

Jesse: This is the NatSci Chronicles for Quarter 3, 2019.

Jesse: Hello, and welcome to the NatSci Chronicles, the official podcast of the College of Natural Science at Michigan State University. My name is Jesse, and I will be your host for this episode.

Jesse: The NatSci Chronicles is a quarterly podcast dedicated to keeping you up to date on all the latest happenings in the world of NatSci. We are kicked off this first episode with a back-to-school edition. I had a chance to sit down with Phil Duxbury, the dean for the College of Natural Science to get a recap on his time so far as the dean and what the college has in store for the coming year.

Jesse: I also had a chance to sit down and talk with advising, student success, career services, alumni relations, and advancement to provide our student listeners with helpful information for this academic year. We'll close out the podcast with helpful advice for incoming freshman straight from fellow NatSci students. So, sit back, relax, and enjoy the podcast as we begin with my interview with the dean.

Jesse: So, I'm here with Phil Duxbury, the dean for the College of Natural Science. Phil, welcome to the podcast.

Phil: Thank you, Jesse. A pleasure to be here.

Jesse: Yeah, thank you.

Jesse: So, I'm calling this episode of the podcast the back-to-school edition, so a lot of the content is geared towards students. With the largest incoming freshman class in the history of the college, we'll have more students than ever, and many of whom may not know you. Can you give our listeners a little background on yourself, your studies and expertise?

Phil: Yeah. I'd be happy to. It's really exciting to get a big class of students coming in. Fresh faces in the college gives us a real input of energy, and it's always an exciting time.

Phil: So, my background. I'm Australian. I grew up on the west coast of Australia, which is a beautiful place. Then I went to the east coast of Australia for my PhD. From there, I went to the UK. I was in Oxford, and I wore a fancy gown. I had dinner in a place that looked a lot like Hogwarts.

Phil: From there, I went to the US and was on the east coast of the US for a while before coming to Michigan State in 1986 and started working here. I've gone up through the ranks and was chair of a department for a while, Department of Physics and Astronomy, before taking on the dean's position about a year ago.

Jesse: So, we just passed your one-year anniversary as dean of the college. Can you provide some background about what interested you about the dean's position and why you thought you might be a good fit in that role?

Phil: Yeah, sure. There are a lot of initiatives in the college that really excite me as chair of the department. And prior to that, I was a director of an institute which was focusing on collaborative research. So, I enjoy putting teams together that work on interesting new science directions. As dean, I get a lot of opportunity to do that.

Phil: There's also very interesting activities related to STEM education that I'm passionate about. In particular, new teaching formats that are believed to be better for students, engaging students in discussions and communications and expressing their opinions, so exploratory kind of learning environments. From the dean's office, I get a lot of opportunity to make changes I think are positive for student learning.

Phil: An aspect, too, that a lot of students these days look closely at is the career tracks for students in natural sciences. So, in the past, a lot of students who came through college didn't really focus on their career tracks much until maybe their junior or senior year. It is really important to start thinking about that earlier, and it's important for the college to provide opportunities for students to explore different tracks that they might be interested in. It's easier to think about that and do things related to that from the college level rather than from the department level.

Phil: So, they're all very exciting things that I want to engage in.

Jesse: How do you feel like your first year is going, and what do you think the most challenging aspect of your job as dean has been so far?

Phil: Yeah. The biggest challenge ... When I first came in, it just seemed like an avalanche. It's a giant organization. There's so many different things going on. Within the college, there are 27 different units. There's 11 degree-granting departments, and then there's a whole bunch of other research centers and programs. So, just getting to know all the people that lead all those different things took a long time.

Phil: Then there's issues related to changes that are needed in the college, and each change involves a lot of pieces of the puzzle. So, trying to fit them all together is an interesting and complicated thing. So, they were the big challenges initially.

Jesse: Are there initiatives that the college is currently tackling that you would like to highlight for our listeners?

Phil: Yes. Very exciting that we've got a new STEM teaching and learning facility that we'll open in 2020, or early 2021, depending on who you talk to. But it's going to be a very exciting facility, and what it will house is new learning environments predominantly for laboratories. These learning environments will put together students in inquiry-based learning environments. I think that's really positive things for students and giving them experiences that are essential for their future careers. That's one of the initiatives.

Phil: There are other initiatives in research, and there's so many of them it's hard to go through them. But areas where Michigan State is really spectacular include nuclear physics, and the FRIB facility is really run by NatSci faculty. Then there's plant sciences where there are outstanding faculty here. We're top 10 in plant sciences in the world. And there are places like Kellogg Biological Station where it's a field station, and students go down there and experience a field station environment. Ecology and evolution is another outstanding strength in the college, and there are many more, too, but those three in particular are exciting.

Jesse: Fantastic. So, looking at the year ahead, what are you hoping to achieve in your role as the dean?

