

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CHRISTOPHER Hello, welcome everyone. This is the Career and Academic Resource Center's podcast, the
DAVIS: *CARC Podcast*. I am your host, Christopher Davis, the Associate Director of the Career and Academic Resource Center, here at the Extension School. And I'm very happy to have here, with me today, a current ALB student, Blake Hite.

So today, I wanted to talk a little bit about the Faculty Aide Program. And Blake has very kindly offered to share his experiences a little bit. The Faculty Aide Program is a program I manage, with the Extension School. It's been around since 2001. Since that time, I think there have been close to 1,000 students, both undergraduate and graduate, who have taken advantage of it.

It's also a unique program. I think we're the only continuing education or professional degree program school that offers paid research opportunities, such as these, which are usually found traditionally in graduate schools. So it's a program that's very near and dear to my heart.

It's an opportunity for honors-level undergraduate and graduate students to work as paid research aides for either instructors teaching at Harvard Extension School or faculty around Harvard University. That's also one of the really great and unique things about it.

Blake is currently in his third iteration as a faculty aide. His experiences have been really unique. And so, I wanted to pick his brain a little bit.

So the Faculty Aide Program, just to give a little background about it, in the fall and spring semesters, we send out opportunities that instructors teaching at Extension School have shared with us. Either research they're conducting, we've had instructors who are working on research in the lab, on writing books or articles for journal publications, and if they have need for a research aide, they'll share that with me. And then, I'll, in turn, pass that along to our eligible students.

One of the neat things about the program is also student initiated projects. That's where eligible students can approach, not just faculty, but Harvard affiliates, across the university, and create their own research projects and bring them to me.

And sometimes those are really interesting. And Blake, I think has each experienced. Each of

the three projects that you've worked on, have they been student initiated?

BLAKE HITE: Yes, all three have been.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: OK. So I wanted to zero in on the work that you've done last fall and currently, for two very different projects.

BLAKE HITE: Sure.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: So in the fall, you had been working with Aladdine Joroff.

BLAKE HITE: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: OK. And Aladdine, just to give myself a little reminder too, she is currently affiliated with the Law School. She is a staff attorney. And she is a lecturer. Her background is interesting too because it's specifically environmental law.

BLAKE HITE: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: And the project you were working on with her was "Municipal Authority and Climate Change Regulation." Can you talk a little bit about that?

BLAKE HITE: Sure. So one of the big issues, especially with the Paris Climate Accord, the United States leaving from that and individual states and municipalities wanting to remain committed to the accord, was what authority does the city have to create greenhouse gas regulations on individual buildings, within their municipalities. And there are all sorts of legal questions that come up, mostly with preemption and whether or not there are federal laws that govern and supersede any municipal laws that they might want to create.

So there were some municipalities, in the state of Massachusetts, which had approached Ms. Joroff and asked her to come up with a legal argument for some way to really combat climate change through greenhouse gas regulations, at the individual building level, which had and has not been done before.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: So basic question, tell us a little bit about how this was set up. How did you approach Ms. Joroff? How did you find out about this? How did you two connect?

BLAKE HITE: Well, I had taken her class, in the spring before. And I knew, right away, that she would be

someone that I would be very, very interested in working for. She was an incredible lecturer. The class was amazing.

The things that she was teaching were not just intellectual exercises. They were very hands-on. And she was she was working in her field. She wasn't just teaching something that she had done 30 years before.

So I had approached her about becoming a faculty aide for her, and working on a limited project. As soon as I had given her some of the specifics about the Faculty Aide Program, she accepted. And I began working for her on the project, so.

CHRISTOPHER

That's great. So can you tell us a little bit about what the output of that was, or also talk a little bit about, during the semester, how the work broke down. Did you have regular check-ins? Or was it more self-directed? At the end of the semester, was there something that you created together? Or is her research, going to result in something that will be published or presented or what's the output of what you guys did?

DAVIS:

BLAKE HITE:

Absolutely. One of the things that I really enjoyed about working with her, and one of the reasons why I sought her out to become the faculty head for it was that she was very personable. And she was very open to the students. She seemed to make an effort to make time for the students.

I wanted to have that kind of relationship with someone. And that was something that led to weekly meetings with her, at the Law School. So I would go into the Law School and I would sit down with her, at the Environmental Policy Clinic.

