

Episode published September 16, 2024 | Transcription by Liza Jane Triandafilou, '27

Maggie Johnson

Welcome to *As Spiders Do*, the University of Richmond podcast where we share stories about our amazing alumni. I'm your host Maggie Johnson, from the class of 2018. Thanks for tuning into this Mini Webisode series, "From Inside the Web." In these episodes, we feature alumni who return to campus to continue or start their careers. As you'll soon hear, there are truly Spider alumni everywhere on this campus. From admissions and student services to finance, athletics, and advancement. Even some of our faculty started off as students here. Our experiences and roles are varied, but there's one thing we have in common, we just couldn't stay away. So, without further ado, let's hear some voices from inside the web.

Rick Mayes

My name is Rick Mayes. I graduated 1991 and I'm a professor and Chair of the Department of Health Studies.

Maggie Johnson

Thinking back to when you were a student, how did you find UR and decide to go here?

Rick Mayes

I think like a lot of people, it was word of mouth. And I knew a few people in my hometown who had gone to the University of Richmond and had great things to say about it. But this was back in the day before there was an online presence. I was from St. Louis, out in the Midwest. So just the idea of being in Virginia was sort of exotic because it was far away. So, I was kind of drawn to that too.

Maggie Johnson

Was there an experience or a person from your time as a student that was really influential for you?

Rick Mayes

I had a political science professor by the name of Tom Morris, who was just, I connected with him and he was one of the many people that I think had a lot of patience with me. I say that because, to be really honest with you, I don't think I was 100% ready for college. I

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

was 100% enthusiastic, but I didn't have time management skills. I wouldn't even say I had the full-on maturity you'd like to think you have when you come to college. I was all over the place, I changed majors. It felt like it took me longer than other people to kind of figure it out. That reality informs the way I teach. So, I love it when students come in and they have all their life plans articulated and God bless them, I hope it happens. But I also can remember so painfully just feeling sort of clueless and really eager to have some insights into where to go. And so, I weave that into my teaching, into my mentoring, in my office hours that probably a good number of students feel similar.

Maggie Johnson

Absolutely. So, what was your journey post-graduation and how did you end up back on campus?

Rick Mayes

Students sometimes ask me that, like, how did you do this? How did you, and my answer is always, you couldn't replicate this if you tried. Because all I could ever figure out at the time was sort of the next year. But I never had a master plan. And so, I worked in Washington on policy until I got to the point where I needed to go get more graduate training. And then during that decade, healthcare was really a big deal. And so, I was drawn to that, worked on that. Again, like a lot of people, I was pushing, I was ambitious, I was trying to figure things out, and that just intersected with the big policy issue at the time, which is healthcare. I was wrapping up my graduate training at the University of Virginia and either I reached out or the Department of Political Science reached out because they needed someone to fill in a one-year temporary visiting position. And it just happened to be when I was wrapping up my graduate studies and I needed some more teaching experience. And so, I drove over one year every day and taught a lot of courses, got incredibly good experience, made mistakes, figured them out, honed my teaching model. And then at the end of that, I had a chance to go out to California and do some more postgraduate training with the National Institutes of Health. And then when that was over, a tenure track position opened back up here in political science, which was my original degree. And I was able to come back, which was kind of a dream. But my dream wasn't to come back because I was a great undergraduate student and wowed people here. My coming back almost for me was like, okay, I've been given that very rare opportunity to do a do-over and be a different person. But for me, it was sort of like atonement of like, wow, I didn't really make the most of my first time. I was immature, I wasn't ready. U of R still helped me enormously and I got on a totally different life track,

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

but I didn't have great grades. I didn't distinguish myself. And I thought, well, I come back, maybe I can be the professor that I wasn't as a student.

Maggie Johnson

Absolutely. What's your favorite thing about working here?

Rick Mayes

My favorite thing about working here is that you not only can focus on the students, you're expected to. I love being in a place where what I love to do the most is mentoring is what is most important.

Maggie Johnson

Beautiful. Has there been any experience as a faculty member that's been really impactful?

Rick Mayes

I think one of the most neat things, I've been here long enough now, is that some of the very first students I had, I'm now teaching their kids. And that is surreal. I remember their parents and how good they were as students, and now that here's their child. And it kind of blows me away about how much U of R has changed in the meantime. One of the continuities is that we've been getting good students. You see their kids, you realize the impact the institution has on people. They want to send their kids here.

Maggie Johnson

Yeah, amazing. My last question for you is just what does it mean to be a Richmond Spider?

Rick Mayes

I think it means, and this has become more so over time, is very globally oriented. So, you have students who are way more attuned to what's going on globally and locally than when I was a student. So now I think to be a U of R student is to be ambitious for yourself but also to make some sector of the world better. And they're way more knowledgeable about what's going on. They're much more plugged in than when I was a student.

