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Episode 27: Amy Crawford Weschler

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Transcript

Christina Torres

Hi everyone, and welcome to Futures in Languages, a podcast showcasing stories from UCF's Modern Languages and Literatures Department alumni. I'm your host, Christina Torres. Today we'll be talking with Amy Crawford Weschler, who graduated with a BA in English Literature and Political Science with International Relations concentration. She has her minor in Spanish and also completed the undergrad TEFL certification as part of her undergraduate work here at UCF. She graduated in spring of 2015. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Thank you so much for having me.

Christina Torres

I'm excited to hear all kinds of stories, including your Fulbright ETA-ship that you did in Spain and your current job with Delta Airlines. That all sounds very exciting, but how about we start off with a general question? Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and where you're from.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I consider myself an Orlando native. I have lived there since I was young, about six years old and grew up in the Oviedo area, went to UCF, of course. Proud Knight. After completing UCF, as you mentioned, I studied English, focus in literature, international relations, poli sci. I did my minor in Spanish and TEFL certification. While I was studying as a student I completed an internship for the US Embassy in Lima, Peru for a semester and I taught in Spain for a semester through a program through the College of Education, which focused on providing increased resources to underserved schools and rural Castellón. So I was in a little village called Berlanga de Duero in Spain for a semester, and after I graduated, I moved abroad to Madrid and completed my Fulbright English teaching assistantship there. I worked on a bilingual global classrooms program, which is a program through an UN initiative. Wonderful experience, would love to chat more about that. And then I returned home. I ended up getting my MBA at Rollins College with a focus in international business. After that, I moved to Atlanta. I'm working for Delta Airlines doing global threat analysis.

Christina Torres

That's it. Seems like you've been real busy since graduation back in 2015, and there's a lot that I want to unpack there. Can we start? With your experiences with that internship through the Education Department at UCF.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So through that I was placed with a host family and the village, the pueblo where I was living, and they have become dear friends of mine. In fact, I just went on a work trip to Madrid a few weeks ago with my current position at Delta, and while I was there, I was able to reconnect with them. And we were discussing that it's really hard to believe, but it's almost been 10 years since I lived with them. But they have just become wonderful friends of my family and our family friends as well. So

it was really neat to through that connection to just really merge our communities and keep in touch. But through that program I taught at a small school of about 100 students ranging from about three years old to 8th grade, so it was a [Spanish word], so it was like a a school that pulled from surrounding rural communities and most of the time I was teaching about school. About once a week, I would go to another school, which I was in an even smaller village on the outskirts of town, which had about 12 students total, ranging from about 5 to 11 years old.

Christina Torres

Gosh, that sounds like such an important and foundational opportunity to have, especially really because it was during your undergrad, right that you did your first internship over in Spain. Is that correct? Hearing that right? So do you have a favorite story?

Amy Crawford Weschler

It was, yeah, it was.

Christina Torres

I mean, it's hard to pick, I'm sure, but. Do you have a favorite story of maybe like something that you remember really fondly, or that was something you'd like to share with our listeners from your time in that internship.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Well, one thing that really stuck out too me, was just really understanding the difference of studying a language versus being immersed in it and. So I went over there with my A's on my report cards from my Spanish classes and was so overwhelmed. By being immersed in. It thought, Oh my gosh, I thought I knew Spanish and now I realize I don't know anything and. Just the difference. And yet there's just so much perseverance and studying and pushing on. I was really in this small community where it couldn't have been, itt could have been better conditions for my learning for my learning language and becoming more comfortable with it because it was everywhere. And honestly, it was physically exhausting. Toward the end of my evenings. I remember would have headaches just from being around the language all day long and yet, just clear as day, just one day I woke up and it felt like someone had just turned on a light switch and all of a sudden,, I could understand everything everyone was saying. And so in that sense, you know, it's a progression and yet sometimes it's so much work to get to the point where all of a sudden then, it's that light switch moment? So it's all the work leading up to that and then after that? You just reached that breakthrough point. And I remember when I finally got to that breakthrough point and how relieved I was, and how rewarding that was too.

