

# EXTRA CREDIT

## A SUMMER & WINTER SESSIONS PODCAST

### Episode 6 Transcript

#### **00:00:02 Introduction**

Welcome to Extra Credit, hosted by the Rutgers University Office of Summer and Winter Sessions. Listen to hear from students as they share their experiences at Rutgers and some tips on how to navigate a condensed semester. Also gain the perspective of professors and learn more about the courses they teach.

#### **00:00:19 Kylie**

OK, so hello Caroline, thanks for joining us again this year. Two years in a row. This is a great streak. Do you mind introducing yourself and just telling us a little bit about yourself?

#### **00:00:30 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Sure, thanks for having me, Kylie. I'm Caroline Klaus-Ehlers. My students call me Doctor CC, 'cause my nickname is CC.

#### **00:00:38 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I'm a licensed psychologist and I'm also on the faculty at the Graduate School of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology.

#### **00:00:48 Kylie**

So, what made you interested about this field about psychology? How did you like fall into this?

#### **00:00:54 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I really love learning about people. I love learning about behavior.

#### **00:01:00 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I also care deeply about equity and social justice, and so I was really interested in policy. At first I was a government major undergraduate focusing on public policy, and I was interested in policies that promote equity.

#### **00:01:21 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And then, after college I worked as social worker and I was working with families and I became really interested in the clinical aspect of supporting people, of supporting kids and parents.

#### **00:01:33 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And there was a, uh, policy aspect to that as well. I met my mentor during that time. She's still a mentor today.

**00:01:41 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

We're still in touch and she was a psychologist and I just felt like "wow, I want to be like Carolyn!" So, that really started my journey in this field.

**00:01:52 Kylie**

That's amazing. Good for you. It's always nice to hear stories about you know, passion and especially you know, if you are lucky enough to have a mentor like that who kind of like guides and you know drives, you know? I mean, that's always that's always a happy thing.

**00:02:09 Kylie**

Uhm, so I don't- Maybe this is like a now versus before kind of thing, but did you find that there was a stigma surrounding the field of psychology or counseling? Whether it was, you know, when you were studying or versus like now, or do you think the stigma has changed? Is it still there? What do you think?

**00:02:31 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

This is such an important question and such a timely question, I think that there continues to be a stigma around mental health services and seeking out mental health services, but I do feel that it's changing.

**00:02:47 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

You know the- a common analogy that's used is if someone breaks their arm they're going to go and get medical treatment right away. If someone is depressed or anxious, they can seek out mental health treatment and mental health services and support.

**00:03:01 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, there is a stigma there that exists. I think it's hard sometimes for parents, for instance, to acknowledge that there may be an issue that their child is experiencing.

**00:03:12 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I also think it can be hard for individuals to acknowledge that, right? They may not even realize or recognize sort of what they're experiencing, or even feel embarrassed to go for services, but I do think that's changing and I think our young people are really leading that change.

**00:03:34 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Young people are very open. They're very candid and aware and really talking and having a national conversation about mental health services. And with COVID-19, we are certainly seeing in a way some de-stigmatization because we are recognizing the impact of this disease and isolation and quarantine on people and mental health.

**00:04:04 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And so that's letting us know that people really need supports.

**00:04:09 Kylie**

Yeah, I would say during COVID I think- I mean I knew growing up, there was a stigma. I feel like with my peers, it was like, "why aren't you in counseling?" You know, like "you definitely should be," and then with like my aunts or uncles who are you know, obviously older than me, it was like, "why do you need counseling?" Like, "we'll just figure it out" and it's like they're- that's not the same thing.

**00:04:30 Kylie**

Uhm, but I definitely think now you know, after COVID and quarantine and such isolation. Even now I have aunts and uncles going like, "Oh no I have to talk to someone. I'm going crazy," you know and just having that ability to reach out to someone and just be like, "this is what I'm going through and I need tools to help myself."

**00:04:51 Kylie**

You know, 'cause. Sometimes it's- It's not just figuring it out. It's "here are tools. Here's how you get better," you know, so I think that's great. I think that's great so.