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

I'm Stacey Calderon-Castillo. I'm the program coordinator and study abroad advisor in international education. I'm a 2023 grad, so very recent. I was a global studies major with a concentration in politics and governance and a sociology minor.

Maggie Johnson

Excellent, well happy one-year anniversary of graduation.

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

Thank you.

Maggie Johnson

So, thinking back to when you started undergrad, how did you find UR originally?

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

It was kind of crazy. I grew up in and around Charlottesville. So not very far at all, but I had never heard of the University of Richmond until my school counselor told me about it. She was like, this seems like it would be such a great place for you. And so, I started looking into it more. I saw that they had a lot of the classes that I would have wanted to take because I already knew then that I wanted to do international relations or global studies, how they say it here. And sociology was a big draw for me as well. So, all of those things. And then I came to an Admitted Students event and I fell in love with the campus.

Maggie Johnson

Excellent. Is there a person or experience from your time as an undergrad that was really influential on you?

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

Studying abroad for me was incredibly influential. I don't know why I forgot about that. Yeah, I studied abroad in spring of 2022, so post-COVID, mid-COVID. That was very interesting, but towards the end of my time abroad, all of those restrictions pretty much lifted, thankfully. I mean, I loved it. I studied abroad at IS Paris, Business and International Affairs. So that was amazing. I loved the classes that I took. The professors were all so knowledgeable and just really made learning fun. I took an art history class there. So, we got to tour the city and the museums and that was a great way to learn as well about all

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

of the history and culture there. Learned some more French as well. So that was great. I love learning languages a lot. So that was building my language skills from what I already knew of French and just getting to practice it. And yeah, that's kind of where the most influential point of my undergrad.

Maggie Johnson

Can you tell us a little bit more about what your role entails?

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

Yeah, so it kind of entails a lot. I have a portfolio of semester programs. Just have five of those, but they have one of them in Spain, so lots of students to look after for that. And then I also help one of my colleagues with summer and short-term programs like SSIR, EnCompass, those kinds of programs. [EnCompass](#) is probably one of my favorite ones to work with since they're so specialized for our students and they're fully funded, which is great. And this year we will have more, so I'm very excited about being able to give more students the opportunity to study abroad as well. Honestly, working there has been so life-changing that my colleagues are just phenomenal. They're so helpful and ready to help me learn and many interprofessional development opportunities as well, which I find helpful given that I had no experience whatsoever in the field. So apart from going myself, but I had no idea how much entailed, all of the background mechanics of how everything works, students don't realize, but so it's nice to be able to see both sides of it.

Maggie Johnson

Yeah, absolutely. What's your favorite thing about working for your alma mater?

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

Just being able to connect with the students, especially being a recent grad. Like, I still remember how things work and I've been through these processes myself. I know how some things can be frustrating so I can relate on so many levels. And, I think that's my favorite part of working here is just how I can relate to students.

Maggie Johnson

Excellent. Yeah, I feel like you probably bridge both sides.

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

Exactly. And then seeing professors who I had and being able to work with them now as well. So, it's kind of bringing everything full circle, which is really nice.

Maggie Johnson

I love that. So really my last question for you is just what does it mean to be a Spider?

Stacey Calderon-Castillo

It means community. Yeah, just community. Everyone's always so ready to be there, to help you, to guide you, faculty and staff, students, everyone's just, it just seems like it's just such a tight-knit community. And Spiders are everywhere. So, it's always, I see sometimes wherever I am running into someone that went here, someone that knows someone who went here, and it's just such a beautiful connection that lasts a lifetime.

Laura Knouse

My name is Laura Knouse. I am a graduate of Westhampton College, the year 2002, and I am currently a professor and the Chair of the psychology department. And I also am the faculty director of the [Richmond Scholars Program](#), which is our flagship merit scholarship.

Maggie Johnson

Wonderful. So, taking you back to when you first started UR, how did you find University of Richmond as a student?

Laura Knouse

So, my dad got one of the, this was back in the day, so the Barron's College Guide, you know, the like one-foot thick Barron's College Guide. And like we went through schools that were, we were looking for the East Coast. I'm from Pennsylvania and so we were looking for schools that were highly, the most competitive and sort of smaller in size and also schools that frankly offered some merit scholarship money. And so that fit the bill. So that was very attractive from a financial standpoint for my middle-class family.

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

Maggie Johnson

Is there any one experience, person, or moment from your time as a student that was really influential for you?

