

EXTRA CREDIT

A SUMMER & WINTER SESSIONS PODCAST

Episode 9 Transcript

00:00:02 Intro

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.

00:00:18 Kylie

So, thanks for sitting down with us, coming to chat. Can you introduce yourself? Tell us your name, your major, and the year you graduate.

00:00:26 Laura Esposito

My name is Laura Esposito. I am a journalism and media studies major with a concentration in global media and a minor in creative writing.

00:00:34 Laura Esposito

I'm graduating in May of 2022, so I am a junior.

00:00:39 Kylie

Wow, congrats for keeping yourself on track for graduation. That's a lot of majors, so can you tell me why you chose these majors?

00:00:46 Kylie

Why are you passionate about it? What like got you into journalism?

00:00:50 Laura Esposito

I've always loved writing. That's something I've always been very passionate about since I was little.

00:00:54 Laura Esposito

Everybody wanted to be a pop star. I wanted to be an author. That's something I've always wanted to do. And when I was in 6th grade, my- this is like such a weird memory to remember, but I'll never forget it. My 6th grade teacher, out of nowhere one day, just started calling me Miss Lois Lane.

00:01:08 Laura Esposito

I had no idea who that was. I didn't know what it meant and he wouldn't tell me why and I was like what does that mean? What does that mean?

00:01:14 Laura Esposito

And finally, at the end of class, on Friday, they pulled me aside and showed me a bunch of clips of Miss Lois Lane from like the Superman TV show, the black and white one. And she was- like I don't know if you ever seen Superman, but she was the journalist for the Daily Planet, like newspaper. She was Superman's girlfriend, and she was this great reporter. And he's like, "that's going to be you one day like you're, you're going to be this journalist, I could see it." And then after that I just never looked back.

00:01:38 Laura Esposito

I've always wanted to be a journalist since then. You know, it's a combination of my favorite things: writing and talking.

00:01:45 Laura Esposito

I've always wanted to make a difference in the world, and my strengths are in my speech and in the way that I write, and that's like those are my talents.

00:01:52 Laura Esposito

So I'm going to use them in the best way I know how, like shed light upon things that aren't talked about enough so I've always wanted to do journalism. I've never once looked back, even though it's a really high-risk profession and I'm nothing but grateful for how far it's taken me so far.

00:02:07 Laura Esposito

As for writing, I've always loved to write. Global media... my dream is to be a foreign correspondent. I don't think there's enough talk about foreign countries and like the things that are going on there and with this new world of globalization, we are more interconnected than ever.

00:02:19 Laura Esposito

So, it's more of an opportunity to talk more about the people from across the world who aren't so different from us.

00:02:25 Kylie

That's awesome. That's like so amazing.

00:02:28 Kylie

I've never- like that's so inspiring. Your story, like Miss Lois Lane, I'm gonna have to get you like a plaque or something in the office. Like you know how it says, like director. Whatever, something Miss Lois Lane like on your desk.

00:02:43 Kylie

That's so sweet, that's awesome. Uhm, you know what, though? I think every career choice, right? There's like a risk. One being, you might not like it, you know, and so I feel like if you have that drive already there and you have like the passion, you know, why not.

00:03:00 Kylie

And you can be a journalist and still- like you can have your own blog and then you can just like, you know, like you can write stories about what you want, you can investigate what you want. I mean, it's probably nice to have, like the backing of a major newspaper and stuff, but like you can still do it. It still can be done.

00:03:18 Laura Esposito

It's also done in so many different kinds of platforms nowadays. Like right now, I'm interning at SiriusXM.

00:03:23 Laura Esposito

So I do their like politics channel. And that's like a whole different take on journalism that I've never done before.

00:03:28 Laura Esposito

You know, like I've done the television reporting and writing, but the whole like radio aspect of it. It's like it's a totally different ball game.

00:03:34 Laura Esposito

You know there's so many platforms you can get yourself involved in, and I'm not writing, but like I'm pitching stories like to be put on air. So, it's just like there's so many different things that you could do, so it's very cool.

00:03:45 Kylie

Yeah, I give you props 'cause it's, it's a- It's a hard industry and like it's very competitive. It's a lot, you know, so you know to have the patience and you know like put the effort into really throw yourself into a story- that's awesome. Good for you.

