

Courtney Trang Interview

Tue, Jan 09, 2024 32:26

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

alum, alumni, criminal justice

SPEAKERS

Interviewee: Courtney Trang

Interviewer: Elizabeth Epps,

Elizabeth Epps

This is Elizabeth Epps. It's January 9, 2024, is the year. And it's 9:30am. I'm with Miss Courtney Trang via the online zoom platform. And we're going to begin our oral history interview for the University of Baltimore stories with the 100th Anniversary Oral History Project. The purpose of this project is to celebrate the university's Centennial by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore over the years. We will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and making these recordings available online. Hi, Courtney, how are you?

Courtney Trang

I'm good, how are you?

Elizabeth Epps

I am doing well. We are going to jump into our discussion today. And I'd like to begin first talking about your early life prior to coming to the University of Baltimore, and then we'll circle through some steps that get us back to that. Is that alright with you? Sounds good. Okay, fantastic. And thank you so much for joining us. When and where were you born? And when? And where did you grow up?

Courtney Trang

I'm born and raised in Southwest Baltimore. I was born there. I've lived there my entire life. I actually moved away for a short period of time and came back with my husband in 2019. So, I've been in Baltimore my entire life.

Elizabeth Epps

And where did you go to school?

Courtney Trang

I went to Digital Harbor High School. I was the second graduating class from the school. When I started, they were actually still in the process of phasing out Southern High School.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay, fantastic. That gives our listeners a point of reference. What do you know about your family's ancestry? And how did they come to Baltimore? What was life like for you in Baltimore growing up.

Courtney Trang

So, my family's actually my mom's family came from Germany in 1957. I actually was. I've done the genealogy stuff. And I've found their Ellis Island record from when they actually came into the country. But my great grandmother, my grandfather, and my great aunt, on my mom's side came to Baltimore, in 1957. My mom's family. Actually, they go back a little bit further, but they're one of the founding families in Ellicott City.

So, I'm not sure how far back exactly they go. But they've kind of come from all over the place. But as far as like my life here, my mom was a teen mom, she was 17 when she had me. And we I mean, we kind of had like a, I wouldn't say we were poor growing up, I had everything I needed. And I had everything that I wanted. So, I can't say that, like we were poor. But you know, my mom was a waitress, my dad was a warehouse worker. So, we didn't have like, excessively amazing things. But so, we're doing, you know, I'm a first gen [generation] college student. They weren't educated. So yeah.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay, our zoom platform froze for just a little bit. So, I'm going to zip back to your response to that question, just because when they review the material, they will eat out the portion that that didn't quite make it through. As far as what I heard was the story about the journey from Ellicott City, and you being content, being everything that you need it, but not having access, and so on. So, if you want to pick up from there, that would be great.

Courtney Trang

Yeah, I was just saying, you know, like, my mom was a teen mom. And I'm a first gen [generation] college student, my family were more like blue collar workers, you know, a kind of, I think that my grandfather worked in a steel was a steel worker. So, you know, as far as that goes, I'm doing a lot better than my grandparents were.

Elizabeth Epps

And that's generally what those that have come before us with, like the hopes and dreams that parents and grandparents have for their children is that they move the needle a little further down the road. Exactly, and can continue to have a stake in something that they've invested in themselves previously. So, for you to have been here as a Baltimorean.

Left and return is probably something that many would be smiling about. Were they to where they to come back and greet the president, Miss Courtney Trang, they say, high five and job well done. Um, how did you make the journey from high school to the University of Baltimore? Was it a natural step? Did it take some soul searching to figure out what you wanted to do? And where did you want to invest in making that journey? Did someone perhaps mentor you into the decision? How did that happen?

Courtney Trang

So, I actually, um, I had, they had college recruiters at my high school. And I was waffling back and forth. I was really interested in Towson for a little while, because I was kind of like, oh, you know, I could do excuse me, criminal justice, or creative writing. And then somebody from the University of Baltimore had come and they were talking about oh, you know, we are admitting freshmen for the first time and 30, or I think it was 30 years at that point.