**00:05:03 Kylie**

So, do you- do you have some advice for a psychologist or a counselor during COVID? Cause obviously now you have the beginnings of this shift. And I mean, burnout is everywhere, and I think it's, kinda like rearing its ugly head right now too. And you have to see that too on the counselor psychologist side. Do you have any advice for- maybe like tips for them to as to what to do if they are feeling a burnout during COVID?

**00:05:32 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Absolutely, self care is really important and so my advice would really be to kind of identify something that you feel relaxes you, that's helpful for you. You know, of course... the caveat is that this is- that may be limited in this time, because there may be things that you want to do that you can't do because of the virus, but to the extent that you can identify things that make you feel good or relaxed, or that you can do, I think that's really important.

**00:06:06 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Self-care is actually a part of our, uhm, what our school counseling program accrediting body wants us to... It's a part of our accreditation we- It's important for us to teach that and to talk about that with our students so that they're engaging in self-care practices to avoid burnout. So, you know, really, identifying something that makes you relax, makes you happy, makes you feel connected and dedicate time, intentional time to engaging in, in those activities.

**00:06:43 Kylie**

I found walking to be very therapeutic now. Like it, it could be a mile, could be half a mile, it could be 10 minutes. It could be just around the block real quick for two seconds, you know, but I just I find it just like removing me from my house which is now work, play, you know everything, and having just the ability to- I don't care if I'm looking at the same tree 18 times, you know, just I'm- I'm thankful that that

tree is now there. It's something for me to look at that's not a computer screen, not an email like, we're good. So yeah, I can definitely relate to that. That's, uh, that's really inspiring.

**00:07:19 Kylie**

Uhm, so what kind of inspired you to teach? So, you have this great passion for you know, psychology for helping people. How does that relate to, you know, your teaching path?

**00:07:31 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Well, the students inspire me to teach, and I learn so much from them and they teach me so much. So, it's definitely a collaborative relationship.

**00:07:43 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I really love this field and I love sharing it with students and I love watching students take the information and really run with it, right? Developing their own careers. Just as I was mentored, mentoring is so important.

**00:08:02 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

For me, I take it very seriously. I have a lot of entities that I work with and it's just, you know, wonderful to see them, you know, go from taking a class, to getting a degree, to getting another degree, to being in the field to collaborating.

**00:08:19 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

It's just been a wonderful thing, so I really get so much inspiration from the students, from the conversations that we have, um, from watching their own development as students and as professionals. And you know, again, I'm always learning and my professional development is always growing and working with them as well.

**00:08:43 Kylie**

Yes, that's awesome. That's- that's amazing.

**00:08:46 Kylie**

Uh, so you have some two upcoming summer courses that I'm sure you're just ready to teach, ready to go. Uhm, can you tell us a little bit about each course?

**00:08:59 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Absolutely, so these courses were taught last summer, and it was such a great success. And I think it was wonderful to be able to be there for students during that first outbreak of COVID-19, um, just to engage with students and be a support for students.

**00:09:24 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

The first- well, they're both this summer, but the first one I'll talk about is Family Systems Development. This is an online course. It is going to be asynchronous. And we're going to learn about families and

we're going to learn about family systems and so we start out by talking about how do you define family? What is family?

**00:09:48 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Exploring how people have varying definitions of family and when we're working in a family therapist role, we really want to understand what how our clients define the concept of family and understand who is in the family. Because we all have different ideas about what makes up a family.

**00:10:08 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, we start with that and then we move into, um, theory, family theory and we look at the different theoretical approaches and we look at sort of the applied theory, applied theoretical approaches. We look at the Bowenian approach. We look at structural strategic. We look at the techniques that are associated with those approaches.

**00:10:30 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, when you are practicing as a family therapist, really having a sense of what the strategies are, what the skills are, what are the interventions look like.

**00:10:40 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And then the last sort of area of the course is- we look at contemporary issues and problems that families are dealing with today. So, we look at issues such as domestic violence. We look at substance use.

