

Lessons from the Juniata College Experience

Nicole Close, Class of 1992; Jim Metz, Class of 1989; Angela Jones, Class of 2001; and Bill Phillips, Class of 1970

October 19, 2018

Four Juniata alumni share their Juniata experiences and how Juniata influenced their worldviews by encouraging passion, confidence, independent thinking, and caring.
Moderator: Bruce Davis, Class of 1965.

This quotation from James Quinter at the very first commencement of Juniata College in 1879 holds up pretty well: “The best and most important thing in an education is not the amount of knowledge acquired but the training which gives us control of our minds, the power of being able to apply the mind to studies, labor, and duties, which the calling we select may require.”¹

DR. NICOLE C. CLOSE

Juniata’s Program of Emphasis (POE) helped her organize her whole life.

I am very proud and happy to represent Juniata. For me, there was a very methodical and careful plan for picking Juniata. I looked at two schools: Juniata College and the University of Pittsburgh. How did Juniata win out? There were three strategic reasons. First, it was close to home, and my mother could do my laundry. Second, they had a good science program. Third, they had an early acceptance option, so during senior year of high school you knew early on that you had gotten in and had it made the rest of the year. I knew Juniata was a great school, a small school. It was great in science, and I really liked the ability to pick my POE and devise a plan that interested me.

I am not a rule follower. I like to do things differently, and I explored a lot of different things. When I got to Juniata, I knew I wanted to study science, specifically biology. I dreamed of being the first female athletic trainer for the Steelers. I am proud to say that they do now have one who is a woman, but that is not where my career took me. I tried many things at Juniata and realized through that exploration that I was also interested in political science, so I took more classes in that. I was able to devise a POE around my interests. That journey was possible because, at Juniata, I was never told no. I never had a barrier between my passion, what I longed to think about, and what I was searching for down my particular path. I think that promise, intrigue, and passion for learning and understanding carry through for all Juniata experiences.

After I left Juniata, I immediately entered an epidemiology and biostatistics program at Case Western Reserve University. Following that, I landed in Washington, DC, and taught at The George Washington University for several years. I earned my Ph.D. while I was there. Later in life, I worked for a number of various groups, but I always wanted to do my own thing. My passion was always in the medical field, but I do not have a good bedside manner because I am a little bit too truthful and honest, so I knew that was not going to work for me. You have to figure out what is going to work for you. While I knew I did not want to work directly with patients, I found my passion was medical research.

I think that when you hear math, statistics, or biostatistics, you think of sitting behind a computer. I knew I was not the kind of person to sit behind the desk and crunch numbers. My research involves helping companies develop new molecules, develop drugs, and actually get them to market. I also work a lot in orphan drugs, which are pharmaceuticals that are often not developed because they are not seen as profitable. There are horrible diseases that affect children and adults and not enough companies are working in that area. What I do for those groups is design a clinical study, tell them how many people need to be in it, collect the data, analyze it, and tell them if the drug or device works. Also, and maybe I am a little bit of a nerd, I love to travel and have seen the world through this type of career. I have worked in Asia, Africa, Europe, and here in the United States. I think it is that Juniata spirit that inspired my confidence to try new things because no one was holding me back. At Juniata, the only person to hold you back would be you yourself. You are always encouraged to find what really inspires you.

I have seen that the environment we are nurtured in at Juniata attracts a certain type of student. We already have an ingrained passion to find what we want to do for the rest of our lives, and we explore many different avenues in order to find that. Do not be afraid to explore your passion because it enriches you, and do not ever think that you have to succeed at everything you do. I have learned most through failures. I have failed at a whole ton of things, every single day, but central Pennsylvania folks have a lot of grit and resilience. I have developed that sort of POE of life.

Through those endeavors and careers, I have branched into other things, too. When I met my wonderful husband, he was working in a position where he was not happy. I thought that was just silly, so I said, “Let’s just start a company to make you happy. Let’s do it!” Simple enough. We started a company together, and he gets to live his passion every day: working in the electrical field. I even went to class with all of the other electrical techs, and I can start a twenty-two-kilowatt generator with the best of them. I thought, “It is just mechanics, and I know how to read. Why not?”

