

EXTRA CREDIT

A SUMMER & WINTER SESSIONS PODCAST

Season 2, Episode 3 Transcript

[00:00:00] 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.

[00:00:21] Kylie: So welcome back to Extra Credit, the Summer and Winter Session podcast. Today, we have a student who is also a Rutgers employee. So welcome!

[00:00:33] Helen Castro: Hi.

[00:00:34] Kylie: So, if you could please introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself?

[00:00:37] Helen Castro: My name is Helen Castro. I work at the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies. I'm an editor on the journal, Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. And, um, one of the things that I love about working there is that I get the tuition benefit. I just, this year started a Master's program at the School of Management and Labor Relations. I just started it in the summer.

[00:01:05] Kylie: Awesome, wow. That's very new.

[00:01:07] Helen Castro: Yeah.

[00:01:08] Kylie: How do you like it so far?

[00:01:09] Helen Castro: I really like it a lot. The, the summer class, it was online, but it was, it was really comprehensive. It was a lot, it was actually a lot better than what I expected it to be, because it was the introductory course for this Master's program. And, um, the professor had like, a bunch of videos each week and she would have other professors involved in the videos. And so if we were learning about, you know, discrimination, there was someone who that was their area of expertise. And so they talked about that in, in some of the lectures.

[00:01:48] Kylie: That's nice.

[00:01:48] Helen Castro: Yeah.

[00:01:49] Kylie: That's a really like, almost like so personalized for an online course.

[00:01:54] Helen Castro: Yeah, I was, I was really surprised at how, how, um, like technologically advanced it was, you know.

[00:02:01] Kylie: Yeah. They had to, I feel like COVID really pushed people into the tech industry. You know, like people-

[00:02:05] Helen Castro: Yeah, that's true.

[00:02:06] Kylie: Had to learn Zoom really, really fast.

So what made you pick Labor and Management after being an editor? And then you've also, you have a heavy background in editing and.

[00:02:18] Helen Castro: Yeah, I also have a Master's in Communication and Media studies that I got, um, three years ago. The reason I decided to do this one is that I was looking for something else to study. I, I'm like that nerd who loves to go to school. I was always that nerd who loves to go to school. So, um, working here is really good for me because it, you know, enables me to, to keep being that nerd who loves to go to school.

And, um, I looked through a whole bunch of different Rutgers programs online. I would just like open up different, you know, tabs on my computer for all the different schools and let's see what, what's offered, you know? And, um, this program looked really interesting. I'm doing the, um, Diversity and Inclusion specialization. And that's like, you know, big topic these days. And I, I thought it just would be an interesting thing to study. And so far it really is.

[00:03:23] Kylie: Yeah, we have a lot of pushes like committees and stuff. I see around Rutgers for uh, diversity and inclusion. It's, it's really big, especially after a whirlwind, the past two years to say the least. So I think it's, it was always important, but now-

[00:03:39] Helen Castro: I think it's an important subject to area to know about, just even if I do nothing else with it, you know, professionally. I don't know that I'll ever get a different job than what I have, but I figure at some point, I'll want to do additional things, you know, there'll be the next act and all that. So it just seemed like a good direction to go.

[00:04:05] Kylie: Yeah, definitely. I will say though, to your nerd comment there, that's where all the power is. They rule the world, you know.

[00:04:11] Helen Castro: Absolutely.

[00:04:12] Kylie: Like if you have the brain capacity to sit and read textbook after textbook, we should all be scared of you.

That's, I mean, that's awesome that you're starting new chapter, outside of your comfort zone of your background, you know?

[00:04:26] Helen Castro: Yeah, it definitely is. I mean, this was, I had never taken any classes in anything related to this before. My, my undergraduate degree was in English. And, um, you know, like I say, I did this other program in communication. So labor and employment relations, it was like, what!

[00:04:47] Kylie: That's great though.

[00:04:48] Helen Castro: Plus, um, with the being an online course, the one I took over the summer, um, everything was done through like discussion groups online. So writing really helped with that.

[00:05:00] Kylie: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah. It's a lot. I will say, I know now that, um, some professors are really incorporating video as well as like an alternative to written submissions. I mean, if someone is better verbally-

[00:05:15] Helen Castro: Right.

[00:05:15] Kylie: You know, then written word, that has to be nice.