Phil: Yeah, there's so many things we're putting on the plate. One of the things is a transition to this new STEM teaching and learning building. That's a very high priority, and there's lots of moving parts. There'll be laboratories from physics. There'll be laboratories from chemistry. There'll be laboratories from the life sciences. They're all moving into that new building, so we have to make that transition smoothly and make sure the student experience is excellent from the very start. So, that's a very high priority.

Phil: There's also all of the issues related to culture. One of the big issues that we face across the campus and across the country is the mental health and the feelings students have about their experience. So, the student experience on campus is usually pretty positive, and students really enjoy being here, but there are problems, and mental health is one of them.

Phil: There's a significant fraction and a growing fraction of students who suffer from anxiety and other issues like that. We want to provide learning environments and opportunities for students to find ways to handle and understand ways that they can deal with the feelings that they have. One aspect of that is looking at things that help mental health, and there are several aspects to that.

Phil: One is helping students understand about how to manage their time and make good decisions. Making good decisions at the age of 18 ... And I think back to my past ... Wasn't my strong suit. But it's really important to make good decisions. So, when you come to college, it's great to have a good time and to meet people and do all the things you should do at college, but you've got to make decisions about making sure that your career and your learning is very positively reinforced while at the same time doing those other things.

Phil: To do that, to be healthy mentally and physically, it's important to get experiences with mindfulness and learning about how to think positively. So, it's really important to have good nutrition and to have a healthy lifestyle, and all those things work together to really help the mental state of students, particularly in this transition to a very new and challenging environment.

Jesse: In closing, look at the incoming freshman class. What is the best advice you can give them in order to be successful in their academic career?

Phil: Yeah. There's lots of pieces to that too, but I think making good decisions is really important, and making good decisions is really taking the time to make good decisions. A lot of students are under a lot of pressure when they get to a new environment like this, and so it's sometimes not easy to just sit back and say, "Okay, what's my objective today, and what's my objective this week, and what's my objective for this semester?"

Phil: If you train yourself to do that very early on, it'll be a much more positive experience. But if you just end up going with the flow and not really being in control of your own life when you're at college, it can get out of control. I think a lot of students fall into that trap where they're not really thinking about, "Hey, this is my life. I really should think about what I want to do with it."

Jesse: Right. Well, Phil, thanks so much for taking the time to sit down with me.

Phil: My pleasure. It's been great talking to you.

Jesse: Thanks.

Jesse: Thanks again to Phil for taking the time out of his busy schedule. Next up, my interview with the advising office.

Jesse: I'm here with Kaitlin Peterson and Kate Thome, advisors within the College of Natural Science. Kaitlin and Kate, welcome to the podcast.

Kaitlin: Thanks for having us.

Kate: Thank you.

Jesse: In addition to academic advisors, you both also have the title of pre-professional advisors. Can you explain what it means to be a pre-professional and how the advising for that differs from academic advising?

Kaitlin: Yeah, actually, there's one change that we're putting through is we're being changed to pre-health advisors. We think that's going to be ... It just happened this past week. So, that's going to be something I think will be more helpful for students. There's a lot of similarities between the two. We do advise curriculum, so we advise for the human biology major but also, for students across all colleges, any kind of health study, so prerequisites for programs.

Kaitlin: But, yeah, the difference is going to be more that we can't advise all majors, and we're more focused on careers in healthcare going onto graduate level programs versus and academic advisor who will be more specialized in that particular department. So, a microbiology advisor will just be really advising that major and then maybe careers that line up with that, versus pre-health or what used to be pre-professional advising. We're talking about really future planning. What does it mean to be competitive for these ...

For the professional schools. What's the application look like? How do you get ready for those big exams like MCAT or DAT?

Jesse: Got you. So, I'm sure you've run into scenarios when a student gets in over their head and ends up coming in to you in a panic. When would you suggest that a student seek out academic advising to avoid a case like this, and should students be meeting with advisors on a regular basis?

Kate: Yeah. So, we definitely suggest for students to be meeting with advisors regularly. We suggest about once a semester if they can just to be kind of checking in, making sure that they're still on track with all of the things that they need to be doing and that there haven't been changes with classes or requirements or anything like that. But, even with that suggestions, yeah, we definitely still have students that come to us with kind of emergencies.

Kate: Really, there isn't anything that's a real academic emergency other than like sometimes students will be coming up right against the deadline for something. So, definitely I would suggest just trying to think ahead as much as possible, making sure that you're aware of drop deadlines and deadlines for applying to graduation, things like that. Also, you can make a four-year plan for your classes far ahead of time if you want. So, if you're a new student starting out, you can come in, and we can make a plan for you for your classes for all four years. Then, hopefully, as long as you follow that plan, you wouldn't run into any emergencies.

Kate: But, yeah, just try to think ahead as much as possible, because it can be a little bit tough to get in for appointments really quickly sometimes. So, if you're right up against the deadline, then you may not be able to get in that day or anything like that.

