

Mike Altman: Welcome to study religion, the podcast produced by the department of religious studies at the university of Alabama. I am your host Mike Altman, and we have the third and final in our series on making the jump. We had conversations with people who were in the field of religious studies on one way or another, and then decided to take their academic career in a new direction.

Mike Altman: And today I'm speaking with Kate Daley-Bailey, who shifted from her work in religious studies towards work in administration. And specifically in advising undergraduate students. And it's a really interesting conversation about how she draws on her training in religious studies, but then how she's also just really enjoys working in the university environment in a different way. So I think it's just a great conversation to think about how there are lots of things folks can do with their academic training in religious studies. All right. I am here with Kate Daley-Bailey, who is the... You told me and I just forgot, academic advisor for Romance languages.

K. Daley-Bailey: Yes, correct. You got it.

Mike Altman: Thanks for taking time to talk about this stuff.

K. Daley-Bailey: Sure. I'm happy to.

Mike Altman: So, just to start off with, can you tell me what you're doing now, and then just how you ended up there.

K. Daley-Bailey: Yeah, so I'm an academic advisor at UGA. I fell into it, surprisingly, I didn't know what an academic advisor was. I didn't know that there was a separate job. And so now what I do basically is I help students in Romance languages but also with other degrees, figure out what they need to graduate, and how to get there, help them figure out their path. So, in a lot of ways, I end up helping people with... What you're describing in this podcast in general is this idea of how do you make your school life turn into something beyond that.

Mike Altman: And so before you were doing that, you did an MA degree at Georgia State, right? In religious studies.

K. Daley-Bailey: Actually I did my MA at Georgia.

Mike Altman: Oh, at Georgia? I'm sorry.

K. Daley-Bailey: Yeah, UGA. But I did teach. I was the instructor of religious studies at Georgia State.

Mike Altman: Okay. So, how did you get from MA, [inaudible 00:03:09] Georgia teaching at Georgia state to academic advising in Romance languages?

K. Daley-Bailey: So, basically having all the teaching experience. So one of the really great things about the master's program at UGA is that part of being at school, most everyone in school had some type of assistant ship. And my assistant ship was to teach. So, I started teaching religious studies, the intro courses, and I fell in love with it. And I loved the material, I loved being able to engage with students, I loved talking about the life of the mind, and helping students figure things out.

K. Daley-Bailey: So, after I did that as part of my master's, I ended up teaching for a few years, mostly adjuncting, but those jobs got harder and harder to come by just because of the market. And I had number of people who were academic advisors, two different people. So, not a huge number, but tell me when I was lamenting my choices for academia, they said "You'd make a great academic advisor." And I was like, "I have no idea what that is." And then a couple, they told me what it was, what they did, and I said, "Well that's really interesting." And then suddenly a bunch of advisor positions opened up at UGA, and I applied.

Mike Altman: As an academic advisor when you're talking to undergrads, how much do you talk to them about grad school, and getting a master's degree like you did. And how, how does your experience shape the advice that you give them?

K. Daley-Bailey: A lot. I end up talking to students about this a lot more than I thought. And it's not really part of the training. Our training is primarily focused on helping students understand university requirements and policies, and also just sequencing of classes, things like that. But I kept running up against, because I see mostly juniors and seniors, the question of career, but also going on to get a master's, some of the students I see are first generation, so they don't have a whole lot of experience with thinking about what grad school is, or why you would want to go.

K. Daley-Bailey: So, it's actually been a huge part of the transformation of my job is to help students explore those things and help them get ready for whatever is the next step. Because they're very anxious. That's one thing I've learned about. There's a lot of fear in them dealing with the prospect of going out and getting a job, or even taking the next step in academia.

Mike Altman: So you have a terminal MA, which we just started offering a terminal MA in our department.

K. Daley-Bailey: Yeah.

Mike Altman: What do you think has been the benefits of a terminal MA, versus having gone into those MA PhD program, if you talk about, did you see it as a better option for you? What's your thoughts about the terminal MA as they're becoming fewer and fewer a lot of places?

K. Daley-Bailey: I liked it a lot because it gave me time to learn a lot and reflect on what I wanted to do with my life. I feel like the masters, PhD combo that you see, I think there's a lot of anxiety that students get when they encounter those type of things because it's such a long commitment. And if they feel like they may not want to finish it, then they could still get their MA usually as part of the deal. But I think they often feel like they've left something behind. Even if it was the right choice. I like the idea of having a masters, because I was like, I did it, I completed it and then I was moving on to the next stage of my life without having to really feel like I left a PhD behind.