00:04:04 Kylie

So, speaking of globalization and how the country kind of shut down. Uhm, how have you been? How's COVID? How you doing?

00:04:11 Laura Esposito

Um, I mean I am living on campus now, which is nice, so it's really nice like to have at least my immediate bubble with my roommates and everything like that.

00:04:18 Laura Esposito

That's been really nice, and it's definitely improved my mental health to have a job on campus. I try to tend to look at the bright side of things.

00:04:25 Laura Esposito

So, for example, I just told you about my internship. It's based in Washington DC. If there was no COVID, I wouldn't have this internship, which is like a very major opportunity for me. Obviously, I would take no COVID over this internship, but I try my best to remain an optimist.

00:04:41 Laura Esposito

This summer was very hard. Uhm, my aunt actually passed away. Not from COVID, but we all went to her funeral in Brooklyn. And it was masked, socially-distanced inside and ended up being a huge super spreader event, which is like to this day, I don't understand how, nobody understands why.

00:04:55 Laura Esposito

It ended up being a huge super spreader event. Every single person in my extended family got diagnosed with COVID within a week. I'm talking about 2 year olds, 3 year olds, my grandparents, everyone, so it was very, very, very bad. My grandfather actually ended up passing away from COVID after that huge outbreak, so it's definitely, it was-

00:05:13 Laura Esposito

It was really hard for awhile. I'm not gonna lie, it was. Nobody knows who had it, nobody knows who started it. It's a very, very guilt-ridden situation that we all kind of just have to live with. So, it, it was really hard this summer to be to be blatant, to be blatant, but my grandmother did just get vaccinated last week. So, we're all feeling better.

00:05:31 Laura Esposito

And you know it's been really hard on her, but like there's brighter skies coming. Keep telling ourselves that.

00:05:38 Kylie

Yeah, that's hard. It's really, really hard. I'm sorry for your losses, that's-

00:05:42 Laura Esposito

Thank you, it's OK.

00:05:44 Kylie

I mean it's not OK, but you're putting on a brave face, but that's still very hard.

00:05:49 Laura Esposito

Yeah, I was definitely, you know, I was able to experience like the trauma that's coming on first hand of the world. And it's not pretty.

00:05:56 Kylie

I commend you for looking on the bright side and like looking to those you know, like those bigger, bluer skies, but, you know, no one's gonna- no one's going to do anything if you have like a pity party every once in a while because that's a lot, you know?

00:06:13 Laura Esposito

Yeah. Yeah, you know, in the beginning it was hard it was kind of like how am I crying over my classes being online, but like there's people actually suffering way worse than me.

00:06:20 Laura Esposito

It's like try to look at it that way, but then, like after honestly, after all of that happened this summer, into September, I kind of just- I now I understand like a lot better than I did, you know, I feel like I was feeling very bitter for a very long time.

00:06:35 Laura Esposito

But after like I experienced like that sort of loss, it's definitely just kind of been like I'm so lucky for what I have.

00:06:40 Laura Esposito

You know, like many people don't even have an opportunity to like be living in New Brunswick at all. And like I have my roommates, I have a job. I have an internship that I love like and the vaccine rollout is looking really amazing. So there's like just stuff to look forward to, yeah.

00:06:55 Kylie

Yeah, no, there's definitely things to look forward to even beyond this. So, like this time in this moment in life.

00:07:01 Kylie

So, uhm, I wish you, you know the best. I wish for your, the bluest of skies, for you and your grandmother, and your family moving forward. OK, so that happened around- like that happened after quarantine?

00:07:16 Laura Esposito

Yeah, that happened in July.

00:07:19 Kylie

OK, and then you've been keeping busy by like doing, though obviously of your internship, your job, and then you know, like school and stuff. Can you tell me more about your internship?

00:07:27 Laura Esposito

Yeah, so I mean, I've definitely kept busy as I typically do. So right now I'm just like- a little like lowdown of what I do- obviously I work here which I love so much and I work at Pasta Volo in New Brunswick, which is fun, and I write a column for the Daily Targum, our school newspaper.

00:07:46 Laura Esposito

And I'm also the public relations chair of Into the Light, which is a nonprofit mental health suicide prevention group at Rutgers we've had for about a couple of years. It's really, really great.

00:07:56 Laura Esposito

And then yeah, so I'm interning also with SiriusXM, I'm interning at the Politics of the United States Channel as their talk programming intern, and I love politics.