They're like, you know, this is our first freshman class, it'll be free tuition for the first year. And then they started talking about a lot of the programs that they had, and criminal justice sounded really appealing. So, it was kind of a no brainer, I applied to both schools, I got into both schools, but UBs' [University of Baltimore] or UBalt [University of Baltimore] program was more appealing, because they had professors who were actually in the field, they had actual, like, real world experience going on with your degree. So, it was just a natural step to come straight up.

Elizabeth Epps

the expertise. So, the institution attracted you, as well as the studies. You know, we all know that making a step, one single step towards the completion of your degree is the most important than that, you put your foot down, and then you follow with the next. So, you got your undergraduate from the University of Baltimore, and criminal justice, and then you decided to join UB [University of Baltimore] and then continue with a second degree.

Tell us about what brought you to the University of Baltimore as an employee, what your educational journey was, like, as an undergrad, and then we'll revisit what it meant to you to then move on to that attainment of that second degree, and what that means to you.

Courtney Trang

So, I actually, while I was doing my undergrad, I was a student employee as well, I worked in at the time, it was the Center for Student Involvement today, it's the Center for Engagement or student engagement and inclusion. Um, but I worked there as a student assistant, I was in charge of student organizations, then as you know, I kind of was like, oh, you know, I'm going to continue on, I'll finish. I kind of was like, applying to places, but no real bites.

And I was like, well, I'll just finish my education now. I might as well do it all and be done. And I became a grad assistant in CSI [Crime Scene Investigation] as well. And then I actually helped them unroll New Student Organization, software. And so, by the time I finished my degree, finished my master's, I was applying to a bunch of different places.

And I had actually applied to a law firm to be a legal assistant. And it ended up not being a really great fit. It wasn't the most professional place I've ever worked. But then it actually a position opened up in CSI [Crime Scene Investigation] that they were looking for somebody interim to help with student orgs [Student Organizations] and since I had a huge knowledge base already, and I had already done all of the onboarding for student orgs [Student Organizations] it just was kind of a natural step to come back.

So, I came back, and I helped through that year, and then left again in December. But yeah, so I just kind of like my involvement was, you know, as a student employee, I was student government, kid as well. And then, you know, I just kind of was involved in all facets.

Elizabeth Epps

All facets of the multifaceted institution that we are, because we always have so much going on, and exactly the fact that, you know, students are encouraged to, you know, explore, as well is gain their education to the extent that they're able. So, it's great that you were able to take advantage of that. So, you left University of Baltimore, and then you came back, and you have been working with alumni, can you describe how you were recruited for that particular experience, and what type of work you've done here at the University in that role.

Courtney Trang

So, I kind of always kept an eye out for things that were open here. Because again, I, my heart will always be at UBalt [University of Baltimore]. I just have my college years were great. And my working experience here has been great. So when, you know, again, I just kind of kept an eye on things. When an opening came up. Originally, it was an assistant job. And it was assistant for alumni relations and donor relations. So, I applied for it. And I think that the fact that I was an alum coming into the position was something that was appealing, because I knew a lot of alumni.

So, when I came in, they, I was able to kind of give them a lot of information about oh, this alumnus would be great for this, because Oh, so and so is a part of that program. So um, then, of course, the pandemic had hit, and then I actually moved up into the role of assistant director. And from there, I think that a lot of what I did was more face to face with alumnus, I kind of put a name to the to the office and provided that like connection that some people are missing. I was kind of in charge of all the social media.

So, I was constantly contacting alums through their events, we were running events, and you know, our Oktoberfest are happy hours, some of our family events and things like that, and just kind of providing that like that person that alums could go to, as somebody who understands like, oh, no, I'm an alumnus too. I get it. So, when people would ask, like, oh, I need a copy of my diploma, I need a transcript. Oh, you know what it cost this much it you can get it here, like I've been through it, I've done it. So not even just for work wise, like I've done these things myself.