Laura Knouse

Oh my goodness, so many. It's hard to not mention the most obvious one, which is my husband, who I met like my second or third day on campus at a freshman orientation event. We did not start dating until junior year, but we kind of hung out with the same group of very nerdy sort of music and theater kids. So obviously that's a big influence on my life. I would say two of the most important mentors in my life. One was Dr. Katherine Bagwell, who is my psychology professor and my thesis advisor. And then also Dr. Jennifer Cable, who is currently chair of the faculty senate. And she is my voice teacher and really influential on me as a person and also just really attentive to my personal and emotional health as a student throughout and really inspirational to me.

Maggie Johnson

So, tell me a little bit about your journey post-graduation and ultimately how you ended up working at UR.

Laura Knouse

So, I was really interested in becoming a clinical psychologist. I was always completely in love with the research side of things ever since like the first psychology class that I took and I have the opportunity now to be a research mentor to students and so the research mentoring I received was a really important part of my journey and so I actually did a summer research fellowship when I was at U of R, which is something that is very common now, but I think at the time was less common. And I got involved in a lab that did research on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which is what I study now. So that was really influential. And then my mentors both at U of R and in my fellowship helped me to navigate the graduate school process. And when I was going through school, adult ADHD was sort of a new thing, which is hard to believe now, but it was very hard to find places where you could get training in doing therapy and doing research with adults with ADHD. So that's always been a fun aspect of my career. It's always been something that hasn't yet been investigated very much. So, sort of cutting edge and sometimes frustrating because there's not a lot of background information, but it's exciting because you're discovering new things and really being able to help a population of people that had not

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

to that point really received a lot of attention from clinicians. So, I went to graduate school and then I, when you're a clinical psychologist, you do something called the match process. So, for that, I got to go to one of the only places you could get adult ADHD training. That was at the time at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. And so, I got to go there and work with one of the only people at the time who was doing research on talk therapy for adults with ADHD and stayed around there for another three or four years for a postdoctoral fellowship to do more research, get licensed, and get more clinical experience. And so, I was at the point in that part of my career where it was time to sort of decide, am I gonna stay at more of a medical school setting and really do clinical and research, or am I going to go more to a university setting and do teaching and research? And I remembered how much I really enjoyed the work that I did with my mentors at University of Richmond. So, I sort of knew that was, I always knew that was a place that I wanted to go with my work. And the U of R job came open. And so, I actually was not getting my hopes up too much because my intention was to like gain a little bit more teaching experience, but I was like, I can't not apply for this. And yeah, the rest is history.

Maggie Johnson

And so, you shared a little bit about that great relationship you had with mentors as a student. How has those relationships changed if at all, now that you're colleagues and you get to work with them?

Laura Knouse

It's funny, when I started back, I was thinking like, oh, it's gonna be weird, but my colleagues in the psychology department are so wonderful. I think they purposely worked to not make it weird. You know, I definitely felt like from day one, I was respected as a colleague. I never felt like I was still being treated as a student at all. And it's been fun. Actually, the first person, the first lab that I worked in was Dr. Jane Berry, and she just finished her term as chair of the department and handed it off to me. So, there's still that mentoring relationship going on even at this point in my career. But then also that's blossomed into a friendship as well. And that's something I value about with my colleagues too.

Maggie Johnson

You have a bunch of different roles right now. Is there any one piece of your role that you really love?

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

Laura Knouse

Oh, there's so many. Well, I mean, one thing I'm working on right now that is hard, but is really meaningful to me and when I earned full professor, I was sort of reflecting what I want my career to be about like in the next phase or whatever. I've been doing more with writing books directly for people with ADHD to read and use. Yeah, so I just recently finished a self-help workbook, but also a clinical manual, co-authored with some other colleagues, for college students with ADHD. And right now, I'm working on another book that's geared directly towards adults with ADHD. And so, I find that work really rewarding, obviously, because you're making an impact, but it also, when you're writing for a popular audience, you can be a little bit more creative. I can use some of my like natural goofiness that I think helps my teaching in that writing. You can help people feel validated and seen. Even though I don't have ADHD, writing in such a way that is compassionate and empowering, which is what I really want to do as a teacher. So, I think really that is taking my research side and my teaching side and kind of combining them in a way that's going to have an impact.

Maggie Johnson

That's so beautiful and so beautifully said. So really my last question for you is, what does it mean to be a Richmond Spider?

Laura Knouse

Oh, I just have so many. I think the reason I'm struggling is because I have worn so many hats, you know what I mean? Within that, like I'm an alum, but I'm also a faculty member and I was a student and now I'm an administrator as the chair, right? I think it means, you know what I think it means? I think it means you have a responsibility to give back. Because when you're part of this community you have benefited from the work and the resources of people that have invested in the institution and have invested in you. And so, I think to be a Richmond Spider is to have active gratitude. And I think to have experience being in a giving community and to want to push that forward.