Jesse: Got you. That's actually a good segue to my next question. So, what are the busiest times of the year for the advising office, and do you have any advice for students on how to avoid the advising rush?

Kaitlin: It definitely goes up and down. We just finished summer orientation for the most part, so that's a really busy time for us. We'll see 50 to 60 students in our college a day typically throughout the summer. So, we finished that. That is from June to mid-July.

Kaitlin: Then what's coming up is the first week in August ... Or, sorry, the first week of classes in August. When students want to make last-minute changes to their schedules, that will be a pretty hectic time. So, we're going to be doing walk-in advising during that point. Students can stop by during that time, but if they really want to do a one-on-one appointment, then they would want to wait until after that first week of courses. Then they could come in and make a regular 30-minute appointment.

Kaitlin: That also happens again in the spring. Spring semester starts up, first week of classes, that's going to be pretty hectic. Then we will do additional walk-ins throughout the semester, but it's really open enrollment time. So, it's around mid-March it opens back

up for students to enroll for their following fall and spring classes. That's when it gets really hectic when people are trying to make those changes.

Kaitlin: Really just try to look for our appointment times. We open up two weeks in advance every Monday morning. So, if they don't see anything, that doesn't mean we have no open appointments. It's just probably full at that point. So, if they look out every Monday morning, they should be able to get an appointment.

Jesse: So, student needs, academic, or pre-professional advising ... How do they go about scheduling an appointment for that?

Kate: There's actually a website that all of the advisors across campus use, and the web address for that is just msu.campus.eab.com. That link is also posted all over the place. So, if they go on our pre-health website, and then click on advising, then there's a link for schedule an appointment. That'll take you straight to the website where you can look up each of our schedules to find out when we have availability.

Jesse: Kaitlin, you also mentioned that you guys have the drop-in appointments. So, how often do those occur throughout the semester, and kind of typically what happens during those drop-in appointments?

Kaitlin: Yeah, so they are going to be shorter appointments. We're going to do them starting in the fall. We have that first week of classes where it's all all-day each day during that time we'll be doing walk-ins. But after that first week ... I think it's around after September 5th. We're going to be doing Mondays and Thursdays in the afternoons for walk-in appointments. These are typically 15 minutes. So, really quick questions. We try to focus them more around scheduling questions. If it starts to get more into the pre-health advising information, we'll say, "Okay, maybe schedule a 30-minute appointment, a little bit longer."

Kaitlin: Again, for fall and spring, it'll be Mondays and Thursdays in the afternoons we'll have them posted. A lot of people mix it up, and they think it's Monday through Thursday, and it's just those two dates. We try to do Monday and Thursday to give students opportunities to come in depending on their schedule. But students can also email us as well if they had quick questions. If they can't come in and see us, we typically can handle those questions through email or phone call.

Jesse: In closing, is there any additional information about advising that you would like to share with our listeners?

Kaitlin: One thing I always say is the first ... Because we're going to have a lot going on on campus the first week of classes and everything, so if they can get out, start getting involved, go to a few different club meetings ... The sooner you start getting involved, I feel like the more comfortable you'll get on campus. You'll start creating a really strong friend group, and it'll really help you just be more successful while you're here on campus.

Kate: Yeah, definitely getting involved outside of class is good. And that's one thing that we can help with in advising appointments too. So, it's not just about scheduling classes but coming in to talk about other opportunities and things you might want to get involved in.

Kate: One other kind of suggestion or tip I would just say is make sure that you're reading your emails, checking your emails, and reading any instructions or notifications that you're getting through that, because that can help prevent things from coming up at the last minute or you being confused about something. A lot of times, you can find the answers to some questions in emails that you may have gotten.

Kaitlin: Yeah. One last thing too. Something that we've been struggling with are no-shows in our office. We had over 300 people basically just not show up for their appointment, and that prevents other students from coming in for their appointment. So, if you can't make it, try to cancel ahead of time just to open up that slot for other students to be able to come in.

Jesse: And you can do that through the same website that you set up the appointment too?

Kaitlin: Exactly, yeah. When you sign up for an appointment through that system, you will get an email notification that you did sign up and I think a text, and you'll get a notification, too, like a reminder that today's your appointment. So, there shouldn't be any reason to miss it, but if you need to, things come up, just try to cancel beforehand.

Jesse: Well, Kate, Kaitlin, thank you for taking the time to sit down with me.

Kaitlin: Thank you.

Kate: Yeah, thank you.

Jesse: Thanks again to Kaitlin and Kate for providing that valuable advice and information. Coming up next, I sit down and talk with student success.

Jesse: I'm here with Sue Stoltzfus, the student success advisor in the College of Natural Science. Sue, welcome to the podcast.

Sue: Hi. Thank you.

Jesse: Also, a big kudos to you for coming in over your summer vacation.

Sue: I'm happy to do it.

Jesse: So, your work schedule kind of follows the academic year, correct? You are technically on a summer vacation then.

Sue: I am. I'm here from mid-August until mid-May.

