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Jason Kennedy Memoir

Kennedy, Jason

Interview and memoir
digital audio file, 58 min., 20 pp.

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Kennedy attended University of Springfield in 2001 as part of the first class of Capital Scholars. Question classes were the foundation of the Cap Scholars multidisciplinary team-taught curriculum that included "What do you know?" "Who am I?" "What is Good?" and "What is Power?"

Interview by Mary Caroline Mitchell, 2010

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Narrator: Jason Kennedy
Date: June 17, 2010
Place: Washington DC
Interviewer: Mary Caroline Mitchell

Begin Recording

Q. This is Mary Caroline Mitchell and Jason Kennedy and this is June 17th, 2010. And Jason, would you describe where we're sitting right now?

A. Yeah, we're in my office in Washington, D.C. at the George Washington University where I serve as the associate director for MBA admissions within the School of Business.

Q. Tell me a little bit about your background and where you were born and how you got to Springfield, Illinois and UIS.

A. Born and raised in Decatur, Illinois; went to St. Thomas Preschool, Holy Family Grade School and Middle School, and St. Theresa High School. And so UIS was my first public school experience my entire educational career, never planned to go to UIS. I applied to the University of Illinois Chicago, the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Washington University and I was stoked for architecture.

I was denied by the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, waitlisted by Wash U. and accepted into Iowa State, accepted into UIC. I went to UIC, didn't like it. I went to Iowa State, didn't like it. But when UIUC sent me a denial, they also included a card which says, "Listen, we're sorry you weren't accepted here. Would you like to consider this new program, this Capital Scholars program at University of Illinois at Springfield?"

Which truth be told is probably the first time I had ever heard of the university and I grew up thirty miles away from it. And so I went; I signed the card. My mom was saying, "What do you have to lose?" Signed the card and sent it back and sent it in and was accepted and went for Preview Day and I left and I said, "There is no way I'm going."

Q. What, tell me a little bit about what happened at Preview Day and who did you meet? Who contacted you and how did that all happen?

A. That much I don't, I don't remember as much anymore. I remember we were in the Brookens Auditorium. I remember two things very clearly from that day; one was all the tunnels that connect the PAC and Brookens and everything as well as the science building. And I remember honestly not liking the campus very much. When I left that was my impression of the university at the time and getting in the car with my mom and I was going, "I don't think I want to go here."

Q. How many students were considering, were in that Preview?

A. It was a pretty packed house. It was in Brookens auditorium and that would hold about a hundred to hundred and twenty people, and it seemed pretty full of students and parents and everything. And Jim Stewart was telling about the program and Karen Moranski; Mr. Korte talking about the housing and the new residence hall, which was still under construction even when we moved in and everything. But it was definitely a full, full house.

Q. Was it just a one day or did you spend the night? Oh, there was no place to spend the night.

A. There was no place to spend the night.

Q. Ok, all right.

A. We drove over and we drove back in the same day.

Q. All right, so then what happened next?

A. You know I was accepted into the program, and I was still trying to see my way into the school at University of Illinois at Champaign.

Q. Now this would be into the school of architecture?

A. Any school.

Q. Or just any program?

A. Just any. I picked psychology at UIS; UIS doesn't have architecture. Again choices made by an eighteen-year-old and UIS continued to send me mailers, and it was very clear they wanted me to be there. They made it also very clear that sizing it up even at eighteen, UIS was going to be the least expensive option, and that definitely factored into it. And so finally it was like, "All right, let's go try this."

Q. Do you remember how close to August you made your decision?

A. I made my decision probably by the Fourth of July. I don't think it was any later than that. I might have still been working some angles after I sent the deposit check in at other universities, but I definitely had signed up for UIS by the Fourth of July.

Q. So then what was... you packed up and came over. What was your... what was move-in day like for you?

A. I had my own personal move-in day. Friends of my mom's in Decatur, their sister-in-law worked for UIS housing actually. And I was going to need a federal work steady job, and so I was able to get that position before starting at the university and I moved in about a week

before everybody else. And so I moved in and my mom and friends of my mom and some other friends of mine, my brother, helped move me in. And I was basically there with the three original RAs for the first week in this entire building.