[00:05:18] Helen Castro: Yeah. I mean, you know, people have different strengths. For me, writing is, is definitely my, my strength. I'd rather write than speak.

[00:05:26] Kylie: Right.

[00:05:26] Helen Castro: Because I can express myself much better that way.

[00:05:29] Kylie: Yeah. I mean, there's definitely pros and cons to both for me.

So can you tell me about your job a little bit? What do you, I mean, I know what an editor is, but what do you specifically do for, uh, the Alcohol and Drugs Journal?

[00:05:43] Helen Castro: I basically copy edit articles all day. Uh, we get submissions from around the world from researchers doing alcohol and other drug research. And I'm the grammar police basically. Yeah. It's, it's a lot of nitpicky detail kind of reading and you know, over the years, I've learned a lot about this topic, too.

[00:06:11] Kylie: Oh I'm sure, we're probably talking to an expert here today. I mean, that's crazy. So what do you like about?

[00:06:18] Helen Castro: It's pretty independent work and I like that. I like that I pretty much know what I'm going to be doing every day, um, that I know that I can control my schedule as long as you know, I have X number of articles to get done in a week. And you know that kind of thing.

[00:06:38] Kylie: Do you like being the grammar police?

[00:06:40] Helen Castro: I love being the grammar police. Yeah, that's another part of my nerdiness.

[00:06:46] Kylie: Yeah, no, that's good.

[00:06:47] Helen Castro: I appreciate the value of a well-placed en dash.

[00:06:50] Kylie: So for our audience, how would you describe an en dash?

[00:06:53] Helen Castro: The en dash is, is more powerful. Um, it's, it's longer than a regular dash and it connects, um, open compounds. For example, like, uh, if you were talking about, uh, a post-World War II period. Post-World War Two is an open compound, but you want to connect that to periods. So you need the en dash because the en dash tells you that you're connecting that whole big concept, not just the last word that's right next to the dash.

[00:07:26] Kylie: Oh, okay. That's very, very well explained.

[00:07:29] Helen Castro: And when I read books to it correctly, oh my God. I'm in heaven.

[00:07:34] **Kylie:** That's great. I love that. Like, it's, it's like powerful. I really like that, how you phrase that, you know, it's, I think the written word can be, can be really powerful.

[00:07:45] **Helen Castro:** Absolutely.

[00:07:45] **Kylie:** Especially when it's done correctly.

[00:07:46] **Helen Castro:** Exactly.

[00:07:47] **Kylie:** Yes. Um, and we can see that at all throughout history, so, and I'm sure in all of your papers that you edit and that you write. But where did your love of English come from?

[00:07:57] **Helen Castro:** When I was little, I was always a reader and I liked spelling and things like that. Um, I remember my junior high English teacher, who I idolized. I had her for three years and she used to do weekly grammar lessons. And that was like the highlight of my life. And, and the other thing too, um, that I used to love when, uh, when I was young, Saturday morning cartoons, they had School House Rock, uh, in between cartoons and I used to love, like all the grammar related ones.

[00:08:33] **Kylie:** I mean, to, I, I envy you having your passions that young, so clear, you know, that's... not everyone gets to experience that. So then do you work while you're going to school?

[00:08:43] **Helen Castro:** Yes.

[00:08:44] **Kylie:** So how do you balance, managed to balance both?

[00:08:46] **Helen Castro:** Right now, I've, I have, well, like this semester I have, um, one class that's online, so it's... what do they call that asynchronous? And then my other one is on Tuesday nights. So, you know, I, don't, nothing conflicts with my, my work day schedule. And then I just spend my weekends doing homework and reading and cramming.

[00:09:14] **Kylie:** What a great weekend!

[00:09:15] **Helen Castro:** Well, you know, it's fun. Like, like I said, I'm, I'm, I'm that geek who likes to go to school. So for me, you know, reading, well reading employment law really isn't that relaxing, but...

[00:09:30] **Kylie:** Maybe a little dry!

[00:09:31] **Helen Castro:** My other class, uh, the readings for that, it's, it's kind of a nice way to spend a weekend.

[00:09:38] **Kylie:** I feel like if you're definitely passionate about it, it has to make the time go by faster. And I would say this weather that we're currently experiencing, like this, like, you know, the colder breeze.

[00:09:48] **Helen Castro:** Yeah.

[00:09:48] **Kylie:** Really good reading weather.

