

Season 6 Episode 3

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Welcome back, college bound listeners to re-introduce myself. My name is Ceci Guarnuccio and I'm a current junior here at the University of Notre Dame. We are so excited to bring you a new episode in our podcast. The Post-Notre Dame Experience: A conversation with Notre Dame graduates about what their life has been like after graduation. Whether that was attending graduate school, going into the workforce, or moving abroad, we are ready to share with you the endless possibilities that are at your hands.

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When you graduate from Notre Dame last episode, we were joined by Luis Alejandro Lazalde, who shared with us his journey from his interdisciplinary education as a chemical engineering and theology student to where he is now working at Samsung. We highly encourage you to check it out if you haven't already. Today, we're joined by Phyllis Washington Stone, who will be sharing with us what she's been up to since graduating in 1980.

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Hi, Phyllis. Thank you so much for joining us today.

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Oh, thanks for having me Ceci. It's great to be with you

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Awesome! Well we're super excited to always be talking with alums. And we'll start it off with your Notre Dame introduction. So that will be your name, what you studied, where you're from, the dorm you lived on, as well as where you're at now and what you're doing.

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My name is Phyllis Washington Stone. I slipped the Washington in there because that was my maiden name when I was at Notre Dame. I graduated in 1980 with a degree in American Studies. And I'm originally from Chicago, but have been living in Somerset, New Jersey, now longer than I've lived anywhere in my life. When I was on campus, I lived in Lewis Hall all of four years and we were required to eat in a certain dining hall, so I ate at South Dining Hall all four years. I have a past career in global marketing in the pharma industry, and I did that for about 25, 30 years and now I'm doing it Executive Coaching and leadership development.

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Awesome. Very cool. What is a little bit of that day to day look like for you?

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Well, it varies. I have some private clients, which means I do executive coaching with clients on a periodic basis for anywhere from an hour to 2 hours. I also do team alignment, which is really kind of an expanded executive coaching process where you try to get teams to work well at their best together. But the sessions typically focus on how to lead, how to lead effectively, and particularly from a values perspective.

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Whether it be technical skills that you learned in the classroom as an American studies major or maybe experiences you had in clubs or just general soft skills that you developed. Were there any activities that you had at Notre Dame that you feel prepared you for your post-graduate work?

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I think every single activity I was involved in prepared me in lots of different ways. I was a Notre Dame cheerleader, and at one point I was the captain of the cheerleaders. So definitely from a leadership perspective, that helped me and what I'm doing today. I wrote. I wrote for Scholastic magazine and I also wrote for The Observer. So, you know, honing my writing skills [chuckles] was also pretty important in learning how to communicate, whether in written or spoken form. I also was involved artistically in some ways. I was in a little dance troupe while I was there. I'm not sure how that prepared me at all [laughs], but.

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It's definitely what I thought in my extracurriculars. I have my classwork that I love, but when it comes to clubs, trying to maybe tap into those extra passions that my majors might not cover themselves.

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That's really it's really important. One of the other things I did as a senior was became an RA. I think that that helped tremendously, too, from a leadership perspective.

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So you've kind of highlighted how your extracurriculars helped you work from a leadership perspective, develop into a strong leader and as well as then kind of coach others to be as well. How would you say maybe that your American Studies major tied into do a lot of things from it and it's a really kind of broad and overarching major that really allows you to work in a variety of fields. So how did you use your American Studies background to go where you are today, as well as your work in global marketing for pharma?

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Well, I think American studies helped me to the degree that it was um very liberal arts focused and I ended up my career for the most part, ended up in global marketing. And part of what I minored in, as part of American Studies, was a Communications degree. So I think that that did have some direct applications to marketing in some way. The major itself American Studies was just broad enough that,

you know, I was able to take writing classes and take classes that took me to learn how to think critically, how to question, and I think analyze. So I think all of those skills are critical to everything that I've done professionally. I believe that the American Studies degree, the liberal arts perspective really prepared me for that, for that, the ability to be able to think critically and to analyze more than anything and communicate.

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So when you were first starting at Notre Dame, what drew you to the American Studies major and maybe how would your experience over your four years impact any advice that you would want to give to prospective students who are considering applying to American Studies or just to Notre Dame in general?

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Well, I think like a lot of students coming out of high school, your parents kind of steer you in certain directions. My parents steered me towards engineering, so I spent my first year, a year and a half, studying engineering and learned after I think my, by my third semester of calculus that that just wasn't the proper course for me. And I chose American Studies because it contained an element of journalism in it and I thought about becoming a journalist. And in general, I just came from a family of readers and writers, and so that was kind of a natural fit for me. At the time, Notre Dame didn't have a journalism major. As an undergrad because I was in American Studies, there was a fair bit of flexibility and elective courses that you could take. And so I ended up taking basic accounting and I ended up taking a basic marketing class, and I was really drawn to marketing. And so I think that kind of served as a nice foundation for me going into that field.

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One kind of final question for you. Do you have any advice that you would want to give to. Current students, maybe in American studies or just current Notre Dame students who are soon about to embark on their own postgraduate journeys?

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I think that a college degree prepares you for just about anything you want to be, no matter your major. You know, I know that some advanced preparation is needed if you're going to do something like medical school. But I think what I like about the Notre Dame degree, when I came in, we had freshman year studies, which was a broad curriculum. And I think being able to have the opportunity to study more broadly in liberal arts and business take electives like marketing and accounting, you graduate with a nice array of experiences academically, but also because there's so much to get involved in from an extracurricular standpoint, your experiences outside of the classroom prepare you as well. So I guess my advice or encouragement to students would be certainly study hard, but don't miss the advantage that the Notre Dame education allows you to have in terms of building relationships with people through clubs and organizations and learning how to develop your soft skills so that, you know, you leave the university having gained a sense of value around what it is to serve, what it is to be in collaboration and in relationship with other people. That part of the Notre Dame education is just as important as the classroom.

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Absolutely. I can definitely say from my own experience in the classroom, Notre Dame really does seek to educate the whole person in a variety of topics as well as then outside of the classroom to build those connections in communities that you might not find on other campuses, which really makes Notre Dame a very special place.

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Yes, it does. And you mentioned something, too, that reminds me that the kind of the third pillar that in addition to your own personal development and your academic development, is your spiritual development. And there are just very few places where you can go where you've got that added benefit of really being able to focus your your attention and developing yourself from a spiritual perspective as well, no matter your religion.

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It really is a great place to get that development, whether you're incredibly religious or not or anything and everything in between.

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Exactly.

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Well, did you have any final comments that you wanted to share with our listeners?

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I have been a member of the Notre Dame family since I was 18 years old, and I have never, ever, ever regretted it.

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Well, that's all the time that we have for today. Thank you so much, Phyllis, for your time. And thank you, listeners for joining us today for another episode of College Bound. We hope you enjoyed getting to hear another perspective about what your time at Notre Dame could look like. Make sure to come back next week for another insightful experience from a Notre Dame alum and make sure to listen to all past seasons of College Bound on Spotify, Apple, or wherever you listen to your podcast. That'll be all for today, and we look forward to seeing you next time. Go Irish!