And what we created, over the course of that semester, was a white paper, which is just a document for individual cities, inside of the state of Massachusetts, which explained how they can go about creating a legal argument for creating a cap on how much energy a building can use or how they could go about taxing that cap or creating a cap-and-trade program, so that they have to use renewable energy credits, something like that.

CHRISTOPHER

DAVIS:

Oh, that's really interesting. So very different, what you're working on, now. Also so, you're working with Kelly Zuromski, who is a Postdoctoral Fellow, in Psychology, here at Harvard. And the work that she's doing is part of the NOCK Lab, correct?

BLAKE HITE:

Correct.

CHRISTOPHER OK. This is something that I was actually not really familiar with. So I read a little bit about
DAVIS: them. So that's N-O-C-K. And the high-level summary of what they do is, from their website, "The primary goal of our research is to understand why people engage in behaviors that are harmful to themselves and to translate the knowledge gained into better methods for assessing and treating harmful behaviors." So really fascinating work.

And the project that you're working on currently is "Perspectives from survivors on suicide." So I'd love to hear a little bit more from you about what this is like. I know it's research that's currently ongoing. I know that the project aim is to explore the perspectives of suicide survivors, particularly family members of people who have committed suicide, correct, in the Armed Services?

BLAKE HITE: Yes, that's correct.

CHRISTOPHER OK.
DAVIS:

BLAKE HITE: That's correct. Like the other experience, it began with me taking a course, with Professor Zuromski. And again, recognizing that she would be someone that I would work well with. And she was working on research, which hits very close to home for me, not only as a veteran, but also as a former health care provider in the Navy, and as someone who's lost a number of Marines to suicide.

It was something that I was interested in contributing to. And I approached her in much the same way as Ms. Joroff. And I asked if I could take part in this project, if she had room for another research assistant. I found most people are pretty open to free labor. So she invited me on board.

And the research project, this semester, is looking at the responses of suicide decedent family members, so active duty Army soldiers, who were not deployed, who had died by suicide. And asking their next of kin, so their immediate family member, as well as their supervisors, three broad categories of questions.

The first one is, what, in your opinion, puts someone at risk of dying by suicide or what contributed directly to this soldier's death? The second is, what was the impact of that death on you or your family? And then, the third was, what can be done to prevent it?

And it's really unique because most of the research about suicide has to do with the risk

factors that lead up to it, but from the standpoint of the person going through it, not their family. And not asking what the family's seen and what the family goes through and what the family thinks could have prevented that. And we hope that, by studying these hundreds of responses, we're going to be able to identify some new risk factors that hadn't been identified before, put them together in ways that hadn't been seen.

CHRISTOPHER

So as this is part of research that's ongoing, within a lab, I think it sounds like the setup is a

DAVIS:

little different than your project in the fall, at the Law School. Can you talk a little bit about what that's been like? Are there other research assistants that you've been working with? I mean, is there an actual-- I'm assuming there's a facility that they use.

BLAKE HITE:

So most of the work that I've done, so far, has been at home. However, we've had numerous meetings at the William James Hall, which is the psychology building, here on campus. And I'm invited to all of the meetings for the NOCK Laboratory.

So if there are open meetings, then I can sit in on them, even if they're not relevant maybe to the [? Show's B ?] project, which is my particular project. So it's been nice. And I have. I've been going up for the weekly roundtable meetings, with the other research assistants.

There are three full time, or part time, paid research assistants. And then, there are another three seasonal research assistants that are working on this project, just with professors Wilks and Zuromski. It's been a pretty inviting community to be a part of. So I'm going to miss it.

CHRISTOPHER

Hmm. That's really interesting. There's mentioning too that there are Faculty Aide projects that

DAVIS:

are done by students who are outside of Massachusetts. So there are a lot of online projects. But for someone who is in the area, I can't imagine the value of these experiences to your overall student experience at the Extension School.

BLAKE HITE:

It has really put all the things that I learned and all of the academic struggles that you go through, as a student, and sometimes that mental endurance of, OK, we're almost to the finish line. What next? The Faculty Aide Program has really put into context what I can do with the degree that I'm earning and the kind of value that's inherent to it.

I've been able to use my-- I'm taking a course in epidemiology, this spring, and I've already been able to use those skills, as a research assistant, in the courses. Each project has been-- it hasn't been something that I've dreamed up. It's been me approaching a professor to work on a project that they have, that I've been interested in.