[00:09:49] **Helen Castro:** Oh absolutely! It makes you want to curl up with a cup of coffee and, you know, whatever reading material you have.

[00:09:57] **Kylie:** Yeah. So do you think that, I know you've done your Master's previously pre-COVID and then this Master's is obviously in the thick of things. Um, do you think that, as you notice any big differences or, um, any incentives to get this one done or relax into it?

[00:10:18] **Helen Castro:** The biggest difference really is that most of my classes for my first master's were in-person classes. And with this one, it seems like more is available online. Um, and then the other thing with the in-person, you know, now we're like sitting farther away from each other and everybody's got a mask on and, you know, it's a little awkward.

[00:10:41] **Kylie:** I'm sure yelling around the masks too. Cause like you can't hear anything.

[00:10:45] **Helen Castro:** It's kind of hard to hear and it's kind of, you know, I, I see like people on the other side of the room and they, they comment on something and I'm like, what'd that person just say, like you know, I can't read their lips because I can't see their face.

[00:10:58] **Kylie:** I'm a lip reader too!

[00:10:59] **Helen Castro:** And you know, it, it helps to, to really be able to see someone's face when they're speaking. And you know, when, when everybody's covered in a mask, it's like, wait, what are you talking about over there, you know.

[00:11:11] **Kylie:** I know, I feel like, now's the time for like in-person subtitles.

[00:11:14] **Helen Castro:** Yes. Oh my gosh. That would be amazing.

[00:11:17] **Kylie:** Yeah, I could really use that.

[00:11:19] **Helen Castro:** That's one of the things that I've really liked about the online classes, because I don't have to worry that I can't understand something somebody's saying, I can read, you know.

[00:11:29] **Kylie:** Right.

[00:11:30] **Helen Castro:** And if you're making a comment in a discussion group, I can read that and I can think about it and, you know, really consider my response and, you know.

[00:11:39] **Kylie:** That's what I really like about online courses. Cause it's, it lets you digest.

[00:11:43] **Helen Castro:** Yeah.

[00:11:44] **Kylie:** There's a pro and a con about, you know, like a professor saying, tell me your opinion, just like calling you out, right? Because you do need to think on your feet sometimes. But I like that online classes allow me to take in the information for maybe a day or two. I can go back, I can reference something, make sure I have it right. You know, because sometimes my first thought, shocking, not always the best one, you know. So I like that you have that time, especially if you just, you know, manage the due dates well. You do have that, that capability.

[00:12:13] **Helen Castro:** The only problem I've noticed is that sometimes you miss like the spontaneity of being able to just immediately respond to something somebody says, or sometimes, you know, someone will, will bring up an idea about the topic and what you want to say about it is just like, kind of like a casual aside, like, oh yeah. I remember something similar happened to me. It doesn't seem worth writing about, but it's something that if you were in class, you would say, oh yeah, that happened to me.

[00:12:45] **Kylie:** Right.

[00:12:46] **Helen Castro:** You know, maybe it would be like a five minute little discussion.

[00:12:50] **Kylie:** Right.

[00:12:50] **Helen Castro:** But it's not something that's really worthy of the-

[00:12:54] **Kylie:** Full blown...

[00:12:54] **Helen Castro:** Formality of let me do this post on, you know, when I was six.

[00:13:00] **Kylie:** I will say too, um, I find that when I'm disagreeing with someone, I almost feel bad doing it.

[00:13:08] **Helen Castro:** Yes!

[00:13:08] **Kylie:** Because it's not a personal attack, which I feel like sometimes it can come off on because it's such a formal way of writing.

[00:13:14] **Helen Castro:** Exactly.

[00:13:15] **Kylie:** You know? And so, but I think that sometimes I'm like, listen, great, that's your opinion. Great. But I'm just saying kind of playing devil's advocate.

[00:13:24] **Helen Castro:** Right.

[00:13:24] **Kylie:** What about this? Not that we have to go on a debate. I'm just saying another perspective.

[00:13:28] **Helen Castro:** You have to be really careful. That's, that's one of the things, you know, where you have to be careful with the precision of, of the words you choose. You know, because I, I had something like that recently with, with, um, one of my online classes where someone made a comment and I was like, I don't know if you're being insulting or if you just aren't the best writer, you know?

[00:13:55] **Kylie:** Right.

[00:13:55] **Helen Castro:** And so I made a comment back to her and I said, you know, I'm trying to be tactful here because what you said could come across as negative to someone, you know, who has the condition you're talking about.