Jesse: As a student success advisor, can you give our listeners a brief summary about what your job entails?

Sue: Brief, probably not. When I talk about student success, oftentimes I say, "Whatever it takes." So, many of my students come in, and they need help with academic topics. For instance, studying or note-taking, test-taking, test anxiety, time management, finding a major.

Sue: I have a lot of students who are looking for interesting classes and classes that will help them develop parts of themselves that they enjoy. For instance, a lot of athletes will come in, and they don't realize they can take KIN classes, which are like phys ed, things to get them up and out and moving, that they can pick up art classes even though they're not an art major, and things like that. So, the academic side is certainly a big portion of it.

Sue: I also do what I call transitional things, particularly for new freshman: finding friends, figuring out where to go, what to do, what kind of classes, dealing with homesickness. I also will connect students to MSU resources, be they financial or health. They're again finding clubs, organizations that support them. Anything we can do to get them off on a right foot at Michigan State.

Jesse: I do have a scenario here that I want to run by you. Let's say I'm incoming freshman to the College of Natural Science. I did really well in high school. I got a really high score on the ACT. And I think the transition to college is going to be a piece of cake. Midterms hit for the fall semester, and I find that I might not be ... I might not have been taking classes as seriously as what I should have been based on some of my course grades. So, as a student success advisor, what could you do to help me in this scenario?

Sue: You know, I think the first thing I'd do is triage. The student comes in, we meet one-on-one, and we discuss what happened. For some students, it's just a case of learning how to study more efficiently, managing their time, learning about D2L and how to assess their own progress and evaluate where they are. Some students have homesickness. So, it really is just figuring out what the problem was and what changes to make. Getting them in the office is the first step.

Jesse: As a student success advisor, is there a common theme or scenario that you kind of see repeat with students each semester when they come in looking for your help?

Sue: I would say that there's two. The first one, and probably the biggest one, is time management. Most of us had somebody wake us up in the morning, and we knew when we had to be at school. The coach told us when practice was, and the counselor told us when our applications were due. The teachers told us when everything was due. So, when you come to Michigan State, there's a lot less structure, and there's a lot more temptations. So, students don't often know how much time they need to put in in order to be successful, and many of them don't know what to do with that time. Then there's the ones who don't know how to carve that kind of time out of their schedule. So, time management's the first one.

Sue: The second one I would classify as change in expectations. They're going to go into classes where they have two tests, and that's your whole grade. So, they don't really know what to do to be prepared because they're not getting that continuous feedback. And the feedback they get is different. So, instead of having a lot of homework that counts for points, they now have low or no stakes homework, and then they don't know whether to take it seriously or what to do with it or how to use it. They're not used to online feedback like discussion boards or chat rooms or things like that.

Sue: They're really afraid of office hours. So, going in and meeting with a professor or even a TA or a ULA is very difficult, and that's one of the most important things that they can do. Most of the students don't know how to calculate their own grade. They don't know how to track their progress. So, even if they are doing the homework and they are participating, they don't know what that means.

Sue: Many students think they can memorize rather than understanding. They don't know how to study. I have students come in, and they say, "Well, I got good grades in high school, so I'm a good student." Well, no. A good student is one who knows how to study, not necessarily one who earns grades. I don't mean to make it sound like this is a big flaw. It's just something they've never had to do. So, studying is a good thing to learn.

Sue: Many students come in thinking that they need to check the box. "I got this class. I got this credit. Yay me." As opposed to really understanding and owning the material and engaging with it. This is especially true in courses that they either don't like or courses that they don't see why they need. They don't know what the connection is to the material. So, they've got to change their expectations and learn how to deal with that.

Jesse: So, those are the big two then that you see.

Sue: Those are the big two, yes.

Jesse: So, what students ... I'm going to start over. What student success resources are available for students, and how can they find out more about them?

Sue: I often send students to our website, natsci.msu.edu. Go to current students, and under current students, you go to the student success resources. They change frequently. As I learn more, as I read more, as more things become available on campus, I post them there. So, I always have that open for every session, and we talk about what's there and how to use it.

Sue: They can also come in and meet with me individually. There's a form they can fill out on the webpage, or they can just email me directly through that. That's the best way to get in. Advisors. All of the NatSci advisors know how to get ahold of me. Many of them include my information in their emails so they can get to students and come in and do that. There are some resources on the neighborhood webpage, but those change frequently, and I confess I don't always keep up with the changes as they come through.