When I moved in that week before, the card system had not been activated. We literally went to the front door of Lincoln Residence Hall and turned the key to lock the door at the end of the evening the first two nights that we were in there. And I had the strangest dreams of checking in new freshmen when I was myself a freshman. I remember standing at a table in the lobby...

Q. Was that your job?

A. My job was just kind of office support.

Q. In which, in Lincoln Residence Hall?

A. In the housing office.

Q. Housing office, ok.

A. But of course on move-in day it is all hands on deck even if you are one of the people who they are supposed to be anticipating. And I remember sitting there and knowing the name of my roommate and just keeping and waiting to see when he was going to come in and what he was going to look like and everything else. And we'd had a couple phone conversations but hadn't met each other before.

And so I was cheating a little bit because I had the list and as soon as he came up, I knew exactly who he was and he did not know the same about me. I introduced myself very quickly, but that was a different move in experience. And I worked for housing, housing with the Capital Scholars program the entire time at the university, and so I never had the traditional move-in experience, which I preferred. It was a whole lot quieter.

Q. So who did your roommate turn out being?

A. My roommate ended up being Justin Park who was from Springfield, a really tall, lanky guy. He left the program after two weeks. He had considered joining the Marines before coming to UIS and two weeks in college he said, "You know what, I don't think this is for me." And he left the program and joined the Marines.

And so for a time then I had a room to myself as a freshman for maybe two months in that first semester. And then finally I picked a new roommate, things got moved around and so I went from Lincoln Residence Hall, one west to three south... I don't know my directions. Yes, three south and three south was only using three suites down the hallway.

It was a little bit of overflow, of course keeping half the residence hall for the incoming freshmen the year after, and so three south was kind of the party wing of the residence hall because there wasn't anybody else living down there. We just had to keep the small group of us happy, and we were all a pretty fun-loving group.

Q. And who did your first roommate that stuck end up being?

A. It ended up being Chris Roberts.

Q. Where was he from?

A. He was from I believe Joliet, and I was suitemates with Ryan Morrison and Mark Krohe in that first year.

Q. So did you have an orientation after freshman orientation or anything like that?

A. There was an orientation somewhere between when I signed up and move-in time. I met Chris Roberts there; I met Alisa Manzoello who is currently one of the roommates at the house with a bunch of UIS alum there.

Q. That you live in now?

A. Yeah, live in now. And I don't remember much of the orientation; I do remember meeting both of them and they are both pretty effervescent personalities and so I do remember that.

Q. Ok, and so what was your first class? How did they start you all off? Did you have a... like did you know what you were going to study? Did you have an advisor or how did that work?

A. Yes, that was actually on the academic side very structured. There were the four "question classes" cap scholars have as well as a writing and a discipline class. Being a psychology major initially I was in the social sciences section of that. Karen Kirkendall was my original academic advisor. "How do you know?" the first "question class" was my first Capital Scholars kind of class, trying to remember what other classes I had that first year.

Q. Would you describe what a "question class" is?

A. Yeah, yeah. The "question class" is still to my knowledge but was certainly at the time, intended to be the foundation of the Capital Scholars curriculum. Some people go to college and they take English 101 and History 101. And we took cross, multidisciplinary, team-taught classes that touched upon social sciences, humanities, hard sciences, really bringing all this together and addressing particular things about it.

And so "How do you know?" was really focused on logic, on logical fallacies, on assessing information. A dangerous class to teach eighteen-year-olds because at every class we went to,

we used those tools against faculty. But it was definitely a, it was really an interesting way to learn things and it definitely is something... all the "question classes" "How do you know?" was followed by "Who am I?" talking about identity, learning about different perspectives.

One of the, probably the simplest book I ever read in that class was the autobiography of Malcolm X, followed by "What is good?" It was the concepts of utopian society constructs meant to push limits in that class, talking, touching on ethics in philosophy. And then finally "What is power?" which just divided a different section in business power, political power, people power and that sort of thing.

And you know it's something where I really value that experience now. I think particularly the "Who am I?" that looking at different people's perspectives was an aspect of the class I wasn't going to get somewhere else. You know I think in most other colleges, you would have needed to have taken Modern History or get Americans to read the autobiography of Malcolm X.