Peggy Watson

I'm Peggy Lum Watson, I was Lum when I was here and graduated in 1976, so I go way back. And I am now the director of the [Osher Lifelong Learning Institute](#) here at the University. Been here for 10 years.

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

Maggie Johnson

Congratulations, happy 10 years.

Peggy Watson

I've loved it, yeah.

Maggie Johnson

Amazing, so how did you find UR as a student?

Peggy Watson

Well, that was easy. My two aunts, my uncle, all came to the University of Richmond. My dad got caught up in the war, but he was here a short while. And then my sister came and then, so it seemed like coming to U of R just seemed so natural for me.

Maggie Johnson

That's wonderful. So, tell me a little bit about your journey back to the University.

Peggy Watson

Well, it was interesting. I was running a grant project for the Virginia department of education. That grant was housed in Henrico schools, public schools, and I was looking to hire. So, I reached out to a colleague whom I knew from the Department of Ed. He was now one of the associate deans in the [School of Professional and Continuing Studies](#). So, I reached out to him and said, could you put this ad out for me? I was interested in an IT person, and the school has a program. And he said, sure. He said, but when are you retiring? And I went, whenever you find me a job at my alma mater. I said, you know, part-time would be great. And he said, Peggy, I've got a job, but it's not part-time. And with that, the wheels started right direction and I retired from Henrico schools on a Friday and started here the following Monday. And that was it, 10 years. And it's gone so fast.

Maggie Johnson

So, in your 10 years, what's been your favorite thing about working for your alma mater?

Peggy Watson

Well, there are a couple of things. From an alum's perspective, being back on campus is terrific. It's just terrific, I love it. From a personal perspective, I feel like I've made a whole new group of friends. And the work, you know, they say if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. I'm sort of feeling like that. There are days, surely, when we're very busy and I'm like, not gonna make it, you know? I'm not gonna make this deadline. But most of the days are filled with people who want to be part of the institute. They're here for the love of learning. There are no grades, no tests, and they volunteer all across campus. It's just such a joy to be around these folks. They're smart, they're well-educated, and they love learning.

Maggie Johnson

Amazing.

Peggy Watson

Yeah, it's like the best job.

Maggie Johnson

Is there anything that surprised you about coming back to work here?

Peggy Watson

I don't know that there was anything surprising. You know, times have changed. I'm not [Boatwright Society](#) yet. When you look back on the 70s and where we are today, it's changed enormously. It was a beautiful campus then, but it is twice as pretty now. We had great buildings and facilities then, but nothing compared to today. We ate our meals in what is now Perkinson Recital Hall and the choir room, right? The guys ate in the Refectory, never the twain shall meet, right? So, who knows what they ate, but now we've got the Heilman Dining Center and our Osher members have been busy taking behind the scenes tours of that. It's so fun.

Maggie Johnson

So, when you think back to your undergrad self, do you think she would be surprised by what you're doing now?

From Inside the Web: Faculty & Academics Edition

Peggy Watson

No. And so here's why. When I was in high school and I worked on, I was the editor of the yearbook in my high school. So, when I came to U of R, I also was the editor of the yearbook way back when we had a yearbook. And so, I think I've been in publications almost all my life. In my prior career, it was developing curriculum materials. So now what we're doing is developing course catalogs of all sorts of events and classes for those of us 50 and better. So again, it's just been kind of curriculum, coursework, publication. So, I don't know if my former self would be terribly surprised. And I don't think my former self would be surprised that I'm back on campus.

Maggie Johnson

Excellent. Well, my last question for you is, what does it mean to be a Richmond Spider?

Peggy Watson

Don't you think that goes really, really deep into your soul and your bones? And yeah, it is an identity that I am proud of. I am grateful for the education I got here. I have a lot of friends who say, well, my children went to wherever, JMU. And so that's where my support is, that's where my money went. And I look at them and I say, nope, no, I'm a Spider and proud of it.

Maggie Johnson

Thanks for listening to *As Spiders Do*, from the University of Richmond Office of Alumni Engagement. We hope you enjoyed hearing some stories from inside the web and learned a little bit more about what it means to be a Richmond Spider. This episode was edited and produced by Charlotte Haneke, Assistant Director of Student and Young Graduate Programming, and me, Maggie Johnson, Associate Director of Regional and Young Graduate Engagement. See the show notes for information about our music and sound effects. Links to university programs and additional information can also be found in the show notes. You can subscribe to *As Spiders Do* wherever you get your podcasts. Rate our show and leave us a review to let us know what you think. We're always looking for new stories to share, so let us know who else we should feature by emailing us at alumni@richmond.edu. That's all for this episode. Talk to you soon, and remember, there are Spiders everywhere, and that's a really good thing.