Christina Torres

Yeah, what you're referencing is something that I've read called restructuring, which is this moment after a lot of work, was like somehow, like you said, like the the pieces fall like a Tetris puzzle and all of a sudden boom, you know, here we are. But I can empathize with this idea of suddenly being immersed in the language and being away from home. And being away from, you know, America. Was this your first time abroad for a stretch of time.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Uh, it wasn't. I had. I had traveled fairly extensively before. It was certainly the longest time.

Christina Torres

OK. And there's certainly a difference between traveling and like living in a place. Yeah, for sure. But I appreciate your comment about, you know, really the brain exercise that you're doing. Again, like some studies have shown that again, like the exercise that the brain receives from multiple languages is actually great for like delaying the onset of Alzheimer's symptoms. So like, good on everyone, you know, learning additional languages. And yeah, like so when you're teaching these students, what is something that you remember the most from your classroom communities over in Spain?

Amy Crawford Weschler

I remember just being so impressed with my students. There's so much value in bilingual education programs and I love that I got to see that playing out and how it benefited my students, but also just seeing the importance that their schools and their communities placed on it. They're just so that my students are so intelligent and and, we were talking about various subjects in English. English, which is not their full first language, so they're learning science in English. They're talking about IMF loans in our model UN debating and they're doing that in English. So it's so humbling, but also so inspiring to see these students applying themselves. I think something that was also really fun to see is how well the younger students picked up on accents and fluency, and just you know, that's something we study, and I studied in my classes at UCF, but then seeing that come to fruition in the life of these little kids is really, really something. That was fun to watch, fun to watch them grow.

Christina Torres

You've touched on two things that I mentioned with my students and my teacher training classes and my applied linguistics classes, since I tell them number one was that we are learning from our student communities, and that's something that we always want to keep in in mind as we work with our students, there's so much for us to learn. And the second thing I wanted to share was that this academic information that we learn in our classes does have a real world application. I like to share with everyone, I hope that by the time you finish a class, you can walk around in the world and actually see these concepts in action. Because they're not just meant for textbooks, especially when it comes to language learning. It's not just for textbooks.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, absolutely.

Christina Torres

Well, thank you for sharing that. I knew that you were touching on your Fulbright ETA-ship in Spain. Could you maybe share maybe some similarities or differences from your first internship to your ETA position in Spain?

Amy Crawford Weschler

Sure. Yeah, absolutely. So the first internship was a great experience with supporting classrooms and learning more about Spain's education system, particularly seeing the challenges they faced being in rural community perhaps the less resources than if they were in more urban areas. Some of the other

realities facing some of the pueblos, some of the concerns about depopulation and things of that nature. So that's really eye opening. My second time back to Spain was such a valuable opportunity to see a very different world being in Madrid, such a vibrant, fast-paced city. I was also working in a high school and taught basically the equivalent of 10th grade, primarily. I taught across all of the different classes within my school, but was focused in on three primary classes that were {Spanish}. So, so essentially 10th grade students and with this bilingual program, they were all completing what was called the global classrooms program. And so this is based on an initiative sponsored by the UN Foundation, and it's focused on the sustainable development goals and promoting the UN Sustainable development goals. Teaching students about that and then also debating topics around those goals in a model UN type format and then through that curriculum development all year we're prepping the students towards at model UN competitions and so at the end of the school year, all of the secondary education schools who have been completing this global classrooms program. They all came together in Madrid and we had a model UN forum, and then ten students were selected from their performance in those debates to go on and form Spain's national team. Which then went to the UN in New York, and went to the Model UN Convention. That was really interesting, fun program. The students really seemed to enjoy it. I learned a lot through the curriculum and through them really had a great opportunity to build our classroom curriculum. It was very much, my classroom was my own in terms of we had the the other Fulbrighter, we were all part of the community where we were sharing teacher resources, sharing lesson planning ideas, we had a lot of leeway in terms of being able to adapt the curriculum to our students and to our focus areas, and so that was really valuable experience as well and getting to combine some of my TEFL training, exercising some of the language skills, but really just a wonderful, wonderful time there.