And I remember in this class reading Catch 22 one week and reading the autobiography of Malcolm X the next week, and I think that was really helpful. That "How do you know" class, that constant questioning the information you're presented, but this was some years back where there was even less information. Now it's just massive, it's who do you trust and how do you critically take things in. I think those classes taught me a lot about being a critical thinker.

Q. So how many people were in each of your sections?

A. There was a main lecture, which was basically the entire class.

Q. How many was that by the way, first cap honors class?

A. Entering was one hundred and twelve.

Q. Ok.

A. And each then, within each then was a major lecture which was in the Studio Theatre, and then each section had somewhere between twenty and twenty-five that was taught by one of the team faculty members that taught in the larger lecture as well.

Q. And besides this kind of a course, did you also take some language course or math or what were the other courses besides that?

A. I did. My freshman year, I took a Spanish course. I also took I believe in the second semester of my freshman year, a micro economics course where I completely changed my major after that course and said, "I want to be an economist" and everything. I never took a psychology course. But I really liked the micro economics and went with that, and so there was a lot of those kind of courses as well, a little more traditional.

Q. Were you all mainstreamed with other UIS students in those classes?

A. We were. We were the disproportionate number a lot of times, particularly some of the 100 and 200 level business courses were almost exclusively Capital Scholars. And the first couple of years which meant the classes were a little bit smaller, maybe fifteen to twenty. But there were always traditional UIS or Sangamon State students there as well.

Q. My understanding is that we didn't really have 100 and 200 level classes. Is that correct? Until your first freshman class?

A. Yes, pickings were very slim. There were some 200 level classes, which I'm not sure were even intended to prep people coming into the 300 level to come in as well. But there were only a handful of them that were available and ones that oftentimes we were kind of the first run for these courses, even the more traditional 200 level courses.

Q. They were just being developed?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Could you describe, you had obviously a lot of faculty members teaching you that first semester. Could you just describe maybe two or three that really stand out for you as either good or bad? I mean you don't, if you don't want to say bad, that's fine but maybe you can say it nicely or we don't have to... you don't have to tell us, we can figure it out. (laughter)

A. Well, I remember, I just remember two faculty members really from that freshman year. One was Karen Moranski. Dr. Stewart was kind of the freewheeling; he was the visionary kind of behind this. Dr. Moranski was the one who would dive into the details of it with the individual students and "how is this going?" You know, practical sets; it's a great concept, but Dr. Moranski was very much involved in the implementation side of things.

The other one I remember was Pinky Wassenberg mostly because... I mean she cursed in class, which being a teenager you know shouldn't faze you but I came from a Catholic high school. It was, I remember that about freshman year and I remember thinking, "Oh wow, this is college now; you can say four-letter words in class." But also that was kind of just honesty as well. Pinky always definitely treated us as student peers.

She was obviously the professor – that was clear. But she spoke to us like adults, and that was really the same for all the faculty. But I think Pinky had a much more casual way about it where our reverence for her, our respect for her came specifically because she gave us respect as adults that would appreciate the material she was teaching. And so those are the two professors I remember most.

Q. In terms of address, were you encouraged to address your faculty as Dr. Wassenberg or how casual was your instruction?

A. It was very casual. Dr. Stewart who ironically was one of the faculty members I still call Dr. Stewart, really wanted to be called Jim. Dr. Moranski was another one. Pinky encouraged people to call her Pinky. And so over time you know the reflexive thing was to call them professor and doctor. But by and large, most of them wanted to be called by their first names.

Q. Was this surprising to you? What did you expect when you walked into a college class versus a high school class?

A. Honestly, I expected college to be a lot like high school. You know Mr. and Mrs., doctor and professor, that level of formality, that line. It's very clear in a high school class, and it was very strange. I remember kind of wondering, "Are they trying to throw me off here? Are they trying to draw me into something where they going to turn around and say, wait, wait, wait, hold on."

It was definitely a unique experience; it was something that they all brought in a very casual approach to the classroom and to us. They all put a lot of faith in us that we were going to appreciate this experiment.