- Jesse: So, even if a student doesn't happen to come across the student success resources on the site, if they happen to meet with an advisor, an advisor will also pass along the information about that as well?
- Sue: Absolutely. Absolutely. I don't really care what their major is. So, I work with students from other colleges, from other disciplines. I'm happy to do that. I will confess that most of my examples, most of the work I do, is for science and math, but it's so readily applicable to other disciplines that I'm comfortable talking to students about those kinds of things.
- Jesse: And if you do happen to go in for a meeting with her, she also has a really nice jar of candy, so ...
- Sue: Which I stuff anew at the beginning of the school year. So, come and see what's in the candy jar.
- Jesse: In closing, do you have an additional advice for students on how to be successful in their academic career that you haven't already covered?
- Sue: A lot of students come in with an expectation of what they want their major to be or their career, and it's not always based on who they are. I have students who come and they say, "Oh, I really like my science classes; therefore, I need to be a doctor or an engineer." And there's so many things you can do in the sciences that are not medicine or engineering. I have students who come in with family expectations or community expectations, and it's not really who they are or what they want to be.
- Sue: So, to be successful in college, one of the first things to do is land in an area that appeals to you. I frequently tell students, "You could go to medical school with any major, any, any major." I have art majors who are planning to go to medical school, and sociology majors. You don't have to be a science major. And we can talk about that a lot more, but many students find that the difficulty they're having in their classes is that they really don't want to be in that major. When they find the major they like, then everything falls together for them.
- Sue: So, get help. Get help soon. Connect with your advisor. Come in and talk to me. Talk to the people in career services. But the more quickly you can connect with Michigan State, the happier you're going to be here.
- Jesse: Perfect. Well, again, thank you for coming in and sitting down with me.
- Sue: Thank you for having me.
- Jesse: Yeah.

Jesse: Thanks again to Sue for coming in on her summer vacation, but she's back in the office now, so be sure to reach out to her if you're in need of any assistance. Coming up next, my interview with career services.

Jesse: I'm here with Brian Telfor, career consultant for the College of Natural Science. Brian, welcome to the podcast.

Brian: Hi, Jesse. Thank you.

Jesse: As a career consultant, can you give our listeners a brief summary about what your job entails?

Brian: Sure. What I'm involved in doing here at the college is helping students identify what types of career goals they're interested in, helping them to set up a career plan with some action steps and how do they get to that career. Some of our students want to know things about what types of career resources are available to get those objectives achieved, those types of things. That's what we're all about here.

Jesse: I know one of the things you're passionate about, and I know this because I worked with you on setting up a section of the NatSci website for it, is effectively communicating your skills. Can you talk a little bit about why this is important for students to do as they seek out employment opportunities?

Brian: Sure. I also teach a class here on campus every fall for career development for specifically our STEM students, science and health related students. One of the things we've found over the years factually to be true is that, although the students are pretty intelligent with respect to what they know about their career maybe, or maybe they even know they're good at a particular area in the career, they're not very good at always communicating those skills to other people. Where that becomes a very serious problem is employers are expecting the students to be able to identify and articulate what types of skills they have and how those skills are relevant with respect to what the career involves.

Brian: We do plenty of data collection on this, but our students ... Although they're very bright, and they've got ... Many of them have great GPAs, and they're going to medical school or PhD programs or that type of thing. They really are challenged when it comes to how can you talk about those skills. How can you explain those skills to where they're relevant to that employer's needs? That's where they usually drop the ball quite a bit.

Brian: So, what we've developed over the past few years is opportunities and resources to help our students identify and more effectively communicate their skillsets to employers on their personal statement, on their resume, et cetera, so that the employer, the professional program, the med school program ... They can get a much better understanding of what that student is gifted with as far as skills and their ability to carry out those skills. We've got that on our website, on our College of Natural Science website, under career resources, how to more effectively identify and communicate your skillsets for getting to where you want to go to.

Jesse: You just mentioned some of those resources, but what other resources does NatSci offer to help students when it comes to finding employment?

Brian: Sure. We've got everything from beginning of ... Just students saying, "I'm not sure what I want to do with this degree," or maybe, "I'm not even sure I want this degree. What do I do? What are some options for me?" Basically, that center's around what we call establishing your purpose. How do we know this is relevant for you? How do we know it's important for you as far as achieving your professional goals? How can you do it? We've got those resources available here through either the College of Natural Science, our career services setup page, or Handshake, which is our platform, our social network platform or all MSU students.

Brian: On the Handshake platform, there's a listing of various types of resources available, and those include more specifically resume development, how to develop a resume, how to develop a cover letter. Maybe students are struggling with how to communicate effectively what they're about or why they're interested in a particular job. How to look for employers, how to look for internships, how to secure internships. Maybe they're wanting to go to graduate school or professional programs. How to build up a social network with respect to maybe using social media platforms such as LinkedIn or Handshake to connect with those goals in mind.

Brian: So, we're there to be supportive and assist students with, again, like I said, not only identifying what they want to do but also looking at surrounding areas as far as action steps and to completing those goals.

Jesse: If a student would like to set up an appointment with a career consultant, what is the best way to do so?

Brian: The best way for a student to set up an appointment with us is just simply go to the career services page on Handshake. So, that could be accessed through careernetwork.msu.edu, and there's plenty of step-by-step information there, plenty of filters available for finding out everything as simple as saying, "I'm not really sure what I want to do. How do I make that initial appointment with a general career consultant?" We've got plenty of schedules available for students to come in.