Elizabeth Epps

We all become ambassadors for the institution that we love. And being an alumnus, you feel everyone else's journey as you're making your own. I don't, I think get the sense that you agree with that, but you see yourself and everyone else that you come across in. You know, I personally always tell everyone, our job is to make sure that you are successful.

And if there's anything that we can do, if we're little milestones along the way, then you know, I'll hit your palm will match palms exactly moving. And the hope is that they will also continue to do the same. Because you've been a professional within the institution, and you have also been a student, what are your biggest highlights about your time here, things that stand out that you think that maybe 5 to 10

years from now, you'll still be using as examples to others or raving about and saying, Oh, this is a great example of Blau or this is what I learned from this, the things that continue to motivate you and sustain you. Because I'm sure you've been able to glean, you know, little golden professional nuggets, as I like to call them from everyone that you've met here and you work with so many people in your office, as well as leadership, what are those? What are those takeaways that you'd like to share?

Courtney Trang

So as far as like, you know, the things that I look back on my time as a student, and, and block parties, and those things that like, we've experienced kind of a lull in, you know, with the pandemic and everything, like they're just things that I'm like, oh, but block parties used to be amazing. And those kinds of things like, you know, block parties, the student orgs [Organizations] the events like that kind of stuff was like always the highlight of my student time. And then even like, something that I appreciated as a student and appreciate as a staff member as well are like the opportunities that students have here.

So, one thing that I did in my master's work was, I got to participate in the Ropers Academy, something that is a victim like a trauma victims course, where you kind of, you go to a retreat kind of place for like a week, and you learn, like what the state is doing as far as like, victim services go. And you kind of get like, into, like, what is what they're doing in that kind of work, you meet people from other state agencies, and it's a fantastic networking opportunity for students.

And it's free, it was free, you just had to apply for it. And it's, it's a theme, again, we talked about this, that UB [University of Baltimore] is a part of those experiential things, you know, like our students are actually getting the real-life experiences at the same time as learning. And, you know, like, we have the Schaefer Center and students that are actually in public policy, being able to get experience. And I think that's something that I valued as a student, but I also like I look back on and I'm like, that is such an amazing thing, that we're still doing these things, and it's getting better. But I think that's like one of the biggest things I will highlight at UB [University of Baltimore] is just that. There is every department has that. And it's an amazing thing.

Elizabeth Epps

So, from the framework of being a highly engaged student, and transitioning to the role of a staff member, who then seeks more engagement opportunities for others, and to try and grow the institution. What, What responsibilities that you've had, are preparing you, I guess, for the next step of your journey, where do you see yourself heading? And, you know, I guess the idea is that you were more than likely carrying a large part of us with you into your next journey.

But what are some of your biggest professional takeaways that you think others need to maybe hear and benefit from? Because obviously, you've, you've been promoted to such a nice position. And it obviously came from lots of like, what we like to talk about here is grit, you know, the elbow grease that it took to get you to where you are. So, what can you advise those that might be listening to this recording in the future, like steps that they can follow for success? And things that you think that you will never forget that perhaps you learned in the professional setting? And the role that you hold?

Courtney Trang

Yeah. So, I think a lot of a lot of what I would say that I've learned kind of actually came during this time in the pandemic and everything. Adaptability, I think being adaptable is the most important thing that you can be in any workplace. And I think that my time at UB [University of Baltimore] has kind of taught me to be adaptable. You can't go into every situation. Like, oh, we used to do it this way. Because the thing is, you know, being at UBalt [University of Baltimore], and you know this to that, it's changed. It's from what it was when I was a student, to now it's changed completely.

It's not the same. It's not the same any given year. Um, and I think that looking at things like that, and being like, oh, you know, we used to do this, and this worked. But it's not the same anymore. You know, something like in alumni relations, we saw a downward kind of tick in happy hours. Okay, so how do we fix that? Okay, well, we started 40. And we go to 40 in September, and it's an all-day thing, but it's, it's more the speed of what people are doing right now.