We are also passionate about camping, hiking, and being outdoors. We moved about five years ago from the Washington, DC, area to North Carolina, close to the seashore. This is the kind of area where vacationing families often come together to rent an expensive house for a vacation, so we decided to bring together our love of family, togetherness, and camping and develop a company where folks can

rent a camper from us. We set it up at a campground, they come and have that family camping experience together at the beach, and we take the camper away when the vacation is over. This makes these vacations more affordable for families. We were able to take one of our passions and develop that into joy for others in that particular area. I would say that I continue to follow what my interests are.

This relates to some of the core values encouraged at Juniata, like not being afraid to take risks. From risks, there are gains, and, if you never take a risk, you will not be able to enjoy what is after that risk. It is okay to fail—try it a different way until it is the right way for you. I am very thankful for my roots, passions, commitments, and developments that I had at Juniata College. I also did not realize how hard Juniata was until I left. They are hard on us for a reason, and that gain is mainly experienced later. Any time I have been asked to come back to Juniata, I always say yes because of the passions, experiences, and family community that I feel at Juniata.

DR. JIM METZ

Juniata gave him the foundation to become Chair of the Radiation Oncology Department at one of the greatest medical schools in the country.

I see big changes when I look back to when I graduated in 1989. There were no cell phones at that time. There was no Internet. There was no Facebook, Snapchat, or all these other things that students now live by. However, I have been able to work in this future because of the foundation that I got from Juniata. Who knows what is going to be coming along twenty years from now? But Juniata students are going to be prepared in a way that many others are not. I am incredibly fortunate to be where I am today.

When I was at Juniata, I was a biology major, and I actually did not think I was smart enough to do medicine. There were seven guys on my football team that went into medical school, and I thought, “I am not as smart as these people. There is no way I could do this.” I ended up going to graduate school in clinical immunology. When I was there, I realized, “Wait a second, I am as smart as these people.” I was taking medical school courses as a graduate student. I thought, “I can do this,” and I started to understand the foundation that Juniata had given me.

I actually was a lot smarter than I thought, and Juniata taught me how to learn. They taught me how to assimilate information. Even though technology has changed, I know how to look at science in a comfortable way despite the new things that are coming along. That foundation is incredibly important, but Juniata also taught me to believe in myself. I doubted myself at the beginning. But once I got into graduate school and went to medical school, I knew I was going to be successful because of the foundation that I had.

I went to Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, which is Rutgers’ medical school in New Jersey. It is at a state school, and I could afford to put myself through. Then I decided what field I was

going to go into for residency: radiation oncology, which is using radiation to treat cancers and requires a strong physics expertise. By the way, I dropped out of physics at Juniata, which I had to take again later, but now I am an expert in nuclear physics. Your world can change; do not think what you decide today is what it is going to be tomorrow.

When I was doing my job interview with the chairman of the University of Pennsylvania, he challenged me: “You know, with your pedigree, how do you think you could ever succeed in an Ivy League institution?” I had no idea he had already decided he was going to hire me, but he let me go through my rant anyway, explaining how I would succeed with my background. He subsequently hired me as a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania and became a good friend. He then went on to become head of oncology at Oxford University and helped me get the position of chair at the University of Pennsylvania; he really was a big advocate. So, do not doubt yourself, and stand up for yourself. You can succeed anywhere you want to succeed.

Another thing I loved about Juniata was the team mentality. What I learned in life is that no matter what you do, whether you are in business or medicine, the team approach is a much more successful approach to doing things. That got ingrained in me playing football, having eleven guys on the field and trusting everybody around you to do their job. I like to apply that to what I do in medicine. When I treat patients, I am kind of like the quarterback with a whole team of people (physicists, dosimetrists, therapists, and nurses) to treat that one patient, and I have to rely on every one of them to do their job. However, I also have to know what all of them are doing. Having that team approach and that foundation has been incredibly important for me being successful in what I do.

