

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the Cuse Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Leondra Tyler:

I'm taking advantage of all of what the Syracuse University has to offer, that I am making a mark on this campus. I'm making it a better campus for the next round of students that are coming in and that I'm an example for future students to also take similar choices and make similar impact in different ways.

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to get the new name for the GED. So essentially I got my GED at Boces in Liverpool. And while I was there about to take my test, one of the instructors told me about the HEOP program and where I would be able to attend Syracuse University even though I hadn't graduated from high school. So I just opened up the possibility for me to attend university and now here.

John Boccacino:

Do you mind sharing a little bit about what happened with your decision to drop out of high school and then what led you to go back and say, I really feel it's the right time to fulfill those academic dreams?

Leondra Tyler:

So growing up I was in a predominantly white school and I dealt with bullying, but also a lot of racism and really impacted my mental health. So I decided to drop out of high school because it was just too much for me. And I think I was around 20 or 21 where I'm like, I need a job and you need a GED to get some sort of at least clerical job. At the time, I was working at Driver's Village. My friend got me that job, thank goodness. And I decided to attend classes at Boces. And I didn't even think of at that time about SU, about possibly going to college. I was like, I need to be able to feed myself. I need to be able to have some sort of job. And it was a time where I was really struggling. And then when the instructor told me about Syracuse University, it just opened my mind to all the possibilities of who I can be and what I can become. And I'm really glad that they told me about the HEOP program because otherwise I would not be the person that I am right now without that.

John Boccacino:

How exactly did HEOP and the College of Professional Studies help you in making that transition?

Leondra Tyler:

Oh, oh my gosh. I feel very grateful for having my experience in college as a part-time student one, but also as an HEOP student because it seems more of like a one-on-one advising experience. My advisor, Marsha Senior is amazing. I feel very comfortable coming to her with any issues or questions that I have. So that definitely made me feel a lot comfortable. And I wasn't just close with my advisor, but everyone in the office. It was a great relief that I did not have to pay for my education because I didn't have the money for it. So going into the HEOP program knowing that I won't have to worry about a lot of loans or any financial issues and all I have to do is just focus on myself and school was just a huge relief. And then from there, we started off with summer remedial courses, which was great because when I started off at Syracuse it had been about eight years since I've been in a classroom setting and it's a huge shift from high school into college. So the remedial math courses and writing courses were a great introductory start to get me used to attending college.

John Boccacino:

What are some other challenges that face our nontraditional students on the path to a college degree?

Leondra Tyler:

A lot of nontraditional students are typically adults. So they have kids, they could have health issues. We're also typically commuter students, so that's the aspect of transporting to campus as well. I'm lucky where I live downtown, so I'm still near campus, but transportation's often a big barrier for nontraditional students as well. And then honestly just fitting in socially on campus. Especially in my first two years here, I felt a little disconnect for me in campus, even though I'm taking the classes and I know in the end I'll obtain the same degree. Just knowing that one, I'm older and that I took a different path just made me feel different on campus. And I didn't really have a community because I didn't make the effort to find



communities have instilled this foundation of just knowing that I belong here, that I'm going to do amazing things and it's just nice.

John Boccacino:

So connect the dots for us a little bit with your academic pursuits. Again, we mentioned getting neuroscience and psychology as your degrees. What was the thought process where did your passion for these fields come from?

Leondra Tyler:

Dealing with my own mental health issues and depression from the bullying in school, I developed a passion for psychology. So then I decided to attend Syracuse University majoring in psychology. And then the way that the LEOP program works is that for part-time, at least you have to start off with an associate in liberal arts. So through my liberal arts requirements I took introductory biology 121 and 122. And my instructor had mentioned how great I was doing in class. I was getting an A. She's like, "What's your major?" And I'm like, "I'm psychology." And she told me like, "Oh, you should look into neuroscience. You do amazing in biology, and you can pair that with an integrated learning major!" So I took an introductory to neuroscience with Dr. Robin Jones, and I fell in love with it. She's like, "You're doing neuroscience very easy and very exciting for me. I absolutely love her as a teaching instructor. And then I decided to take introductory to cognitive neuroscience also with Dr. Jones. And then after that I was like, yeah, I'm declaring neuroscience.

John Boccacino:

Did you have to go through any soul-searching to overcome ... I don't know, having to deal with the fact that it's okay to work on yourself, it's okay to admit that there might be a problem with your mental health?

Leondra Tyler:

Yeah. That's definitely something that we're still working on in the black community. There's a stigmatization around mental health. And I feel like it got a lot better for me in my adulthood because I was able to make my own choices when it came to healthcare. And I was very proactive about prioritizing myself, seeing a therapist. Which I believe everyone should have a therapist rather than you feel like you have issues or not. It's always great to have a third party unbiased opinion with anything that you have. And it's been very transformative for me to put myself first.