Q. Did they bring you in as the first group to help critique what was being taught?

A. They did. They sought that feedback and I think did a good job of considering the messenger as well as the message. And so a lot of things we didn't like because they were hard. There were a lot of things we thought were silly because we were eighteen. I remember thinking "How do you know?" at the time was this ridiculous class where I wasn't learning anything because no one was teaching me about something. They were teaching me about talking about other somethings. And it was one of you know those things that I didn't appreciate it at the time, and I think I'm grateful now they didn't listen so much to us. But they definitely sought that feed back and kind of, "How is it going?" That was definitely Dr. Moranski's role. She was very much always checking: Is it too much? How much free time do you have? How much trouble are you getting into? That sort of thing.

Q. In terms of difficulty of the classes for your freshman year, were they harder or easier or just different than what you expected?

A. They were dramatically different, which I think made them harder. Some of our writing classes, I had Dr. Moranski for a writing class and the topic she gave us was very vague, touch on these components in an essay for six or seven pages or whatever it was. And I remember going to her and saying, "What are you looking for?" She said, "Well you have the questions." Yeah but it doesn't ask anything. What am I supposed, what do you want?

And she didn't listen, instead of saying, "How do I get an A?" And that was, that was very different. It was very much take it where it leads you. You could tell these principles, take it where it leads you and that was very difficult because it forced you to expand your thinking, which wasn't satisfactory.

Q. Did you, where you studying more hours than you thought you would or how did that work in your life coming from a structured high school to it's all free time for you except for class every so often?

A. Yeah, I never studied as much probably as I should have. I think, the thing I remember is time didn't make any difference anymore. When you slept, when you studied or you hung out with people, it didn't really matter anymore. The whole, whether it was three o'clock in the morning and you were hanging out and sleeping at two o'clock in the afternoon; time had no meaning; there was no structure. If you look at the grades of most of the freshman Capital Scholars, that's clear.

There was definitely a little bit of panic among the faculty of... I remember this particularly there was a kind of a moment where the key faculty got together and got all of us in a room and were like, "Guys, you really have to study." I think the majority of us were teetering on a 3.0 after the first semester. I know I was a little south of a 3.0, and that was a consequence of being a freshman I think.

Q. We've talked a lot about academics, so let's move on to the more subtle aspects. Can you describe what it was like to live in the dorm and what kind of student life there was for you hundred and two guinea pigs?

A. Yeah, living in the dorms was probably the biggest part of the reason I was south of 3.0 in the first semester. It was incredibly free and it was just, it was just fun. I mean it's like a permanent sleepover I guess would be the best way to describe it coming from high school and always ending up back at home in high school. And then realizing you're home with all the same yahoos you typically had to leave, took some adjusting.

The student life, UIS housing actually had some great programming already, which we essentially took over as quickly as we could: the Spring Fest and homecoming and a lot of events like that that they had all been doing for years. And that was a good foundation, but then we also started probably twenty clubs in the first four months.

Q. Twenty clubs.

A. Everything from an Ultimate Frisbee club to doubling the people signing up for the college Dems, things like that. trying to kind of create more student life. I think that what housing had done to foster an on-campus community was a great first step. I think that was definitely one of those kind of unanticipated things.

When the faculty were designing the curriculum, I don't know if they thought about some of the student life aspects of things as much. And we definitely made it front and center by creating all these groups weekly, by storming the student government essentially assuming leadership positions just as soon as they were available and everything.

Q. How many of the students would go home on the weekends versus stay in the dorms?

A. Most would stay in the dorms. People who lived in Springfield, the program required, it didn't matter whether you lived a mile away or two hundred miles away, required you to live in the dorms, the housing.

Most of the Springfield students would kind of disappear off the campus; they'd go visit their friends or something. But for those of us who stayed particularly the Chicago, the people from Chicago, some of the folks from the St. Louis area, you know it was probably about twenty percent of the students that would bail out at the weekends and maybe local students would have friends coming in already.

But we made some really great friendships on a lot of Friday and Saturday nights when it was relatively quiet around there. We had forty-eight hours before we had to think about school again or so we thought, and this was actually where we were kind of developing those bonds.

Q. How many had cars?

A. Most had cars; I had a car. Yeah it was still in that sense if there was something that you... if you wanted to do anything in Springfield, you were going to need a car to get there, and so I think the majority of students had cars.