And so, there's a real world value to it. You can look back on graduate school applications, or whenever you go in for a business interview, and you can say, no, I have done this. I've done this in real time. I've done this with some of the leading experts in the world. NOCK Laboratory's pretty well known.

So it's been one of the highlights for my time here. And I would definitely encourage any student to, at least, give it a shot. I would always look at each semester's listings, first, that you said that you send out, in the fall and the spring. Definitely do that.

And if there isn't something that's on that list, but you still want to be a faculty aide, then I would encourage students to look back at prior courses that they've taken, where they were really interested in what the professor was teaching. And they really wanted to be in class.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: For folks who are done it, not only are there skills learned and obviously, experiences to be had from being a faculty aide, but there are also other benefits too. And one of the things that I always love to hear about, and I would like to hear from you what's coming next, is students who have utilized that experience to substantively boost their resumes or their applications for graduate schools and PhD programs. In the past year, alone, I know of three students who have been accepted to PhD programs-- according to them. This is not--

BLAKE HITE: Right.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: --me saying it-- in large part, because of their Faculty Aide experience. And also, the relationships, obviously the work output, and also the relationships that they've cultivated with faculty that have resulted in sterling letters of recommendation. So it's always wonderful to hear about experiences like that.

As I mentioned, as well, hopefully you're graduating this term. And I think, you had mentioned earlier, that your Faculty Aide work had been a part of your applications to grad schools.

BLAKE HITE: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: And it sounds like, you have some wonderful options ahead of you, right? Hopefully, fingers crossed.

BLAKE HITE: I do. I think you touched on two really important issues. One is to not take on too much. And two is the benefit that can come from the Faculty Aide experience, not just the money or the

experience, but also potentially, some pretty powerful letters of recommendation. And I think those two really tie together.

And it's important for students to realize that, when they apply, there is a great wealth that can be obtained, if they really commit themselves to the work that they are doing. So with that being said, it's important not to take on too much and suffered because of that. And lose those opportunities because of it.

But coming out of mine, I don't know how big of a part that it played. I would imagine that it was pretty useful. And I'm forever indebted to Ms. Joroff, for doing so. But she did write a letter of recommendation for me. I, of course, never saw it.

But I applied to three graduate programs. And I was admitted to each of those. And I'll be moving down to DC, to pursue a Master of Science, in Health and the Public Interest, at Georgetown.

So that's the next move. And that's what these two Faculty Aide experiences have come together for. It's not just, how does the science work, but how do you translate that science into really actionable policies, which is what that degree is intended for. So I would say, it's very relevant. And it was very helpful in pursuing yeah, my future down at Georgetown.

CHRISTOPHER That's great. That's wonderful. Yeah, I think, when we had emailed, or when I had last asked
DAVIS: you, your decision hadn't been made, yet. So I'm really thrilled to hear that it has.

BLAKE HITE: And on the *CARC Podcast*.

CHRISTOPHER Yeah.

DAVIS:

[LAUGHTER]

Well, that's wonderful. Thank you. And, as you said, I think the important thing is to have-- putting things on a scale and weighing what--

BLAKE HITE: Right.

CHRISTOPHER --is my bandwidth. And also, what, if I am interested in pursuing a degree, beyond what I'm
DAVIS: doing now, are there things that I can work on, that can connect to that and translate into extracurricular research experience. That can be often so helpful. So I'm really thrilled to hear

that.

BLAKE HITE: And I think, even if you're not sure that it's what you want to do, but you had a good experience with a professor and you feel like you would work well with him and you're interested in just kind of dipping your toe into it, it's an incredible opportunity. I was thinking about maybe going to law school. And that's something that's still might be off in the future. So having the opportunity to see just a little bit of what it looks like, on the other end, was-- yeah, you can't put a dollar amount on that, so.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: That's great. Well, Blake, I know that you are busy. And I know that midterms are upon us. Or, it sounds like you're still studying for--

BLAKE HITE: Thursday. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: OK.

BLAKE HITE: I have, yep, one on Thursday.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: OK. Wonderful. Well, I want to thank you, so much.

BLAKE HITE: Thank you for having me.

CHRISTOPHER DAVIS: I think it's something that I have wanted to talk about and hear from a student who has gone through the program. And I'm really grateful for your time. Thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

You have listened to the *CARC Podcast*. This is the podcast for the Career and Academic Research Center, here at Harvard Extension School. And I hope you will join us again.

[MUSIC PLAYING]