Mike Altman: Did you ever consider doing the PhD, or how did you come to the decision to go in this career direction as opposed to going on to do the PhD?

K. Daley-Bailey: I did consider it. In fact for a long time I thought it seemed like the logical next step. I love teaching, but after a while of a fifth teaching and everything, I thought, "Now I'm going to go back to school for a few years, and it'll be super intense, and then I might get a job as a professor somewhere maybe." So, a lot of it had to do with looking at the prospects for my occupation going forward, and I wanted more job security, I think. The idea of being where I am, my husband is here, and so being able to not have to worry about traveling, or any of those type of things, that was very important for me.

Mike Altman: One of the common themes we've seen I think across people who've made either a leap out of the academy, or within, or come to decision point has been a balance of like "Well what's the life that I want?"

K. Daley-Bailey: Exactly.

Mike Altman: And what's the amount of bending and stretching I'm willing to do and think I'll still be happy in the long run, which you've have done.

K. Daley-Bailey: No. I think that's exactly it.

Mike Altman: How do you see it big picture? I think you're interesting because you have multiple views on the Academy being both an advisor now, and administrative strategy side, but I haven't talked for so long and having been through graduate program and all that.

Mike Altman: How do you see the relation between the agency students both undergrad, grad students have, and even early faculty when they're making the decisions, versus the overarching structures of the Academy, both in terms of programs but also jobs. How do you think people should think about, wherever they are on that spectrum along their academic career, how do you think they should think about themselves in relation to those larger seemingly faceless structures [inaudible 00:09:27]?

K. Daley-Bailey: Well, sometimes, I mean they are all systems, so you're within them understanding that it's almost like intersections, the idea that you have an identity that works in a certain way. And so, one thing that I really enjoyed about being an advisor, or becoming an advisor that I didn't even know was there, is that I'm liminal, which I felt like as an academic that was the bad way to be. But as an administrative, someone in administration, being liminal has only served me.

K. Daley-Bailey: So for example, I can talk to students, I can talk to professors, I can talk to other administrators. I help with curriculum. I have the experience of teaching. So, I know what the classroom and research experiences is like for professors. So, I can explain to students that professors don't just teach, that a lot of their life is involved with research and grants, and things that students haven't thought about.

K. Daley-Bailey: So, in many ways that has helped me. And so I think people in this position, or who are thinking about these various positions should acknowledge that there is a decline. We've noticed it for lots of years now of certain jobs in the Academy, that the Academy's changing, but it's a behemoth, so it changes very slowly and usually not with everything else going on. So, those are the things to keep in mind. And administration is getting bigger for the most part.

K. Daley-Bailey: So, just knowing those things, and being able to leverage those things in your favor, I think is important. And having administrative experience, helping professors in particular who maybe don't know the ins and outs of curriculum has been really helpful for me, because I've been able to say, "Hey, I know how this works and I can help you create the best curriculum plan based on what I'm seeing students need, or do, or want." And so that I think helps them. So it's an interesting place to be, but I mean I understand that this is a very complex system, and we're all trying to figure out where it's going.

Mike Altman: What advice would you give someone in an MA program, because that is considering similar that you're not doing the PhD for whatever reason. What should they be doing as an MA student to prepare themselves to be able to come out, and show that the MA was actually a benefit towards.... And not just two years they took after the undergrad, before they started their career?

K. Daley-Bailey: Well, actually, I mean, a lot of people I work with have masters who are advisors or administrators. And some have PhDs. So in some ways... But if someone has thought, "Okay, I know I don't want to go onto the PhD route for whatever reason." The most important thing is to think about what you've learned, being able to... And I tell this to my undergraduates too, that a lot of times in academia, because everything is driven towards more academia a lot of times, that they don't understand about... They have no experience translating what they do into something that can be understood in a non-academic environment.

K. Daley-Bailey: And so they have to be their own spokesperson, their own salesperson. And I know it's often really hard within the humanities and the liberal arts to do this, because we don't like to think of ourselves that way as marketing ourselves. But in many ways I say, you want someone to want to hire you. You want it to make it easy for them to hire you. And so therefore, you want to go get someone to look at your resume, [inaudible 00:13:33], even doing things like book reviews. Being able to show that you can write clearly and concisely is something that you could use in all fields, in all areas, in all types of work.

K. Daley-Bailey: I was a business analyst for a year in between my stents, and I didn't like it, but I learned a lot about what I wanted to do, and what I could offer the world, and that I was very organized that having an MA taught me how to organize large swaths of material, and to pair it down and articulate it to the quintessential parts.