00:08:04 Laura Esposito

That's right where I want to be. It's we have people like Julie Mason. She's a CNN analyst with Chris Cuomo, Andrew Cuomo's brother, who's a CNN analyst.

00:08:14 Laura Esposito

Laura Coates, Michael Smirnoff, just a lot of very prominent legal analysts and like reporters they have their own shows and basically, I work for all of them.

00:08:24 Laura Esposito

Today, actually, my shift started at 5:00 AM and I actually just got off, so there's some very, very early mornings, which isn't that fun. But other than that, it is like I'm having so much fun doing it, I really, I really love it. It feels really great to be doing something meaningful and like to be headed in the right direction with my major and everything, it feels really great. I love the job. Everyone is super nice.

00:08:43 Laura Esposito

It's really cool to like- I feel like when you think of internships, you think of like you're getting people coffee and everybody yelling at you.

00:08:49 Laura Esposito

I mean, that's kind of how I thought of it before, but it's not really like that here. I guess because it's remote and I can't get anybody coffee even if they wanted me to.

00:08:55 Laura Esposito

But they actually care about my opinions, like they're letting me pick clips, like playing the shows like they're letting me like pitch stories, and I'm like, "well, they're listening to me. That's weird!" like, but yeah, it's been really cool so I'm, I'm happy with that.

00:09:07 Laura Esposito

Definitely gives me like- um, one thing about me like what I mourned a lot in the age of COVID was that I loved my schedule. I love being busy.

00:09:14 Laura Esposito

It helps me get things done way more and like having this like set schedule with my internship has been like really cool. I like it a lot.

00:09:25 Kylie

That's great, look at you woman on the go, you can't stop, yeah, I remember you being like "hey I have- I'm coming to work now. I have eight meetings for my sorority and then I have to do homework and then I have to do-" so...

00:09:36 Laura Esposito

Yeah, I like to be busy.

00:09:38 Kylie

You know you've always been, you've always been busy, yeah, but that's good. That like keeps you motivated like I'm, I clocked out of work, I walked the dog four times. I was like what? What, now? Like what you know? So I think it's important to keep busy especially-

00:09:51 Laura Esposito

Yeah, absolutely. Even just like getting like going for a run like once today or something like that. Like just going for a walk, like going to the grocery store, like just like little things.

00:10:00 Kylie

Yeah, definitely, uh, but congrats on- that sounds like an amazing internship, that sounds like- you know you could like DoorDash some coffee if you wanted to, but obviously, up to you.

00:10:13 Laura Esposito

That is true, that is true.

00:10:16 Kylie

Uhm, so I know during COVID, but I think it was after quarantine too. Did you organize a Black Lives Matter March in your hometown?

00:10:27 Laura Esposito

Yes.

00:10:29 Kylie

So can you tell me like why you coordinated? How coordinating went?

00:10:34 Laura Esposito

OK, it was about a couple days after the death of George Floyd, and I've always been very, I've always been very active in my community. That's something that has been very prevalent. A little background that was in, was in high school during the Parkland shooting after that, like I organized like, uh, I organized the school walkout and like I coordinated with a lot of local media.

00:10:56 Laura Esposito

I coordinated with the police, and it was like just me doing it, like I got almost the whole school to walkout, like tons of protesters.

00:11:02 Laura Esposito

The entire middle school walked out. It was like I, I've- so because of that, like I kind of have known how to work with my community like I was very, very involved in high school. Like I was in like a lot of organizations outside of school as well. So, like I have a pretty good grip on like organizational skills.

00:11:16 Laura Esposito

So, after the death of George Floyd, obviously I was feeling just like millions of other people completely outraged and devastated.

00:11:21 Laura Esposito

So, I started going to local protests. I went to one in Asbury Park and I saw how peaceful and moving it was. And I went with my friend Schneider, who is an African American and we had a long talk afterwards and we're like you know what? Like if Asbury Park can do it, why can't we do it?

00:11:39 Laura Esposito

So, the reason why we have this protest is to bring awareness to the fact that racism can happen here even in our own backyard, and we wanted to like make a statement. The thing kind of blew up overnight.