John Boccacino:

What else would you say to students who might be dealing with the same mental health issues you were encountering?

Leondra Tyler:

So for me, I've always sought academic validation. So I tend to do more than I can handle. So the thing that's been a big issue lately has been burnout for a lot of people. My advice would be it's okay to say no to things. You may want to take every opportunity that comes your way, which is great that you're getting those opportunities, but you also got to think of, I constantly doing everything, how is this going to affect you later on in life? So I would recommend that you take time for yourself. It's really hard, especially in college. But just taking time for yourself. I personally have a self-care day once a week where I literally just don't do anything. I don't do any work, I don't do any assignments, and that has been great for me. There's a lot of resources on campus in Barnes like the MindSpa room. Even if you take 30 minutes just



What are you planning on doing with your degree to utilize it once you graduate to make a difference in your community?

Leondra Tyler:

I want to take a gap year. So this fall I'm going to ~~start~~ applying to PhD programs. I want to be a doctor. And I'm looking at social psychology, but also neuroscience programs. I'm looking to just being able to continue conducting research. My main interest is conducting social psychology research, but I really want to implement neuroimaging into my research. I'm really interested in biases. In general I've always just been interested in social behavior and why people do the ~~things~~ things they do. I've been interested in public policy since my work in the food pantry. So one of my top programs is at Georgetown and they have a PhD program in social psychology where you can also get a ~~master's~~ master's in public policy, which I'm hoping will be allow me to be able to conduct research throughout my PhD. But then ~~also~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~career~~ ~~field~~, being able to help facilitate policies within the health sphere of mental health to help people.

John Boccacino:

Is there what you would call a dream job for you in ~~the~~ world of social psychology and biases and the way we interpret and conduct ourselves/ what would you say is a dream occupation in the ~~field~~ field?

Leondra Tyler:

I would love to work for the NIH or some government health department being able to ~~diffuse~~ diffuse laws and ethics around psychology and also neuroscience, because neuroscience is a very emerging field.

John Boccacino:

You were selected as the inaugural outstanding future alum during the recent Syracuse University alumni award celebrations. What a cool honor that was. What did it mean to you to be selected and to get to receive that designation?

Leondra Tyler:

It meant a lot. It ~~was~~ ~~so~~ ~~great~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~able~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~awards~~ ~~ceremony~~ ~~and~~ ~~see~~ ~~just~~ ~~everyone~~ ~~gather~~ ~~to~~ ~~celebrate~~ ~~orange~~ ~~excellence~~. And ~~really~~ ~~special~~ ~~to~~ ~~me~~ ~~to~~ ~~know~~ ~~that~~ ~~I'm~~ ~~the~~ ~~university's~~ ~~ideal~~ ~~students~~, that I'm taking advantage of all of what the Syracuse University has to offer, that I am making a mark on this campus. I'm making it a better campus for the next round of students that are coming in and that I'm an example for future students to also take similar choices and make similar impact in different ways.

John Boccacino:

What is it going to be like and what ~~is~~ ~~going~~ ~~to~~ ~~mean~~ ~~for~~ ~~you~~ ~~when~~ ~~you~~ ~~officially~~ ~~get~~ ~~to~~ ~~go~~ ~~across~~, hear your name called, and to be a member of the class of 2024?

Leondra Tyler:

I'm going to cry. It's ~~been~~ ~~such~~ ~~a~~ ~~long~~ ~~and~~ ~~rewarding~~ ~~journey~~. And as me being part-time, it's taken me six years to get here, but it's been such an amazing journey and it's very saddening to ~~make~~ ~~it~~ ~~its~~ ~~over~~. But I know that Syracuse ~~will~~ ~~always~~ ~~be~~ ~~my~~ ~~home~~. I'm from the area. I know that there will always be people on campus that will love me from afar no matter where I go. And no matter where I go, I know I can always come back to campus. So even though my time here is almost done, it's really never over.

John Boccacino:

Leondra, it has really been a pleasure getting to meet you here on the podcast and tell your story. Best of luck and just relish every moment of commencement weekend. You've earned this.

Leondra Tyler:

Thank you so much John.