Q. What did you feel the relationship was between UIS students as a cap honors scholar and the other students that were on campus?

A. Stranded initially. The majority of the other campus students were older. We were these eighteen-year-old punk kids and to make matters worse, we were being told we were very special; we were acting like we were very special.

And so initially there was definitely that divide particularly since there was no sophomore class. There wasn't... no kind of buffer transition group for our group of students. And so I think we just kind of kept to our separate quarters for a lot of that first year because we just didn't know what to do with each other.

Q. How many had campus jobs?

A. Quite a few, whether it was the library, departments.

Q. And you worked for housing?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. What did you do in housing?

A. I was office support for the main housing, Homer Butler Commons and so I did everything from help residents get keys if they locked themselves out, database management about where residents were, and maintaining contact... emergency contact information.

Q. How many hours a week did you work?

A. It was about twenty to twenty-five hours a week. I worked the maximum federal work study would let me.

Q. Wow. What about volunteer and making a difference in the world? What did your class do for that?

A. I don't know as much about that as I should. Otherwise, I made a poor volunteer.

Q. Ok. It wasn't a requirement as a freshman?

A. I believe there was some community service requirements. But if there was, I'm sure I just filled the requirement.

Q. Ok. So did how many of your freshman class stick with it for number two, year number two?

A. The majority, we didn't lose too many people between the first and second year. I think we lost more people in the first month than we did between the first and second year.

Q. How many?

A. We went from the original hundred and thirty to a hundred and ten in the first month or so. People decided they didn't like it; they decided they didn't like college in general, that sort of thing.

Q. Right.

A. But we lost more people there than we did between the first and second year. I think we lost maybe a couple of people, but a lot of people were just kind of... particularly that freshman and sophomore that's an unnatural transfer point. And so I think a lot of people were kind of, you know they were wondering how these credits were going to be taken at other schools, and so a few didn't come back for the second year

Q. So what were you involved in starting freshman year or maybe second or third year? What kinds of student activities were you involved in?

A. I was involved in a lot of student government, very slowly got involved in the student government; I was a rep and then the treasurer. Finally as a senior I was involved in a number of activities around campus. I also did a lot with the UIS speech and debate team, the forensics team. Part of the first group of those students where I would do, I did impromptu speaking and elementary debate.

Q. Who was the sponsor for that group?

A. The UIS Forensics team out of the Communication Department led by Sue Webber who was a new faculty member that was essentially brought in to be a coach for the speech and debate team.

Q. And how did you do?

A. I did pretty well. My second year I did prose, which was basically taking a short story and in my case I took a book and doing kind of a dramatic reading in ten minutes. And I qualified for nationals at one of the events that we did for that. I really liked the impromptu speaking where they give you a quote... they give you quote in seven minutes and you have to decide whether to defend the quote or just read from the quote. And within the seven minutes you have to decide that, write and come up with a speech and then deliver that speech. And a good impromptu speech is typically four and a half to five minutes long, so I only had about two minutes to prep.

Q. Had you ever done anything like that before?

A. Not really. I learned a lot about that, a lot about being decisive, about not being afraid to speak in front of people knowing you're going to stumble at some point, knowing sometimes that it was just not going to work. Sometimes the quote was going to be too tricky, but you had to go and do it anyway. I was never that great an impromptu speaker, but I always enjoyed it and learned a lot from it.

Q. Did the program you think decide this would be a student activity and were there other than cap honors scholars in it?

A. There were. I do think it was a program decision. And there were other Capital Scholars in it: Gabby Weigand, Alisa Manzoello, Chris Wyant, Nels Dale, Chris Roberts.

Q. Didn't you win some competitions? I mean the whole team did very well, I thought I had heard.

A. It may have.

Q. Ok. I think it was a point of pride for cap honors scholars at one point that you all did so well as a brand new entity.

A. Yes. Sue Webber was a fantastic coach for that; she had been doing it for a long time. She also taught just some of the general speech classes in the curriculum. I think we might have, I can't recall.

Q. So what did you end up majoring in?

A. I ended up majoring in economics. I was one of two Capital Scholar economics majors and one of four in the entire school at our university.