**00:11:00 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

We look at um, COVID-19, which of course has had a huge impact on domestic violence and on substance use. We look at divorce, so there are a range of different issues that we look at to really understand those issues, to understand how families are struggling with those issues.

**00:11:23 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And then to explore ways that family therapists can work with families to address those issues.

**00:11:30 Kylie**

Wow, yeah I think that's. I mean it's I think that's always been an important thing to talk about, important thing to, you know, have those tools. But I think now like you said, you know, COVID definitely it- It can make family structures a little more difficult. You know, like you have those same issues and now there's- there can be no escape. There's no school, there's- it's just everyone on top of everyone.

**00:11:53 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

To your point, one of the things that I'm going to add this summer is, uhm, exercises in a part of a module focused on parenting and the role of parenting.

**00:12:08 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Because we're seeing a lot of stress related to parenting now because parenting has really changed with kids being in school or being school to not being in school with childcare being maybe not available or limited. So that's definitely an area that's going to be added to the course for this summer.

**00:12:29 Kylie**

I have to say I've never been so happy to not be a parent during this time. Like that's my, my honest thought, you know I was, I was- I would be in this like laying in my living room in quarantine. Just be like what if I had a toddler right now, you know, like I don't know how I would handle it. That's a lot. That's yeah, I can imagine that's being a lot.

**00:12:51 Kylie**

So, what about the second course? Can you tell us a little bit about that one?

**00:12:53 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Sure, so the second course comes under topics in counseling psychology, and this course is called Adolescence.

**00:13:01 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And this is also going to be online, asynchronous. And it's really fun because we are going to really dive into learning about this very important transitional period in life that has a lot of dynamic change associated with it.

**00:13:21 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, in this course, first we talk about what is adolescence? How do we define adolescence? What years cover the adolescent years? We're going to look a lot at brain development and what the brain and the brain development tells us about adolescence. And then look at policies connected to this, you know, to understand why sometimes adolescents make the choices that they do within sort of a context of looking at the brain, the adolescent brain, the developing adolescent brain.

**00:13:59 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Then we'll move into looking at sort of some of the different theoretical approaches connected to adolescence. So, for example, the emerging adulthood. So, looking at adolescence within sort of the later years, uh, emerging adulthood is a period in time that often gets overlooked.

**00:14:21 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And to your point about stigma and mental health services, it's often this group of young people that gets left out of services because they're not under 18 anymore. But they're also young adults, and you know, probably living at home, or, you know, connected to home.

**00:14:41 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

They're not necessarily fully independent yet with their own health insurance, so there's some interesting questions there for us to talk about, and then similar to the family course, we really explore what are key contemporary issues that adolescents are dealing with currently um, you know, as they go

through this transitional phase. So, questions of identity, questions around job choice, questions around the peer group questions, around romantic relationships, uhm, mental health concerns for adolescents, so we'll be exploring all of that as well.

**00:15:28 Kylie**

So maybe you're the person to ask this to... uhm, adolescence, right? It's a crazy time for whether you're the adolescent, whether you're a family friend, the parent, whatever, uhm. Why do you think that period of a person's life is so difficult?

**00:15:48 Kylie**

I know it's important, you know, like why do you- Is it because there's so many life changes happening? So many transition periods? Is it because of their brain development? Is it just the perfect storm right there?

**00:16:00 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Well, it's great that you asked that because that's one of the first questions that we look at. Like is this really a time of storm and strife? Like, does adolescence get a bad rap, or is it really not as bad as everybody seems to think that it is?

**00:16:16 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And so that's a key question that we look at and we look at some of the strengths that our young people during adolescence, you know, bring to us and some of the positive things that they bring to us.

**00:16:30 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

You know, we try to look at our lessons as, "Hmm, maybe it's not this sort of stormy time that we think it is... what's really going on there?" Yet at the same time we look at it in terms of like this transition period that's very difficult. So, in, in so many aspects of life, adolescents are transitioning out of childhood.

**00:16:55 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

They're moving into young adulthood, but they're not there yet, and so there are so many things, you know... We talk about how at no other point in life other than infancy are there so many changes going on for a person. It's infancy where changes are happening on a day to day basis.