So, I think that's probably the biggest like, piece of advice I could give somebody and something I've learned is just that you have to be adaptable to what's happening around you. You can't be stiff and be like, oh, you know what, I've always done it this way. That's great. Nobody is saying that that's not okay. It's just that we have to change with things as they're coming and you know, UB [University of Baltimore] is coming up on their centennial.

It's changed a lot from you know, 2007, when we were coming in is that first freshman class to now, we've had, you know, it's hard to believe, fifth 16 years of, you know, freshman students on campus. And it's just, I think that's, that's always going to be the biggest piece of advice I can give somebody, you know, there's a lot the people I have worked with at UB [University of Baltimore] alone, have given me a wide variety of personalities that I've dealt with as well. And I think here, I've learned a lot about how to work within a team, and to work with different personalities. But I think it all comes back down to that, that like being adaptable.

Elizabeth Epps

That's good advice. And it sounds like you've, you've done some very good problem solving along the way and keeping yourself keeping your skills sharp, having change as a catalyst for your everyday actions, gives you the momentum to kind of get up out of bed every day and say, all right, I'm ready for what the next 24 hours has to offer. My name is Courtney, and I am signing this card. I'm ready. So, do you have a favorite memory of an alum [Alumni] that you have helped?

And perhaps could you share their story with us because I know you cross paths with so many people every day that are working really hard, or that have achieved a goal, and they may share the next goal with you. The Alumni Office is always capturing, you know, there's snapshots and milestones of people as they move from place to place. And of course, they always circle back and share information, is there anything or are there several that may stick out to you is just extremely memorable.

Courtney Trang

So um, as far as, like helping alums out, there have been a few times where we have had alums reach out. And, you know, they might have been in a personal crisis, whether it was they were looking for, like

mental health, or we had an alum [Alumni] who had a fire, and she was just looking for anything that anybody could send to her.

And, you know, like, one alum [Alumni], we helped him find services, we coordinated with student services to be like, okay, he's not a student. But here are things that are in his area, the student who are the alum [Alumni] who had a fire, you know, we managed to collect clothes from other offices to send to her. And those were just great community feelings where it was like, you know, we kind of helped somebody figured out that, okay, I might be an alum [Alumni], but this is a community that still cares about me, and they will still try to figure out something for me. And I think that that was, I mean, like you, you help them because you want to help.

It just, it was a good feeling to know that we had assistance to people who were in crisis. But then on the other side, like, like the happier side, you know, I've had an alum [Alumni], Melissa Martin, who is running Stanley Snacks for school kids, she created this organization, it puts snacks into Baltimore City Schools so that kids are getting a healthy snack at school. And I think it's a fantastic mission, not just because I'm an alum [Alumni], who, who thinks it's a great mission, because I work in the office thinks it's a great mission. As a mom who has a kid in Baltimore City Schools, I think it's a fantastic thing. But it kind of helped, it led me to the opportunities to actually help them too.

So, I've furthered my own volunteering by like, a by getting to know her, and I've helped there helped out with them a few times. Um, so I think it's, it's wonderful, especially when I get to hear about the alums who are doing things in the community, and I can be an advocate for them. I've had other alums who have created businesses and so I started highlighting their businesses on our Facebook and the happiness that comes from them and they're like, oh, my God, you know, thank you so much for posting that people have been asking me all day about it. It's just nice to feel like you've helped somebody out.

Elizabeth Epps

Not only being a safe space for people to land and using creative artful triage, but also really proving that we are knowledge that works and that we're always open working, they're always working, I think it's probably safe to say that we never miss the opportunity to help. And we don't consider it necessarily work, we consider it an honor and a pleasure to do so. As the University continues to change and continues to grow, what advice do you have for students that are interested in studying your discipline with regards to how they should view selecting their courses, and then what types of opportunities or resources they should draw upon when they start getting to a comfortable point in classroom instruction, and they're ready to say, Okay, now I'm ready to dip my toe in the water.

And I'm ready to go and start applying for some things so that by the time I'm on the other side of my degree, if not before then, that I can actually contribute to the landscape of all that's been poured into me, what advice do you have for them? Can you leave them from maybe course 101, up to the higher-level courses with some good practical advice?