Brian: We've also got drop-in times. So, if a student is kind of tough with classes, getting things done, and they're busy, we've got 10-minute drop-in times where they can just have a simple resume review, something simple like that. If they want to make an actual, formal appointment, again, through the Handshake platform, all they need to do is click on the link that says schedule a Handshake career advising appointment, and they can do that without any problem.

Jesse: In closing, do you have any additional advice for students seeking employment opportunities?

Brian: I would say one of the biggest comments I would like to make is that it's not too early. It's never too early to lay out some action steps of what you want to do, how you want

to do it. Maybe general questions such as, "What if I don't want to do this particular career? What are some of my options?" In our college, for example, we have many students who start off with a pre-med goal or career option, and then they turn around and say, "You know what? I'm not sure I want to do that. I'm not sure I want to be a doctor anymore. What do I do? What are some options for that?"

Brian: Those are all perfectly understandable. They're perfectly acceptable and natural questions for students to be asking. So, we just ask that students get connected with career services. Get connected with us, excuse me, even to just help you do an initial assessment of "Am I on the right track? Am I maximizing my resources? How can I get assistance with these resource areas?" We're here to help you with all of that, and we definitely want to make sure that you're making really good progress in all those areas.

Jesse: Brian, thanks for taking the time for sitting down with me.

Brian: Thank you, Jesse.

Jesse: Thanks again to Brian. And, as he said, it's never too early to start thinking about your career. So, be sure to make sure of all the resources at your disposal. Coming up next, my interview with alumni relations.

Jesse: So, I'm here with Sara Ford. She's the alumni coordinator for the College of Natural Science. Sara, welcome to the podcast.

Sara: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Jesse: As the alumni coordinator, can you give our listeners a brief summary about what your job entails?

Sara: Sure. So, my job is to represent all 48,000 alumni that we have for the college. I help with all of our 29 programs and departments, support their department chairs and program directors with reaching out to their alumni. I help provide mailing lists and updated contact information to all the programs so that they can reach out. I also help plan events, usually around Homecoming and end-of-the-year awards programs and stuff like that. I also do a lot of event planning for the college and also just bigger alumni events that we help out with here. Then I help disseminate our e-newsletter, which comes out four times a year. And I help oversee the Dean's Research Scholar program.

Jesse: So, you mentioned the Dean's Research Scholar program. Can you talk a little bit more about what that program is?

Sara: Sure. Our Dean's Research Scholar program is made up of 10 undergraduate students whose majors are in the College of Natural Science and they are also conducting undergraduate research. We have a panel of alumni who interview these students after they apply. We usually get about 50 or 55 applicants every year. Then, we narrow it down to 10 students. The 10 students then are given a little bit of a scholarship money.

Sara: Then they come up with a presentation that is on their research that we kind of help them vet and make it easier for people who don't have a background in science to understand. Then we take these students with us on the road and to different events all over. We have them talk about the opportunities that they get from scholarships, what this undergraduate research means to them. They talk about their life on campus, where they live, where they come from, why they chose Michigan State. It's a really great program. We also use them to speak at some of our events too.

Jesse: One of your responsibilities as the alumni coordinator is to organize events for alumni. What are some of the biggest events that you organize each year, and can you talk a little bit about each one?

Sara: Sure. We have two really big events that we do every year. They take place in April. So, the first one is our alumni awards ceremony, which, this next year, it will be on Friday, April 24th of 2020. That is a dinner that we give awards to our meritorious faculty award-winner and our outstanding alumni award-winner and our recent alumni award-winner.

Sara: So, these are all people who are nominated from alumni or faculty, and then we have a panel that selects the winner. The recent alumni award winner is somebody who is under the age of 35, an then outstanding alumni is anybody who is alum from the college. Then meritorious faculty is a faculty member that's nominated by alumni.

Sara: We also give out awards to some undergraduate and graduate student scholarships, and then we also welcome our new cohort of Dean's Research Scholars and then kind of send off our current cohort. It's a big dinner. We have a lot of alumni who come back and help support the current students and other alumni that are there.

Sara: Then the next morning, we have an event called Classes Without Quizzes, and that will be on Saturday, April 25th this next year. That includes about four or five faculty from the college who will give TEDx style talks on their research. So, we try to have them give these great, elaborate research presentations but add a level that anybody would be able to understand. We also have our Dean's Research Scholars who will, this next year, be giving some mini presentations on their own research.

Sara: We have alumni from all over. Usually we have somebody from Texas and Wisconsin, all over, that come back for it. So, we get about 100 people that come back every year for it.

Jesse: And you also get free ice cream passes to the Dairy Store.

Sara: Yeah, you do get ... That's a big draw. You get free passes to the Dairy Store, and sometimes they order a couple extra, so we like to give those away.

Jesse: Okay. So, in closing, how can upcoming graduates or recent graduates stay connected with the college?