**00:17:12 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

And adolescence where changes are happening regularly all the time, and so negotiating those changes is- can add stress and can be stressful for young people.

**00:17:25 Kylie**

Absolutely, absolutely yeah. I can look back and the parts of my years that I haven't just wiped out of my brain just for pure embarrassment, I think. Overall, it it was an important time in my life.

**00:17:40 Kylie**

Uhm, but, I mean like all- like life, you know it has it's ups and downs, but I think it's- I think it's very- There's a lot of change happening and change can be difficult, so I think maybe, maybe the bad rep comes from that. Some people aren't great at handling change. I'm one of those people, so I get it.

**00:18:06 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Change is hard and we talk about this in the family course. Change is hard, even positive change is hard. Like, even positive change is difficult and so you know responding to change and managing change, it can be very stressful.

**00:18:25 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

You know another stressor for adolescents today is the whole social media. On the one hand, it's a great connector, it connects kids. It's been a great way for people to stay connected during COVID-19.

**00:18:40 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

On the other hand, it can be a way to bully. It could be, you know, people can feel left out when they see all these social events happening with my peers, and I wasn't invited.

**00:18:52 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, it's that you know it's that both-and that really defines this adolescent transition time, time that we'll be looking at in the course.

**00:19:02 Kylie**

Well, that sounds really interesting, really. I mean just to see just to hear other people's points of views. You know, 'cause obviously everyone's adolescence was a little different. Everyone has their own story, so that would be really interesting to just see.

**00:19:19 Kylie**

So, speaking of, you know, communication. How do you promote communication in, uh, in your classes? Like how can students best communicate with you this summer while taking your courses?

**00:19:34 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, the communication is the central part of the course. It's just so important and so we have online community dialogue where students are posting responses. Students are sharing their perspectives, students are talking with each other.

**00:19:52 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

We also have- I have virtual office hours, but we also have, uh, a virtual meeting built into the course so that the students— we set up a time and we talk face to face and we talk about, sort of, for both classes, it's related to the final project for the class, so we kind of talk about that. But then you know we just talk in general to see you know as kind of like a check in and how folks are doing and what they're thinking of doing. You know, after the course, those kinds of things.

**00:20:22 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**



So, there's communication built in at every, every step of the course. The other part I really encourage through the online dialogue is that students are sharing feedback and responses with each other, and you know, they really do a great job doing that so that you know I'm asking questions about the post, but they're kind of asking each other questions and sharing feedback with each other as well, which is wonderful.

**00:20:54 Kylie**

So, kind of switching gears here, how have you been handling COVID?

**00:20:58 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, I've been handling quarantine. I'm a parent and my youngest was four, just turned 5. And then I have two teenage daughters, so I have been sort of managing, working from home, people having school on Zoom at home, trying to balance all that, trying to support students who are understandably stressed about online learning in some instances and, you know, getting requirements done which is understandable. So, I've been trying to handle it by finding a balance, you know? Definitely self-care has been a part of that.

**00:21:44 Kylie**

So, what is your favorite, uh- whether it's self-care, you know, just something that you like to do, what's your favorite quarantine COVID hobby that you've been doing lately?

**00:21:54 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

So, my favorite quarantine hobby is Netflix, and I don't see that changing after quarantine.

**00:22:03 Kylie**

By the way, do you have a favorite show that you like to binge?

**00:22:06 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I've been watching all kinds of shows. I like-The Queen's Gambit was fantastic, I loved it. I loved it. That was a highlight.

**00:22:18 Kylie**

Everyone's conversation now, like what was your quarantine Netflix show? What was your quarantine streaming show?

**00:22:25 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

Exactly.

**00:22:26 Kylie**

Alright, well thank you very much for, you know, taking the time to discuss yourself and your courses with us today and I wish you the best of luck and you know, your summer.

**00:22:38 Caroline Clauss-Ehlers**

I am excited to teach and excited to be with students this summer.

**00:22:46 Outro**

Thanks for listening and we'll catch you next time on Extra Credit.