It is also important that you figure out how to give back. I came to Juniata because I was able to get a scholarship to come here. I could not afford it otherwise. You give back through mentoring people, through funds, or any of many other ways, but it really is important to do that. I believe that, in many things I do, I never would have had the opportunities I have today without the help of others. Juniata students are the future. I recently met a couple of the students who I had been helping with some of their 2017 scholarships. I was floored at how mature they were and how much they have thought about things; where they are in life is way beyond where I was at college age. The one thing I told them is that when you have the opportunity to give back, you should. I think that is an incredible thing to pay forward, and it will come back to you many times over.

Remember those things: believe in yourself, know you have a strong foundation, think about teamwork, and give back.

ANGELA JONES

Juniata taught her about global inclusivity, and she is now Director, Business and Legal Affairs, Original Series at Netflix.

I have worked at Netflix about five and a half years, which in Netflix years is about a century. I joined right after we launched *House of Cards*, which was our first original series. We now have hundreds of original series produced around the world. When you see an original series on your Netflix service, it means one of two things. There's one bucket of shows we have started producing ourselves, like a traditional studio—for example, *Stranger Things*. And there is a second bucket of shows that we enlist other studios to produce on our behalf because we do not have the capacity to make all the shows in the world. My team handles all of the legal aspects of the second bucket: from negotiating with the studios over the license agreement for shows like *House of Cards*, *Ozark*, or *Narcos* to working with our business affairs executives on managing the budgets for shows, to advising on random talent-related issues. Hypothetically, if the lead star of your biggest series is accused of something horrible, what do you do? It is an interesting job, and, obviously, it is not one that actually existed as an option for me to even think about when I was at Juniata.

I think the most obvious impact Juniata had on me is that I met my husband here. When I started working at a law firm after law school in Philadelphia, we had our first son, and Chris decided to stay home and take care of him full-time. It might not seem so revolutionary now, but, ten years ago, it was a big move. On a personal level, it enabled me to keep progressing in my career, and it gave me flexibility and support that I otherwise would not have had. I do credit Juniata with helping to instill in him this progressive philosophy. He trusted himself enough that it was not actually a big deal for him to do this. The move enabled me to flourish in my career, and it is a great arrangement for us.

I did not really come into this school knowing what I wanted to do at all. The Program of Emphasis and the curriculum were really transformative for me. I had a politics POE, and I generally knew I liked writing. I knew I was good at it; I knew that I liked to construct arguments. I did not, however, love public speaking. It was very helpful for me to be able to add different types of classes into my POE and try out different things without being penalized by delaying graduation like might have happened at other schools. That was hugely impactful in pushing me towards understanding that pursuing a legal career was probably the right next step for me. The access to professors and the personal relationships you have with them is also a really special thing. Dr. Barlow played a huge role in guiding me through what my next step was after Juniata.

And what about Juniata's impact on my current role? Like I stated at the beginning, there are interesting parallels between the values that I took away from Juniata and things that I see and experience in my current role at Netflix, and I think that those values are what ultimately result in me feeling fulfilled and happy in my career. Some of it is likely a "chicken or egg" problem: specifically, was I attracted to

both Juniata and Netflix because I was already pointing in that direction as far as core values were concerned? One of the main core values that I keep going back to is Juniata's emphasis on global IQ and inclusiveness. This is not a revolutionary concept today, but I think, eighteen years ago, having that incorporated as part of the curriculum across the board was unique and special to this place. Now I am at a global company, both in terms of our subscribers and in terms of the colleagues I work with on a daily basis, that really lives and breathes those values. I talk to colleagues in Japan, India, Amsterdam, and all other parts of the world. I feel very fortunate that I was able to learn for four years of undergrad at a place that actually incorporated these values into our day-to-day learning.

Lastly, Juniata really instilled in me the ability to think on my own, question what we think are norms, and foster curiosity that leads to more learning. Coming to Netflix later in my career (where we are encouraged every day to think outside the box, be curious, and challenge the status quo), after having been at a firm and then at a very corporate job right after that, I realize now that I had the benefit, right here at Juniata, of practicing a unique skill that not everyone has, especially if you study at a larger, very process-oriented school. Independent thinking is a great thing to have fostered from the beginning of your educational process because that is how innovation flourishes. It is something that Netflix encourages in all of its employees on a daily basis. It makes me very happy, and I feel incredibly fortunate that I was able to incorporate that into my learning early on. I did not appreciate a lot of these things until later in my career, but I hope that you all recognize right now that Juniata is a special place and that you are fortunate to be at such a unique school. I hope that you are able to take those values and turn them into a career that you love.