Q. So after two years of this only cap honors courses, then did you transition to just the regular curriculum?

A. Yes. Capital Scholars was always designed to be kind of the general education piece, and then you were going to transition to the others. The economics program was in the business school so I took a lot of financial accounting, managerial accounting, courses that complimented the economics and then you did a year or more of electives as well, international trade policy theory, business cycles.

Q. How long did you live in the dorms?

A. I lived in the dorms for two years and then in the apartments on campus for another two years.

Q. Did most of your group stay together once they left the dorms?

A. We did. In fact I was thinking about this when I knew I was going to do this. The majority of Capital Scholars stayed in on campus housing even when they didn't have to. Very few folks found apartments off campus after they didn't have to live in the dorms anymore.

Q. What was it like when the next class was coming in? What kind of leadership roles were you all expected to provide?

A. We were I think... well one, we were skeptical that they could live up to our reputation. We were very sure of ourselves. But I think part of it was kind of to let them know it was going to be ok, you know it was the second time they were in the curriculum and I think there were a lot of people who were concerned about getting a worse reaction between the second class and the first class. And I think some of our job to kind of be the patients.

Q. Were they integrated into your wings or were you as second year students into second year housing?

A. They were integrated into our wings, not typically our suites. So there were some freshman suites and sophomore suites, but they were definitely integrated into the wings.

Q. Did you think that was a good thing to do?

A. I do. You know, I didn't give it much thought at the time, but I have a feeling it would have been very odd to have had a freshman wing and a sophomore wing and formalize that division quite a bit more.

Q. Ok. So how did you feel that the new class was? You said you were skeptical they could live up to you. What did they do to prove themselves or not prove themselves?

A. I think they just kind of hung tough. I think we talked among most of the first Capital Scholars, but I don't think the second group didn't live up to it. But I think there were certain people there that really bought into it just as we had really bought into it. I think the biggest difference between that class and our class was our class was a hundred and two students that was in this experiment together and there was a cohesiveness there.

That second year class didn't have that, never had that. They didn't have to have that as much. There was the sophomore class to buffer between sophomore and junior; this was the second run of the program; the university learned a lot in that first year. And that's the one thing I kind of lament for that class is that they didn't have that same cohesiveness that our class did.

Q. How did the campus use your class to market the program?

A. When I was a senior, they asked me to host a type or a blog about my experience as a UIS student. They gave me an additional camera as payment and basically said, post these things, we're going to post them on the website and just talk about your experiences in your class and everything. I really enjoyed that, enjoyed sharing my experiences.

Q. How many people did that?

A. There were I think five or six of us in that initial group across everyone from freshman to seniors. Initially I believe it was all Capital Scholars but now they've diversified it quite a bit. But initially it was very much for the group Capital Scholars and so they targeted that group.

Q. Did you feel that you would like to recruit more people from your high school to come this your program or were you ever asked to talk about it?

A. I wasn't, although it could have been a reflection more of my grade point average. I wasn't asked directly to talk about it as much.

Q. What services did you use on campus as a student? Did you use career services? Did you use... was the TRAC [The Recreation and Athletic Center] center around? How did that all work out?

A. When we got there the athletic center was in the one of the “temporary” buildings. And in fact I sat on the committee that voted to approve in sending the students the request for a fee, I think I was a junior, to reassess everyone’s bill to start gathering money for the TRAC facility.

Q. Was that a very controversial decision?

A. It was a little bit. The administration was very clear in saying listen, in saying two things. one, listen the state capitol investment money is probably not going to come through for this; and number two, we’re not going to be able to strike ground on this until after you all graduate. And you know I was alright with that.

I’d like... they were expanding the sports programs. There was talk of trying to go NCAA; they were NAIA when I was there, and I thought this is a good investment. This will really increase student life when this is all said and done and ready to go. It was also something that was two dollars a semester or something; it was not a large fee and so that was part of the reason as well. I thought well they are not asking for another hundred dollars a semester from students.

Q. So you never got to see, to use the recreational center?

A. No.

Q. Ok, great.

A. But I kicked in some money. Other student services, I used the Applied Study Term Office for my internship my junior year.

Q. Where did you intern your junior year?

A. I interned with the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

Q. And what did you do there?

A. Office support.

Q. Always what you were doing.

A. Always what I was doing, office support. I helped cataloged some things in their office. I was able to help with some events. I was able to help them do some research and everything. That was a good experience in that it taught me what I didn’t want to do.