00:11:49 Laura Esposito

Me and my friend Schneider started, yeah, started reaching out to local activists. Obviously, we're two 20-year-olds... we didn't want to do it all on our own, so I reached out to some local organizations and businesses that I knew would want to help. Cause I do have those like connections from like, my previous activism at school. I mean at home.

00:12:06 Laura Esposito

So, I reached out to a couple of businesses and some prominent people in my town that were, that I knew would be down. However, at the same time, this is all happening, I was receiving immense backlash. so I like, I made it like I made it like a mission of mine, like call the police station and let them know I was doing this because at this point, I had obtained permits from -

00:12:25 Laura Esposito

We walked down the Causeway Bridge. I don't know if you've ever been to LBI, but it's like like, it's literally the bridge on Long Beach Island. So that was where the march was planned.

00:12:32 Laura Esposito

I obtained permits by some of the older people that owned the land that let me walk there. I spoke with local businesses or things like that and then also I'm gonna call the police and let them know like this is happening. Call the police.

00:12:46 Laura Esposito

They're like- I was like "my name is Laura Esposito." They're like, OK, you're immediately going to sheriff, we know what this is about.

00:12:51 Laura Esposito

So, they patched me through, and I got on the phone with the chief of police and he's like, "Do you have any idea like how many calls I've gotten complaining about you?" And I was like, "Well here I am, hi," so I met with him like every day for like a week like trying to just plan it out like let him know what's going

on, what was happening, how we're going to make it COVID safe, like how I wasn't going to disrupt traffic like so on, so on. I really felt like I covered all my bases.

00:13:14 Laura Esposito

I was talking to the police, making sure everyone was safe, I wasn't getting in the way of traffic like we, we even had like-

00:13:21 Laura Esposito

I booked like multiple speakers. I reached out to a lot of local activists. It was really going to be a beautiful event. So, the morning of, these random strangers are dropping off like water bottles and food at our house.

00:13:30 Laura Esposito

My mom is like, "how many people did you give our address to?" Because I had all the snacks, everything.

00:13:41 Laura Esposito

Okay, It's 5 am. I'm setting up sounds- like this was this wasn't just a little walk. We had sound stations, like food, donation bins like everything. This was a full-fledged event that like me and my friend organized in five days so.

00:13:49 Laura Esposito

The morning of, I get a call from the chief of police, 'cause you know, we're on speaking terms now, chat all the day, all the time. There was a shooting threat that was posed against me that morning and he asked me if I wanted to proceed, told me that like I was gonna have police officers surrounding me and like there was like a shooting threat coming for me.

00:14:07 Laura Esposito

So, I was like, "OK, I'm still gonna do it anyway," so we- the protest comes. Obviously at this point we have state troopers.

00:14:16 Laura Esposito

Everyone is there. Uhm, there's -honestly once I got there though, once everything was set up the sound systems, we had our speakers.

00:14:25 Laura Esposito

It's- I didn't even think about that once because there's 3000 people there, and it was probably one of the most beautiful like things I've ever seen in my life. It was amazing. It was, so many honest like- people from everywhere, like people that have come down to LBI once, like people who have come down to LBI their whole lives.

00:14:41 Laura Esposito

But there was such an influx- I've never seen the Causeway Bridge so crowded. It was so peaceful, so moving, the speakers were amazing.

00:14:47 Laura Esposito

It really felt like we were doing something. Like I've never seen my town partake in activism, so the fact that there were so many people... I did not expect that many to actually just say, "Hey, this is going on. We want to acknowledge it. This is like our pledge to do better, like let's make a difference." That was huge to me. It was really beautiful.

00:15:05 Laura Esposito

After that we created the page called LBI for Black Lives, where we continue to try to like do events. Notably, we got our Congressman Andy Kim's attention, so, me and Schneider met up with him, maybe about a week later and he asked us to be part of his youth Advisory Board, where like we met with him and his advisers to try and strengthen youth political participation.

00:15:27 Laura Esposito

So, how we did that was we reached out to a lot of local businesses... They let us do voter registration events all summer long, so we ended up registering about like hundreds of people to vote by the end of the summer. So, it was definitely a very cool summer, yeah.

00:15:40 Kylie

Yeah, that's amazing.

00:15:42 Laura Esposito

Yeah, it was definitely. It was really eye opening and it was a really beautiful thing to be part of, honestly.

00:15:48 Kylie

That's crazy, you could write a book just on this.