Omnia Shedid:

Being at the College of Law has taught me how to lead with understanding. There's leadership with example, and then there's leadership with understanding. And I think with understanding it is such a beautiful way to tie up my entire experience because my law classes have taught me how to understand not just the law, but other people's perspective on the law. How law is written. It's important to understand where people are coming from and what they need because that's your way to respond to that. And I think that is a strategy and a lesson that I definitely learned at the College of Law because you can't

Omnia Shedid:

My mother is a phenomenal woman, and I think her work inspired me because she just took every challenge that came her way with grace. It's not easy to, again, learn a different language, raise three kids, and with just very minimal support. And I grew up in Baltimore and the Egyptian community there, there's the community there, but it's not as big as other places in the country so it just felt very isolating at times. And my mother tried her best to ... I saw her work really long hours to raise us. There were days when she had to go complete certain paperwork at the social services office or try to get us the help and the resources we need again without really understanding how the American systems show any systems in the country work. But she also taught us that in any time of need, and when you get that time of need, you experience it, you feel everything that you need to feel in those times, but when you get through them, you have to, one, be grateful and thankful that you got through them, but also help people who are in the same position. And I think that instilled in me a lot of the feelings that I have for ensuring that other people feel supported with whatever hardship or adversity they may be feeling.

John Boccacino:

Coming to Syracuse to earn these dual degrees in both public administration and law. What exactly was it about our academic offerings that really resonated with you when it came to choosing your career path of coming to Syracuse?

Omnia Shedid:

Syracuse is one of the most incredible places I've ever been. Both the city ... It's such a beautiful community and university has a beautiful community. But I knew what it was at the forefront of a lot of academic areas, and particularly the College of Law has very strong research, but also incredible



among the people that help members of Congress or just are leaders. Ensure that they are creating laws and policies that are reflective of the people that they govern, that are responsive to people. And I want to ensure that people of all backgrounds of all means have the resources that they need to succeed and are aware to be able to advocate for themselves to get those resources. So it's

When people ask me what form of advice would you give people, one of the main things I tell them is make a plan and keep that plan flexible. So when I got to my second summer internship, first of all, I didn't even want to end up at my second summer internship because I didn't want to be at my first summer internship. Not because I didn't think that the job was incredible, at least. Both of them were incredible opportunities. But I think I was so scared to get out of my comfort zone because both jobs were in

Hard work matters. And sometimes you're not going to get the grades that you want. After the first semester of law school, I didn't do nearly as well as I would've hoped. But again, I knew that my hard work could get me to where I would've liked to be. And I had to make my plan flexible to the work that I was going to put in. And within that hard work, I think that just as much as your hard work is your currency, the way that you treat people is your currency. The way that you make people come together. The way that you understand people. The way that you mediate between people. And when I think about something that Syracuse College of Law has given me, I really think about the opportunities that I've had to mediate between my fellow students and I think it's something that's going to serve me really well in my career. But more than that, I'm just lucky to have been able to ... Even if it's just one student, to bring people together during tough times. I think that's important.

So I want people to know that times will get challenging, especially for students. Times will get challenging. Classes will get incredibly hard. There will be internships. While the internships that say, no, you can't. We regret to inform you that you didn't get this internship. We regret to inform you that you didn't get this job opportunity. But if I had gotten discouraged after every single no that I've heard, I wouldn't be with you today. I wouldn't have gotten my dream job. Every, no, I think should turn into a way that you work 10 times harder because when one door closes, I swear to you, so many other doors will open for you and you just have to keep turning the knob.

John Boccacino:

To have Syracuse University on your degree, being an alumna of both the College of Law and the Maxwell School with your dual degrees here, how special is that going to be to know that once you cross the stage, you get that diploma? You are officially one of more than 250,000 living alumni in the orange Network?

Omnia Shedid:

Syracuse has allowed me to really not only know more about myself, but myself as the attorney that I hope to be. It has forced me to understand for myself and to encourage others that there's so much going on in the world right now, too much for us to be ignorant. And it has challenged me academically, personally. And to be a part of that, to be able to say that this is what Syracuse University taught me, and to be a part of their alumni, to be a part of their network is something so special. And I never thought that I would reach it. And to have ended up here is such a dream come true. And it's so crazy. It's weird. You come into contact with things that I think are inherently meaningful to you very early on before you even reach that stage. And I think I'd always had such a soft spot for Syracuse University because of its academic reputation, because of its athletic reputation, because of just the amount of people that get to have the privilege of saying I'm part of the orange community, and I cannot believe that I've become now a part of that community and could say to other people that you can also be a part of that community. So I'm so excited. I feel very privileged, very honored, and I know that it will help me others.

John Boccacino:

Well, we know you're going to make us all proud to watch you really blaze a path and blaze a trail. As again, an attorney and someone who is combining her passion and love for law with making a difference for those who are less fortunate in our societies. It has been a real thrill to have Omnia Shedid here on the podcast. Best of luck with your legal career, and thank you for making the time today.

Omnia Shedid:

Thank you so much, John. I really appreciate it.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of ~~the~~ House Conversations podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for ~~the~~ House Conversations Podcast.