There was a great... I had a great boss, was a great organization, still some lessons I learned there I take away with me. It was great, it was actually right on the Old State Capitol Plaza, their offices, so when I could get to a window I had a great view. But it was something, it

definitely was something that was kind of a moment for me, all right I know what I don't want to do and that was very helpful.

Q. Did your class do shenanigans or anything that you would like to put on tape that would capture what it is to be an undergraduate as a cap honors scholar?

A. Yeah, I have a feeling anything we did as freshmen or sophomores has been overshadowed by the classes since. One thing I would definitely want to put down on tape, one tip. I remember when we were in the apartments was we found out how you could create stadium seating in the townhouses.

The bookcases that housing had at the time when I was there would lay flat, you could fit the housing issued couch snugly into the bookcase if you laid the bookcase face side down and put the couch on top of it and moved a futon in front of that. And we had stadium seating and so we watched a lot of, 2005 watched "Madness" in stadium seating in our apartment. And that was one of those things that I don't know how exactly we stumbled upon that, but that was a great discovery.

Q. That's great. So as you reflect back... Explain what you had to do your senior year to be a cap honors scholar.

A. For senior year there was a senior, oh I forget.

Q. A capstone?

A. It wasn't quite a capstone, it was senior seminar, a senior Capital Scholar's seminar that was taught by senior Capital Scholar's faculty but also very self directed, talking about leadership and aspects of leadership and what that means. How you find it, real politique, and a lot of things that hadn't been covered so far, styles of leadership, great man's theory, and things like that. And then we all had to do presentations.

A fairly small group of us had elected to do that, I think there was only about fifteen of us that elected to do that. And my final project as a heuristics analysis of the Kennedy/Nixon debates. Of course famously Kennedy won on TV and Nixon on the radio, and so it was an analysis of the heuristics of that visual versus the audio and everything.

Q. So what do you remember about commencement?

A. Not falling down. You know the Prairie Capitol Convention Center is this huge space, seeing everybody and the culmination of all these things and very honestly I spent the entire time I was sitting there waiting to cross the stage hoping, praying I was not going to fall on to the stage, so much so that I forget what it was like to walk across the stage.

Q. Oh, ok.

A. But it was, I remember the expanse of it and the experience of having all the families and everything around you, isolated cheers when a particular, people had large contingents of supporters there.

Q. So when did you start to consider what do I do next?

A. Really towards the beginning of senior year, sizing up what I was going to do. Had an interest in international affairs went very well with economics, my minor was in international studies. And so I started looking into international affairs graduate programs and careers in international affairs and everything.

And I found at George Washington University interdisciplinary graduate program in international affairs. The interdisciplinary part really resonated with me, and so I ended up basically with two plans. One, I was going to apply to George Washington and only George Washington and try to get into their master's program. And if that failed, I was going to try and find a job in Springfield and try again next year. And I eventually got in to GW and the summer after commencement, moved to DC.

Q. When did you find out you had been accepted?

A. I found out a little bit later. I was actually originally waitlisted at GW, and I found I was waitlisted probably in January or February. When you are a graduating senior generally there is that freak-out moment where everything is not going according to plan and you have to try to find a job and I was applying to a bunch of different things. And then mid-March I was pulled off the wait list and quickly organized a group of people to go down to Bootleggers for a drink to celebrate.

Q. That reminds me. What are the famous watering holes for your class?

A. The most famous or infamous is Bootleggers that every Wednesday had fifty cent draft night. They gave you a little eight ounce cup of fifty cents, they said it was Bud Light; I think it was Bud Ice, and that was definitely the preferred watering hole for Wednesdays. Brewhaus downtown as we got a little bit older was kind of the respectable place that we would go, not necessarily because it was fancy at all but because they had a very extensive beer list and they didn't serve it in plastic cups.

Q. Ok. All right, any other places that cap honors scholars liked to hang out for other things? Or what other activities did they like to do?

A. We loved to go to the Chinese Buffet over... what was that?

Q. Wabash?

A. Was it Wabash? Yeah, I think right off Wabash, yeah, over by the Aldi, had my first Indian food at the place that's across the street there from that. That was very definitely a common practice for a late, an early afternoon excursion.