[00:14:10] **Kylie:** Right.

[00:14:11] **Helen Castro:** And I don't mean to offend. I don't think you meant to offend, but I just want to point out that, you know, when you write it a certain way...

[00:14:20] **Kylie:** Right. Words have power. Definitely, they do. I like to assume that we're not just going around insulting everyone.

[00:14:27] **Helen Castro:** Exactly.

[00:14:27] **Kylie:** And I think the point of college, especially higher education is like, let's test your opinions. Let's you know, like look at all sides of the discussion. Let's critically think.

[00:14:37] Helen Castro: I do assume that most people are coming at things with the right attitude. It's this new, this, uh, online thing is new for so many of us.

[00:14:46] Kylie: So many. Yeah. A lot of people aren't really familiar with it. It's like a whole different set of, set of customs.

[00:14:52] Helen Castro: Yeah, it's like, oh boy. They didn't give us an instruction book on how to, how to, you know, online class etiquette.

[00:15:00] Kylie: So kind of going off topic a little bit. Uh, how did you come to Rutgers? How did you come here, just professionally?

[00:15:07] Helen Castro: Actually, I've, I've worked in publishing forever and the jobs that I had before I came here, I got laid off. Happens too often. It's happened to me several times in, in publishing. And this was like right after the big, uh, recession, 2008, it happened in 2009. And, um, I was talking to a friend of mine who I, who I used to work with at another job. And she told me, why don't you look at Rutgers for jobs? Because my daughter at the time was a junior in high school and she said, you know, Sarah could go to school.

[00:15:46] Kylie: Yeah.

[00:15:47] Helen Castro: If you work at Rutgers and I was like, oh, that's a thought, you know. And I found my position here and..

[00:15:55] Kylie: Wow.

[00:15:55] Helen Castro: Got lucky, you know.

[00:15:58] Kylie: Yeah.

[00:15:58] Helen Castro: I really believe I got lucky.

[00:15:59] Kylie: Yeah. I'm starting to think the older I get, it's literally just luck.

[00:16:03] Helen Castro: Yeah. It really is.

[00:16:04] Kylie: Yeah. That's great though. Did your daughter come here?

[00:16:07] Helen Castro: Yes, she did. She graduated in 2016 with a sociology degree. She loved it here.

[00:16:13] Kylie: Wow!

[00:16:13] Helen Castro: Yeah.

[00:16:14] Kylie: Good for her. What is she doing now?

[00:16:16] Helen Castro: She works for a policy research company that she loves what she does.

[00:16:22] Kylie: That's great. Good for her. Wow. So then overall, how would you say that your experience taking an accelerated chorus? How, how did that go for you? Did you like it?

[00:16:32] Helen Castro: I really liked it. Part of the reason I wanted to do the summer class was because I had gotten accepted to the program, I guess, in the late spring. And, you know, they said you

can start in the fall. And I said, well, you know, I haven't done school in a few years. I haven't really done a full online thing and I wanted to kind of test the waters, you know, like.

[00:16:57] Kylie: Yeah!

[00:16:57] Helen Castro: Ease my way into it. That ended up being a really good way to do it because without any other classes going on at the same time, there was so much less pressure.

[00:17:08] Kylie: Yeah. That's great. Well, I'm glad that you got to dip your toes in.

[00:17:11] Helen Castro: Thank you!

[00:17:11] Kylie: I mean, a Master, any Master's can be really challenging and the fact that you decided to go back. Then take a three-year break and go back again.

[00:17:19] Helen Castro: Yeah.

[00:17:19] Kylie: You know, maybe in another five, there'll be gone for like another P, like a PhD or, you know, who knows.

[00:17:25] Helen Castro: We'll see! As long as I'm still working here, you know, the, the.

[00:17:29] Kylie: Yeah, if the opportunities there!

[00:17:31] Helen Castro: If the opportunity is there, I'm going to take advantage of it. Yeah.

[00:17:32] Kylie: Good for you. So yeah, thank you for coming, spending your time with us.

[00:17:36] Helen Castro: It was fun!

[00:17:36] Kylie: And telling us about your experience. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. It was great talking to you.

[00:17:40] Helen Castro: Great talking to you, too.

[00:17:43] Outro: Thanks for listening and we'll catch you next time on Extra Credit.