Christina Torres

That sounds really great. Like an opportunity to combine, like you said, not just your TEFL, but I would imagine also your political science understanding on international relations for those of us who are listening and are maybe less familiar.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, absolutely.

Christina Torres

Could you maybe share some examples of the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

Amy Crawford Weschler

So these are the goals that the UN has developed as key initiatives tackling global problems that they really want to work towards resolving. And so, the idea is resolving issues such as access to pure water, access to food, how do we handle, you know, one of the the key topics, key debate topics that my students were given in our preparation for the debate was dealing with IMF loans and loan forgiveness in developing countries, how that impacts developing countries. So really tackling these critical global problems, so really interesting to hear. I pulled them up my cheat sheet here. So there are 17 goals, I'll just read off the the top 5 just to give everyone a a better understanding. So the first one is no poverty, the second one is zero hunger, third is good health and well-being, the fourth is all the education, and

then the fifth is gender equality. So as you imagine there's a really high arching goals, but then you can start peeling back the layers to each of those really, delving into the issues driving a lot of those issues.

Christina Torres

Again, that sounds like such an important experience that you had, and then you came back to the US and I understand that you are now working for Delta Airlines. Could you share a little bit about your job with our listeners?

Amy Crawford Weschler

Sure, sure. So every day looks different would say in my job, but that's one of the things I really like about it. I am definitely combining a lot of what I've studied. Particularly the international relations and laws at UCF. I also focused in on terrorism studies courses there, so really leveraging a lot of my research, prior research in that area. My team and I, we look at global issues that are facing our operations. So one of the key things that I do is look at analyzing the worldwide threat environment, whether it's terrorism, unrest, government instability, crime, contraband, smuggling, fraud, things of those nature, and looking at how those threats are impacting our operations, how they may be threatening our interest, personnel, how we can design mitigation strategies that are Intel based to really drive down risk enterprise wide and protect people. Yeah, so it's a lot of, it's a lot of gathering information, synthesizing information, assessing it, and then developing strategies based around that.

Christina Torres

That sounds really important and honestly, as someone who also flies like as a, you know customer, it's comforting to know that folks are making these assessments and making these synthesis and thinking about these things too as part of their airline. I would imagine that this is a really intricate thing to work on. Would you say that's right.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, it's really dynamic. The pace of geopolitical developments is constant, so dynamic. So the threats that we're looking at, the regions that areas we're looking at change so much day-to-day, but it also provides great opportunity for constant learning. So that's one of the things I really love about it is it's a constant opportunity to learn about a new place in the world, or a new topic, and a new geopolitical issue. And so that's something that I find really rewarding.

Christina Torres

That does sound like a really cool perk of your job, and while we're on the subject of your job, I know that you studied Spanish and you lived in Spain. How might your Spanish skills apply in your current position now?

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah, they definitely apply. I use my Spanish a lot when I am looking at local media reports or news sources, at contacts and local markets where I'm utilizing language skills there to try to get a better understanding of what's going on in in certain areas, whether it's Latin America, it's Spain, Mexico. We have a pretty big footprint with those areas and so the language skills continued to come in hand and I enjoy opportunities to continue practicing my Spanish.

Christina Torres

That's great for our listeners to hear. You heard it from Amy, everyone who's listening, language learning continues to be valuable in jobs that aren't necessarily teaching here. So thank you. And do you have any favorite stories from your time in the Modern Languages Department? I know that you minored in Spanish. You did all kinds of cool things while you were at UCF. But is there something from the class or department that like sticks out to you?