Q. So you came to George Washington and what's the rest of the story so far?

A. Yeah, came to GW, I went to the Elliot School of International Affairs and finished my coursework in 2007 and was working at the university at the time.

Q. Doing what?

A. I was a, I was senior secretary for the Science Department the project management program while I was studying. After I finished my coursework, I tried to look for another job. It was kind of tough going and was asked to be the associate director of MBA admissions, so here I am.

Q. And do you... is this temporary or do you see yourself as an administrator in academia?

A. I prefer this to be temporary. I've been the associate director for over two years now. It's been a great experience, been able to travel all over the world recruiting students. It's been a great experience to be on the other side of that divide after being a very vocal student participant at UIS to be a school administrator here. But I definitely like to get closer to what I've earned degrees in.

Q. Ok. As you reflect on your pathway so far, what has your degree from UIS done for you personally and then what you see it professionally directing you to?

A. I think I absolutely value the education. I think the economics that I was exposed to, the professors that I had in economics and I really liked, I got to know them pretty well. I think my general education curriculum in the Capital Scholars experience not having standard classes was probably the biggest benefit forcing yourself to move beyond the simple instruction questions was incredibly important for me.

I had always been the kind of relatively good student with relatively little effort. And I think Capital Scholars program and the university as a whole complicated that formula for me. I think it set me up to come to GW; I think I had opportunities for leadership at UIS I would not have had anywhere else. Certainly not at UIUC and that kind of experience makes a difference.

Q. Do you feel that you were as well prepared as your ivy league classmates coming into your master's program?

A. I really did. I think what struck me was not the education; I felt that I was intellectually as prepared if not often times more prepared than everyone else in the classroom. I was a young guy in the program, the people had had a lot of really practical real world experience. That was intimidating.

But when it came to the theories and the discussions of the concepts, people who had gone to massive public schools well world-renowned public schools, people that had gone to ivy league schools, eastern liberal arts colleges, which have a very stellar reputation, I felt like I was just as prepared as they were.

Q. That was great. Also would you tell me a couple of the most influential professors? You've mentioned Karen Moranski, but that as you look back on it in your major or anywhere else that you feel has affected your life?

A. Karen Moranski's definitely the most influential. I can't say enough good things about her. Adil Mouhammed was an economics professor and he was just a, he was an interesting guy in a number of different ways, incredibly dynamic instructor. We had a three and a half hour class on business cycles and if you don't have a dynamic professor, you're in trouble.

He was a dynamic speaker; he explained things really well. He'd keep it tangible for us. I took an input/output methods class with him, which is a subject no one wants to take. He made it interesting and I enjoyed it.

Steve Schwark was a good professor as well as an international studies professor that I had and he was just an incredibly warm person. And him and Hugh... there was a professor, first name is Hugh, African American gentleman.

He taught about ethnic identity conflict, which when I first heard about it, I think I was a junior or something it was this incredibly alien concept. But with that professor and Steve Schwark, they were definitely the ones that really got me interested in international affairs and what that could mean and how it ties into economics and how it ties me into the rest of the world.

Q. What about friendships that you feel will last the rest of your life at this point?

A. I was really lucky; I have a very big group of Capital Scholar friends. I live with three former capital, former I guess Capital Scholars now. Carly Hawkins and Alisa Manzoello were in that first year class with me. Kyle Simpson followed on a few years later.

Jason Stuebe and I are still really good friends; he was a suitemate, he was a roommate, he was a coconspirator on a number of things. Carrie Bauer and Gabby Weigand we talk constantly, literally constantly, usually over email, but we all share and connect from that common history.

Q. That's great. Anything else that I haven't asked you that you think would be important for generations to come to know about your pioneer experience?

A. It was a pioneering experience. I'm thankful every day that I got to be part of something that unique. I'll start off by saying, "I didn't want to go. I didn't want to go." I'm really glad that I went. I'm really glad of who I became, the opportunities that I had because I think there's

a lot of people who won't have anything that comes close to that. And for that I am definitely thankful.

Q. Thank you.

58 minutes 2 seconds

End of Interview