Mike Altman: That's helpful. I think it is helpful to think about the skills. That's something we're trying to do with our MA students. In some ways I'm asking you questions that I want them to hear answers too.

K. Daley-Bailey: That's okay. No, I mean I like to help students, that's part of my job. I've actually talked to MA students who've come into my office and said, "I'm thinking about possibly doing something besides a PhD." And they as just having a casual conversation said, "What do you think? Should I try for something like advising or administration or go teach in a private school, what should I do? Should I go into the private sector?" There are just so many different things.

Mike Altman: What do you tell them?

K. Daley-Bailey: Basically what I just told you.

Mike Altman: [inaudible 00:14:53].

K. Daley-Bailey: So, I want them to be agents. We all work within systems, whether they're business systems or the academic world. I mean, really you have to promote yourself, show the things that you've done. That's probably the best thing is being able to sit down and write out my resume and re-invision the things that I've done from an academic lens to a more administrative lens, it's important to have different resumes for different things, different jobs you're applying to. I think that's important.

Mike Altman: That's super helpful. Because I think a lot of people, if you're going to make a jump, you have to have put in some preparation to do it.

K. Daley-Bailey: Yes.

Mike Altman: It can't just be like, "I got to get out of here." And then, because always I think a lot of people, they're... And I've seen this came up with the conversation I had

with other interviews about that, that the more you get down the academic line, you start to feel more and more trapped. Because you've said yes to this specific thing, which has meant saying no to lots of other things. And I think what you're saying about having other experiences and paying attention to the skills you're gaining is a kind of a way to keep from getting that feeling of being trapped, being able to be like, "Well, I could always go to-

K. Daley-Bailey: Do something else.

Mike Altman: ... Do something else because I have these skills.

K. Daley-Bailey: There's a lot of fear the further you get into academia. And unfortunately, I'm so glad you're doing a podcast like this because... And you have this for your MA students because I feel like in academia a lot of times the people that are the senior faculty, they don't know what else is out there.

Mike Altman: Exactly.

K. Daley-Bailey: And it's not a fault of theirs, it's just that their job and their life did not take them into doing other things. So, they're really not the experts on that. And I think that exploring, and also just the fact that... At this point I work a lot with our career center at UGA just mostly training to find out what is it I can help my students with. And one of the things that I've learned is that this generation of students is going to have multiple careers, not just multiple jobs. So, it's very likely that they will need to understand the skills they have, to hone them, to know how to market them so that they can re-calibrate as the market enters different ups and downs and their different interests and different jobs out there.

Mike Altman: That's really good. All right. I don't want to keep you too long-

K. Daley-Bailey: Sure.

Mike Altman: ... So last question. What is the part of your current position that you enjoy the most? What's the thing that you go home like "That's why I like doing this."

K. Daley-Bailey: I love my job. It took me a little while to get into it primarily because I miss teaching. But advising is so much like teaching, only in some ways it gives you more contact with students because you're engaging them in something that is very personal to them. And you can really see the effect. So, when I see students that first came to me, and they really didn't know what they were doing, and then I've helped them.

K. Daley-Bailey: I meet with them every semester, and sometimes multiple times when we talk about what their plans are, and how to get from point A to point B. And I help them deal with fear about the future. It's super satisfying to see them graduate and to hear about what they're doing next. That's probably the best thing is to

be like, I got to help in that process, even if it was just a little bit, I got to have something that encouraged them and them suite their fears, and helped them be positive and act in their own favor as they go out into the world.

Mike Altman: Well, thank you so much for taking time-

K. Daley-Bailey: Sure.

Mike Altman: ... To talk about this stuff. This is great. And yeah, thanks so much.

K. Daley-Bailey: Thanks so much. It was great talking to you, Mike.

Mike Altman: Study religion is a production of the department of religious studies at the University of Alabama. For more information on our department, go to [www.religion.ua.edu](http://www.religion.ua.edu), or find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/rel@ua](https://facebook.com/rel@ua). Have a comment or a question about the podcast? You can email us at [religiousstudies@ua.edu](mailto:religiousstudies@ua.edu), or reach out to us on Twitter or Instagram @studyreligion. If you've enjoyed the show, please subscribe to us on iTunes and leave us a comment, and a rating. It helps other folks find the show and makes you a very giving person. Special thanks to Kyle Ashley, a major in our department, for his help editing the show. Our opening theme is two minute warning by Stephan [Carton 00:19:45] [Berg 00:00:19:45], and this closing theme is Saturday night by Texas radio fish. Both are used under creative commons license. We'll talk to you later. Roll tide.