Amy Crawford Weschler

I have a lot of positive memories of my classes. I love Spanish literature courses and reading. Just a lot of a lot of the literature that I read, a lot of the history. I think those are so valuable because you're getting to put, it allowed me the opportunity not only to practice the language, but then so practice the language while deepening my understanding of the cultural context. And so that's something that is so valuable and really stuck with me. In particular, some of my class lectures on Don Quixote were a favorite for me, I also on a fun funny note, I recall one of my class projects was to make a video in Spanish and it could be about anything. Our class was fairly goofy. It was with Professor Korosy, and we were a class of I think of, I think we were about 6 students, it was an honors course and we, yeah, we made it an absurd comedic video in Spanish. And I would be very embarrassed to rewatch to this day. But the idea really stuck with me because it was really fun group project and so I actually used that exact same idea in my classroom in Madrid when I was teaching my Fulbright students, one of the end, this end of semester projects that I gave them all was I assigned them all groups and they had to make short little movie in English and could be about anything that they wanted to be about. And I got some really absurd plots and hilarious results. And then we all watched them together as like a movie day. And the kids loved it. So that was something that I directly took from time in the modern languages classes at UCF.

Christina Torres

That's so cool. I love the opportunity to have just like creative outlets and to include humor in class. I think, like, especially from my experience as being a student until what I jokingly referred to as 23rd grade, it's always great to have humor inserted. It helps you to remember what it is that you're learning, but I'm sure that my colleague Ali Korosy appreciates this nod to her class in our podcast recording, how cool that you're able to apply that. I know that I do that too sometimes and like this is a great idea that we trusted out of my classrooms too. And if they work well, we can all share in bar. So taking it to the language studying, what classes, what levels did you take with modern languages in Spanish?

Amy Crawford Weschler

I think I started at intermediate.

Christina Torres

OK.

Amy Crawford Weschler

I came in having studied it in high school, and then I worked my way up through the program through the minor program from there.

Christina Torres

OK. Well, that's awesome that you were able to take those skills you learned in high school and transfer them into the program and then continue to run with that afterwards. What advice would you offer someone who's interested in studying Spanish, or really any other language?

Amy Crawford Weschler

My advice would just be to one, to do it, and two, to stay disciplined. I frequently think of language learning as akin to exercise, and it's just that daily constant. And so I'm not going to go run a marathon tomorrow, but I do try to do 10, 20 minutes of exercise, and language the same way. I'm not going to write a beautifully eloquent paper in Spanish if I'm being honest, but I can practice it, hear a podcast there, reading a book there, read a news article here, and just little things like that. Investing in your ongoing development of the language, and those things might not feel like they're making significant headway in the moment, but over time they really do and that's something that I've learned.

Christina Torres

I hear you're saying taking it one step at a time. Yeah, great. Well, thank you so much for. Yeah, and keep up with it. Thank you so much for sharing that with our listeners. Amy, is there any final thought that you'd like to include here for our listeners before we sign off from today.

Amy Crawford Weschler

I think the final thought and maybe this is a summary of some of what I've shared with my experience too, is just one, to keep with it and to persevere, to be diligent with that. You talked about hitting that breakthrough moment. So just to continue, to continue on the path forward with your language journey wherever that may be, and show yourself grace in the process by just keeping with it, because learning languages opens up so much opportunity for connecting with other cultures, connecting with other people you may never have had the other opportunity to meet or connect with otherwise. And opportunities to humble ourselves. Which is, which is a great thing as well. It's just it's a, it's a good challenge and and I think it puts me in a good frame of mind for both being humble but also persevering and hard work as well.

Christina Torres

Thank you, Amy, for your time. We're so glad that you could join us today.

Amy Crawford Weschler

Yeah. Thank you.

Christina Torres

Thank you for listening to this episode of Futures in Languages. I'd like to give a shout out to Da Video Guy for our intro and outro music downloaded from freesound.org. I'm Christina Torres, and our featured guest today was Amy Crawford Weschler. To the next time, to hear more alumni stories from modern languages. For more information about Spanish and other language programs in the Modern Languages department, please visit our website at cah.ucf.edu/languages.