Courtney Trang

Well, as far as my program goes, so criminal justice, you know, criminal justice is a whole field in and of itself. And there's so many different branches that you can go into. So, I think the biggest piece of advice I could give is really kind of sit down and look at these different branches. And decide, like, what's more interesting to you.

And, because the thing is, it's kind of limitless, there's, you know, law enforcement side, there's, you know, like the law side, where you could go further into law school, the victims advocacy portion of it, the cybercrimes, there's so many different avenues that you can take that I think that it's worthwhile to kind of sit down and just think about what you're really interested in, and talk to your professors, because, again, especially in the criminal justice department, they have been through it all they have been in the field, they have done it all.

And if you want a real world, like experience and advice, you should talk to them. Heather Pfeiffer, you know, Deb Stanley [Debra Stanley], Andrew Contura, they have been there, and they know what they're talking about. And if you find that niche, that thing that you're interested in, find the opportunities as well there, because to you, they are there, you know, like the Ropers Academy. It's free, you apply for it, if you get it, you go. And it's, it's a great networking piece. But even just, you know, Dean Hartley is always promoting things within the College of Public Affairs.

And there's always something I think it's worthwhile to not just like, sit in and study and look at your books. But to actually take a minute to see what the university is offering through the Schaefer Center what Dean Hartley is sharing on LinkedIn, because he's sharing things from the college and, and giving that information out to everybody. Um, it's, I think it's just, we can't just come to school and leave, we have to like to get the most out of it. You need to actually like, kind of involve yourself in what's going on, even going into the criminal justice society on campus. If that if that organization is still active, you know, again, another, like, networking piece,

Elizabeth Epps

taking advantage of every opportunity and finding the ones that fit best, the wall. Yes, throwing it all at the wall. That's so true.

Courtney Trang

and see what sticks.

Elizabeth Epps

And see what sticks. And then, once you're ready to move on, you'll know because you'll get the itch, and the curiosity will carry you further. As we begin to conclude our interview, are there any areas of your journey that we haven't covered that you would like to talk about any facets? That you think, looking back, maybe two, three years from now someone listening to this recording, you know, and that that would be in its early days? I could say, whoa, yeah, I'm at the university now and it has changed a little from what I've heard on this recording. Is there anything else that you would like to share or can impart?

Courtney Trang

If I sat here all day, I could probably think of something all day long. But I think the thing about UB [University of Baltimore] or UBalt [University of Baltimore] now, I always UB [University of Baltimore] because it's just over the years. But the thing is, it really is such a wonderful community. And there's so much happening. I mentored a student during this past semester. And she was so surprised at the things that were available to her, you know, from the academic coaching, they would not just teach her like, you know, to help her with their class, but also help with time management and organizational skills.

And they, you know, the community service opportunities through CSI [Crime Scene Investigation], and the student org [organization] opportunities. There's just so much happening on campus, and even as a staff member, it's amazing to kind of get involved in those things. And, like, I just think it's, it's a wonderful community here. And I hope that continues on and what I'm really excited for is the centennial. And seeing what's going to come in the next, you know, however long it gets to see, of UBalt [University of Baltimore], but hopefully, you know, under the current leadership that we have, that we continue on, expanding and providing that knowledge that works, that you know, that that core of our university,

Elizabeth Epps

yes, the very center of all that we stand for. It has been a pleasure speaking with you, learning about your joy or your joyful journey. And we wish you much, much success as you moves forward. I know from speaking with you now that you will always be looking back at us. I'm pretty sure that our paths will cross again from the perspective of the institution with you. Because you carry us in your heart, and we are so grateful for everything that you are doing and have done. Thank you for today.

Courtney Trang

Thank you so much. I appreciate it and

Elizabeth Epps

welcome. Take care and this concludes our recording and our conversation today with Miss Courtney Trang, one of University of Baltimore's finest. Take care.

Courtney Trang

Thank you.

Elizabeth Epps

Bye.