Sara: There's a lot of ways that people can stay connected with the college. One of the biggest ones is on our website we have an update contact information. So, we can't reach you if we don't have good contact information. Address and email are really important. Also, to connect with us on social media and on LinkedIn. Our communications group does a great job of posting really great articles.

Sara: Then, also, if you don't live in the East Lansing area, we have a huge network of regional clubs all over, even internationally. So, get on our website and check out where you're moving to or you're currently living, and they do lots of game watches and volunteer opportunities within the community. It's really great. So, a lot of good ways to stay connected.

Jesse: Sounds good. Sara, thanks for your time.

Sara: Thank you.

Jesse: Thanks again to Sara for sitting down with me. Be sure to visit natsci.msu.edu/alumni for more information. Coming up next in our last interview segment I sit down with the advancement office.

Jesse: So, I'm here with Karen Wenk from the advancement office in the College of Natural Science. Karen, welcome to the podcast.

Karen: Thanks. It's great to be here.

Jesse: You have the title of associate director of development. Can you give our listeners a brief summary about what your job entails?

Karen: My title is associate director, but really it means that I'm one of the fundraisers. There are three of us that work on behalf of the college raising funds and getting alumni involved.

Jesse: So, I've dubbed this episode of the podcast the back-to-school edition, so much of the content has been student-focused, which I imagine is not traditionally your core demographic when it comes to giving. For the students listening to this right now, can you explain why supporting the college is so important, touch on some of the things that gifts have made possible for the college, and more specifically how these gives have impacted the students?

Karen: Basically, I look at it as, until we can give every student a full ride scholarships and every faculty member an endowed position, I need to keep working on behalf of the college. The alumni that I meet with ... Many of them want to support the university philanthropically, and I work with them to figure out what exactly is the perfect thing for them to give to. Some of them want to create scholarships for undergraduates or fellowships for graduate students. Sometimes they want to support a particular program, or they might want to support a kind of research. Or they might just want to set up some sort of enhancement fund to benefit the college in some way.

Karen: So, I partner with folks to make their dreams come true so that students ultimately can be helped in some way, shape, or form, whether it's directly through a scholarship or a fellowship, or we're getting rockstar faculty to come to hold endowed positions, or providing more support for their department so that there's just more resources for maybe extra programming or lectureships or equipment or any of that. But, ultimately, my work and the work of many other fundraisers of the university is going to benefit students in some way, shape, or form.

Jesse: When it comes to giving, my brain immediately goes to thinking about the large donations that some wealthy alumni give. Could you tell our listeners more about the smaller gifts that you receive, what they help fund, and what impact they have on the college?

Karen: Okay. So, any time someone decides to donate anywhere within the university, they get to pick how they want to direct their gift. Just because I might want to fundraise for a particular department doesn't mean that you have to give your gift there. It's wherever you want to direct it. I get overwhelmed, well, intimidated by those gigantic gifts as well. It's sometimes just hard for me to believe that people can make six, seven, and eight figure gifts and not have to change their lifestyles. But there are people that can do that, and we're very grateful for their help, but there are very few of those people.

Karen: If we have 550,000 alumni and what we call friends, so people that aren't necessarily alumni of MSU but they want to support MSU in some way. So, there are 550,000 people throughout the world. There's a small percentage of folks that give back anything. So, I think, you know, even if everyone gave back \$10, it would make a huge impact.

Karen: One of the things we haven't done well is to create a culture of people giving back throughout their lifetimes. Man, when you graduate, more times than not, you have some sort of debt. So, I get it. You aren't in a financial position where you can gift money to MSU or probably anywhere else. But, at some point, can you give \$25? Can you give \$50? Could you do that most years? Really, our best donors to the university started giving a dollar, like in the 1950s, but they've given every year, and it really adds up and it really makes a difference.

Karen: I often share this story about John Hannah who was president here. I think it was 28 years, but everyone knows his name. He was so visionary in so many ways for the university. I mean, you can look around campus and see some of the major impacts he made. But he fundamentally did not believe in private philanthropy. He was very fortunate in that he could literally go down the street to the capital and say to the legislators, "This is how much money we need for next year," and they would say, "Okay," and give it to him. So, 80% of the money that we got to run the university came from the State of Michigan.

Karen: Well, now, it's flipped. Less than 15% of our money comes from the State of Michigan, and I don't see that getting better any time soon. So, even though we're a state-supported institution, we're never going to be able to get away from having private

support. When people give to the university, it creates this foundation that buffers us when there's ups and downs in the economy. So, again, if you could just think about "Could I give \$10? Could I give \$25?" Make that a habit like we have other financial habits in our lives. Again, not everyone's going to be able to give big, big gifts, but if everyone gave something, we'd be in a much better spot.

Jesse: If a listener were so inclined to make a gift, what is the best way for them to do so?

