated based on anything that was in their application or scores and from their honors college admissions model. Was there something predicting retention within the honors admission data? I called it a meaningless system because the question is, "are we doing all these things and collecting all this information on things and is it resulting in anything meaningful?" That it wasn't it didn't really get to the intent of it, but it was does the honors college admission models predict retention? One of my big findings through that was that the standardized testing score had nothing to do. It was one of the lowest values of whether people actually stayed in the honors college. Being the kid that grew up with learning disabilities, standardized testing is very intimidating. There's not nearly enough accommodations for people. It's a barrier for kids from low economic backgrounds. It has a higher correlation with socioeconomic status than it does even your own GPA. What I did find was that GPA played a much stronger predictor of people retaining because basically your GPA in high school predicted your GPA in college. There was two reasons people got out of the honors college. One, it wasn't a good fit and they didn't like it, and I squared really helped prepare people for that, so there was a lot of self-selection. Or they weren't able to maintain the academic means to do it. There's people who weren't able to do most of it had to do with liking it or not having strong enough GPAs. Your high school GPA was a much better predictor. De-emphasis was placed on standardized testing. That was what I mainly found and it hopefully accomplished was De emphasizing the importance of standardized testing and emphasizing the importance of your GPA in high school.

**LC** [00:52:08] And you said that this was publicized, correct?

**JZ** [00:52:13] Yes, I actually found it was on my bookshelf here. It was the Journal of National Collegiate Honors Council. The fall winter of 2013, Vol. 14. No 2 Admissions and Retention. Patricia and I got it published, and it was called Improving retention and fit by honing in honors admissions model.

**LC** [00:53:02] You worked with Tricia on this. Did this have an impact on the matriculation process in the Honors College?

**JZ** [00:53:13] I know it changed admissions, I don't know if she's ever done a follow up to see if by de-emphasizing standardized testing score, if that's improved retention. I just know that what it does is opens a door for more people to come into the i squared process and self-select the fit and want to be in there. It may not improve retention, but it definitely keeps the door open for a lot more people because they're no longer disqualified based on just a standardized testing score.

**LC** [00:53:43] What was the most important part of your thesis to you?

**JZ** [00:53:52] I really wanted other people who didn't have— my mom fought hard for me and I had a lot of people, not just her I had a high school counselor who really went above and beyond and got me accommodations—but there's a lot of people who don't have people to fight for them like that. If I took the ACT without those accommodations, I would have scored a lot lower and I would not have been able to get into the honors college. I really loved being in the honors college. So to know that others wouldn't have that opportunity, it was important for me to fight and open the door for others.

**LC** [00:54:41] That's great. Do you feel as though you were successful?

**JZ** [00:54:46] I think so. Patricia and I had a number of follow up conversations over the years, and she said she de-emphasized the importance of and the weight of those requirements. I know that's a lot for a lot more people to apply.

**LC** [00:55:05] Have you heard about the change in the Honor Scholarship?

**JZ** [00:55:11] I know the last time I saw Patricia, which was in Dallas, it may have been four or five years ago. I know that they have had to decrease how much they offer students. It's been a lot harder for kids to be able to attend and pay for those things. They cut all the graduate school grants. I know Pell Grants has even decreased. I know the lottery scholarship is decreasing. And paying for college and college prices have increased. So getting those the full ride and everything to school is unheard of now. I know that's a lot harder. It makes me sad because there's people having to get a lot of student loans to go to college. I think they're going to be missing something really crucial there and they might not be able to do it because of that.

**LC** [00:56:01] I was wondering your opinion on how the cut of the Honor Scholarship affects the demographics of the Schedler Honors College or if you think it would or wouldn't?

**JZ** [00:56:18] It can. I mean there's probably kids out there that were like me that if they didn't get a full ride, they couldn't do it. No one was going to give them a student loan. There's people who can't even consider college because of it. Yeah, it's sad that it's happened and that there's not as much opportunity to be able to do that, and there's not an easy way of lowering college costs at all. There's a lot of things wrong. It's not just the honors, it's college as a whole and how expensive it is.

**LC** [00:56:52] I want to open up the floor, and if you have anything else you would like to say before the interviews over, now is the time.

**JZ** [00:57:02] I met my wife in honors, and it was a really big part of my life, so I told you my mom passed away in the middle of sophomore year. I met my wife and we started dating at my end of my freshman year. She only knew me for a couple of months, but she came with me when my

mom passed and was kind of my support when I was there. That relationship, we went to classes together. We did everything together, but she was always supportive of us and the Honors College, and we want to do those things. She was my travel partner and without the honors college, I would never have met my spouse. That's probably the biggest impact is because my life has been made better by her. Whatever they did to get her there was worth it because it's made my life a lot better. Without her, I don't see me being anywhere where I'm at. So she gave me stability when I needed the honors college did too when they gave me funding. Those two things together completely changed my life. I have a very, very fond place in my heart for the Honors College because there's so many things that began in my life when I came there.

**LC [00:58:11]** Good, I'm glad to hear that. Right, I'm about to end the recording and I want to say thank you.