DR. BILL PHILLIPS

Juniata helped him on his way to winning a Nobel Prize.

As I got older and older, I realized more and more how much Juniata has meant in making me into the person that I became. To give you a little bit of the flavor, I would like to tell you a few stories. I came to Juniata a really long time ago, in 1966. It was before they had a Program of Emphasis. The POE is such a wonderful thing because so often people really do not know what they want to study when they come to college. However, I had known since I was ten years old that I wanted to be a physicist. I came to Juniata and was a physics major; that was it. It was really quite unusual, even for the time, that I stuck with what I originally wanted to do.

As a freshman, though, I realized I really did not understand what physics was about. I was sitting in Ray Pfrogner's class, and he was teaching physics with calculus. All of a sudden, it all came together, and I thought, "Wow, this is the way it works." It was not something that happened in class. It was something that, because of the seeds that were planted in class, I figured out. Richard Feynman, one of the

great iconic physicists of the twentieth century, had made a series of movies on the character of physical law, and Ray Pfrogner would invite us for movie night, pop popcorn, and watch these movies with us. Are there other places where this kind of thing happens? He really cared about us. He really cared about us understanding what physics was about and how much fun physics was.

I was still a first-semester freshman when Wilfred Norris came to me and said, “You should take junior lab physics.” Being a naïve freshman, I said, “Of course!” I was the only student, and he worked with me and taught me how to take measurements. I measured the charge of the electron. I measured the ratio of Planck’s constant to Boltzmann’s constant, and now I carry around in my pocket a wallet card of the fundamental constants of nature because that is part of my job. I am a metrologist, and Wilfred Norris taught me how to measure stuff. Later this fall, I am going to Versailles, where we are going to have an international meeting to change the way in which things are measured in the entire world. The metric system is going to undergo the biggest revolution since the French Revolution. I have a little part in that, and it all started with junior lab in physics because Wilfred cared enough to look and think, “There is this freshmen nerd, and maybe he would benefit from this; together we could get somewhere.”

The spring of 1970 was a turbulent time with all kinds of demonstrations; people were being shot on college campuses. Because people cared, Juniata College closed out of fear about what might happen to the students. There were a few of us who refused to leave. They had locked up the dorms, so what did we do? We went over to Betty Ann and Ron Cherry’s house. Obviously, they were crazy, too, because they welcomed us into their house. We were sleeping on their floors and trying to figure out “What could we do to heal the divisiveness that was happening on our campus and in our country?” Sound familiar? Over the course of days, midnight discussions, playing frisbee, Betty Ann and Ron feeding us, and somehow figuring out how we were all going to take showers, it all came together. They cared. College is a place where we learn and where we teach. I got a wonderful expression of what teaching and learning is about.

Recently, I watched a wonderful documentary film called *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?* Fred Rogers had a children’s show on television called *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, and it was the craziest idea. He just sat there in his cardigan sweater and tennis shoes, and he talked to kids about life. In this documentary, toward the end, Fred Rogers was giving a college commencement address. These were probably the kids who had grown up watching Fred Rogers, and he said the following thing, which is hard for me to even repeat because it was so meaningful to me. He said, “Since you were very little, you had people who smiled you into smiling, who sang you into singing, and who loved you into loving. That’s the kind of learning that happens when you’re very young, when you’re surrounded by people who love you.”² I realized that the Juniata family had thought me into thinking and cared me into caring.

NOTES

1. James Quinter, "Closing Exercises and Commencement of 'The Brethren's Normal,'" *The Primitive Christian and the Pilgrim* XVII, no. 29 (July 22, 1879): 457-458.
<https://archive.org/details/primitivechristi17149quin/page/456/mode/2up>.
2. *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* directed by Morgan Neville (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018).