Karen: Probably the easiest way to make a gift is to actually go online and go to the College of Natural Science website, which is at natsci.msu.edu. That's N-A-T-S-C-I dot M-S-U dot E-D-U. In the upper right hand corner, there's a button that says give now. So, you can just click on that, and it will take you to a place where you can make a credit card gift and to designate where you'd like your gift to go. It's easy.

Jesse: In closing, is there any additional information about advancement or the gift-giving process you would like to share with our listeners?

Karen: I just would like to encourage folks to consider it, now or in the future. MSU does so many wonderful things that, if you really love this place, just think about making an impact that will last for generations.

Jesse: Karen, thank you for your time.

Karen: Thanks for having me.

Jesse: Thanks again to Karen for joining me on this episode. For more information on giving, be sure to visit natsci.msu.edu/giving. Coming up next to close out the podcast some helpful advice for incoming freshman straight from the mouths of NatSci students.

Jesse: So, a number of months ago we solicited feedback online from NatSci students on helpful advice that they could provide to incoming freshman. We received quite a bit of feedback, and, after going through the list, we were able to narrow it down to our top 20. So, in no particular order, and all of the comments here are anonymous, here is our top 20 list.

Jesse: Tip #1: Don't be afraid to get involved and talk to new people, because you never know what kind of friend you can meet. Also, get involved in your major early and start looking for internships and research right away so you're not scrambling at the last minute.

Jesse: Tip #2: Go to office hours. Talk to other students in the class. Make time to make friends. Check that you can get to your classes on time. Meet with your advisors to make sure your schedule is on the right track. Know that you are capable of learning here at MSU. Check for university-related scholarships. Know your program requirements. And use the job fairs and internships and job shadows as ways to explore your future.

- Jesse: Tip #3: Become more aware of services and resources that the university offers. For example, the student service building offers free printing and blue books, which isn't really advertised much.
- Jesse: Tip #4: If you're living in the dorms, the first couple of weeks will be hot, so bring lots of fans.
- Jesse: Tip #5: Go to office hours. Plan out time to study before your week starts so you don't fall behind. Start studying for finals early.
- Jesse: Tip #6: Visit your academic advisor often and discuss how you are going to divide your coursework along the entire degree program.
- Jesse: Tip #7: Sit in the front and answer questions in class. You'll see the notes better, and the professor will have a better chance of remembering your name and face.
- Jesse: Tip #8: Make a plan for your schedule. Then, go see an advisor.
- Jesse: Tip #9: To help you understand the material, read the book. Complete practice problems and watch YouTube videos. If none of this works, go to office hours or help room.
- Jesse: Tip #10: Use your combo every day at Sparty's to stock up on snacks. Find a means of exercise you enjoy. Don't pull all-nighters to cram. Make friends in your classes to study and share notes.
- Jesse: Tip #11: Read the syllabus for each class. It's not fun, but it has a lot of important information.
- Jesse: Tip #12: Stay on top of things even if that means a checklist, a planner, even putting it in your phone. Don't let yourself get behind or have assignments sneak up on you. If you do it, it's a downward spiral.
- Jesse: Tip #13: The library has an amazing online catalog of resources, which means you have access to thousands of books straight from your computer.
- Jesse: Tip #14: Take advantage of career services and other on-campus resources. Many of these go unused and are extremely beneficial to student success.
- Jesse: Tip #15, with three exclamation points, says go to the library.
- Jesse: Tip #16: I wish I would have known how important it was to seek help, whether it's going to office hours, help rooms, et cetera. If you are struggling with a class, go get help.

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Jesse: Tip #17: If you want to get into research, start to email any professors that you want to work with as early as you can. You can do so as a volunteer or as credit, and, if you're lucky, you can get paid for working in the lab.

Jesse: Tip #18: Get to know the professors. Attend any social things like coffee hours to make yourself known, and it's never too early to start lab work.

Jesse: Tip #19: Utilize your resources from the start. There are so many resources available across campus and in your own neighborhood for your convenience that they make a world of difference if you utilize them.

Jesse: And last, but not least, tip #20: Rent your textbooks if at all possible. Find a few good study spots you know can help you focus, and color coordinating your classes can help keep your notes and homework organized.

Jesse: That is going to wrap up the first episode of the NatSci Chronicles. If you would like to support this podcast, please subscribe and rate us wherever you get your favorite podcasts. Be sure to also visit us on the web at natsci.msu.edu/podcasts where, in addition to this podcast, you can also find our other podcast, the NatSci News Rewind.

Jesse: If you'd like to keep in touch with us on social, you can find us on Twitter at [msunatsci](#), on Facebook at [msucns](#), on Instagram at [msunatsci](#), on YouTube at [msunaturalsciences](#), and, on LinkedIn, search for Michigan State University College of Natural Science. You can also stay up to date between podcast episodes in everything that is happening at NatSci by visiting our website at natsci.msu.edu.

Jesse: Thanks again for tuning in, and remember, making a difference ... It's in our DNA.