00:15:50 Laura Esposito

It was definitely, I had- My anxiety was at an all-time high.

00:15:54 Kylie

I can't believe people were trying to kill you.

00:15:56 Laura Esposito

Let me tell you, I was afraid if I walked into our ShopRite... It was crazy because like people like knew who I was like, it was like my, I live in a very small town like I would walk into a store. People would look at me, like my sister was hearing things. It was crazy.

00:16:11 Kylie

That's insane. Like it's insane to me 'cause I've been down to LBI and so like that, that's insane because, like LBI is like, it's like kids and stuff. But it's like retirement. You know, like it's like a huge retirement community.

00:16:26 Laura Esposito

It's definitely not- it's not like Seaside where it's like an influx of young partying teens for generations there.

00:16:32 Kylie

No, right? You don't, it's not like a party scene, yeah.

00:16:34 Laura Esposito

Yeah, exactly.

00:16:35 Kylie

It's not like... It's like a riding your bike to get ice cream and like riding your bike back home. You know like-

00:16:40 Laura Esposito

Yeah, and like mini golfing at night, yeah?

00:16:42 Kylie

Yeah, and I mean I love it. I'm all for ice cream and mini golf, but like still. So, like the fact that like people were like these adults are like literally threatening your life, with like vehicular manslaughter and-

00:16:55 Laura Esposito

It was like I, I don't even know what was going on like I... My parents were like freaking out on me and they're like, "Look what you got yourself into?" And I was like-

00:17:02 Kylie

Well, you did have the support of the state troopers and local police and you know, yeah, so I'm sure that helped. Did you have to wear like a bulletproof vest?

00:17:10 Laura Esposito

No, I wore an orange vest. They literally like- just like, just so they could pick me out in a crowd.

00:17:16 Kylie

OK, I saw but I didn't know if you had.

00:17:19 Laura Esposito

It was ugly. It really- it really ruined like the press and everything. I was like I'm in this stupid orange vest like holding this megaphone. I look so stupid.

00:17:28 Kylie

I thought you looked very like in charge.

00:17:31 Laura Esposito

Yeah, that was cool. You know it

00:17:33 Laura Esposito

Was yeah, I mean, yeah, that definitely was I was-

00:17:34 Kylie

Like I saw the photos.

00:17:37 Laura Esposito

I mean, I made it like very, very clear like this was all about like systemic inequality and police brutality.

00:17:42 Laura Esposito

This is not my place to speak, so I was with Schneider the entire time, however, and like it was very- Like everyone knew us as like the organizers. So, like we were like organizing the speakers, like walking ahead of the crowd. And like there did come in time at the end where I thanked all of the local businesses, 'cause we did have a lot of local businesses come out and help us, which was really amazing. They were handing out water. They were giving out free food.

00:18:04 Laura Esposito

It was really just, wow, so I began- I did my part to thank them and then like people- like it was very notable to like, it was like me and Schneider like as the organizers of it.

00:18:13 Kylie

Well, that's amazing. What like, what a summer!

00:18:17 Laura Esposito

Yeah, life is never dull.

00:18:20 Kylie

No, no yeah. I do think I saw the pictures well from the march, and it- you looked like look very calm which now, bless you 'cause I don't know how. And, but you also you looked you looked like you were just a woman on a mission, and you know like even in your bright orange vest is nice.

00:18:41 Laura Esposito

In my bright orange vest. Yeah, it was definitely one of the most meaningful moments in my life. Yeah, I'll never forget it.

00:18:47 Kylie

Beautiful.

00:18:48 Laura Esposito

Thank you.

00:18:49 Kylie

Well, I'm very happy that I can be a part of your journey and thank you again for sitting down with me.

00:18:55 Kylie

I hope to see you in the office one day, uh, because you know, you do work with us. You do work in the Office of Summer Winter Session with me, yeah. And so, a big thing that I miss about the office is like getting to interact with, like the students and just like- 'cause like we've we become friendly, you know, and so it's like nice to see and hear from you guys and like see how life is going so.

00:19:22 Laura Esposito

Things will get better. That's it, you know. I think everyone in the Rutgers community is trying as hard as they possibly can.

00:19:30 Laura Esposito

This is nobody's fault, and like I'm still just really grateful for what I have and the education that I am still getting, even if it is on a computer screen.

00:19:39 Outro

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