

Barrett Oral History Project
Interview with Alexandra Aragon
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Primary Interviewer: Shale Brenner
Notetaker: Joshua Pardhe

BRENNER: All right. Hello. This is Shale Brenner and Joshua Pardhe interviewing Alexander Aragon on February 15th at 10:43am in the Honors Hall advising offices. This interview is part of the Barrett Oral History project. Our goal is to preserve a record of Barrett's history in honor of our thirtieth anniversary. Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us and share your experience. All right, so just to kind of kick things off. How about you just say: how did you come to Barrett?

ARAGON: Absolutely! I started working here in 2008. I was pretty new to Arizona, I had lived here about a year and my undergraduate experience was at Fordham University [*in New York City*], which is a small liberal arts school. I was really drawn to Barrett it because I felt like it was mimicking that small, private experience in the context of a larger university and I really wanted to work with students, so I was fortunate to be hired in as academic adviser for the college.

BRENNER: So, you had been in Arizona for about a year- I did a little bit of research on you- so I know this was after you did Teach for America for a year out of college and then this is your first job after that? Correct?

ARAGON: Yes. So, I was actually a fundraiser for Teacher America, so I wasn't teaching in the core. I was helping them secure funding to support the Phoenix region. And I had just finished a master's degree in counseling and higher education, so I had worked as a graduate student, but this was my second job out of college and, you know, really the start of my career in higher education.

BRENNER: So how would you say that helps you with your advising experience to move up towards being now the head of advising?

ARAGON: Yeah, absolutely. I began as a front-line advisor and we were a much smaller office. We were actually still in the old Barrett complex, so we hadn't even moved to this new facility. And I had a very large caseload of almost seven hundred students. Then I was part of a period of tremendous growth. So, after my first year as a new advisor, I was expected to train and mentor new advisors that came in. So, I really had to think about how I had learned the elements of the job, how I could help others understand our role, and then just how we were going to scale the experience up as we were able to grow. So, over the years, I took on a lot of special projects- managing our thesis process, doing things with the website, working faculty, internships at one point- I mean, I was just really lucky to do a lot of different side projects. So, as I progressed in leadership, it's been really important to me that now that I supervise others, I really understand what their job is because I've done it myself and I still advise students, even in this role. So, I'm still a part of what I'm supervising, and I love working with students, so that brings me joy to

keep doing it. But I think it helps me be a legitimate leader because they also working alongside my team. What I asked them to do I'm accepting myself to do as well.

BRENNER: Awesome. Okay. And then so you talked a little bit about how you had different projects you were doing. Could you maybe talk about and you know what became of some of them?

ARAGON: Yeah, so one in particular was our thesis workshop. So historically, we had put on workshops just as an additional opportunity for students that they weren't required. So, with feedback from our faculty honors advisors, we actually instituted a policy that all students would be required to complete a thesis workshop before they could progress into enrolling in hours and because we knew would not necessarily be able to offer enough in person opportunities to meet that demand, we had to create an online version of that, and so that was a project that I took on. We created the Blackboard course, and I was in charge of making sure we had videos. So just all of the production management that went into that- the scripts, the location, recruiting individuals, helping with the editing process- and I'm really excited because actually, just this past summer, with the move over to Canvas (ASU is moving away from Blackboard), we completely redid the whole workshop. There're new videos. There're new materials, we had feedback from students, so it's a little more streamlined. But you have something that I had been involved with a really long time ago kind of came full circle this past year when we renewed it, so to speak.

BRENNER: Okay, that's really cool. So, I know you've been here for like ten years now. What are some of the changes you've seen, or even overseen? If you could talk about any of those...

ARAGON: Definitely. I mean, one kind of significant change is just overall tracking. So, when I first arrived, we did not have a DARS [*Degree Audit Report System*] report for honors. I think it's easy to take that for granted now that the degree audit system is, you know, available for every major and that's available to honor students. So, we were actually tracking honors credits in Excel spreadsheets. So, every single student had an Excel spreadsheet that we would manually update, and it obviously didn't speak to a system. We never knew what students were up to until the end of the semester when we would look at their transcripts and then manually input- and it took all summer just to even update people's credit sheets. So, the students really had to rely on the advisers- and obviously some students, I think, were savvy enough to have their own tracking systems- but there was just a lot of uncertainty about honors credits and then that meant we weren't doing a great job of reporting forecasting. So, a huge change that's occurred is that we were approved by the university to participate in DARS. We had a DARS encoder dedicated to honors as part of some of her other responsibilities. We have the honors audit. It captures lower and upper division credits. And now we're even at a point where, due to the automation, when people have hit all of their honors milestones, they're automatically processed for graduation. So, it's a lot of behind the scenes work when it's really reduced kind of manual effort and considering how large we've grown. I mean, it was just essential that we kind of get with the times and use the technology available.

BRENNER: Yeah. No, I always use the DARS.

ARAGON: Good. I'm glad it's helpful.

BRENNER: And I like that there's the upper division DARS, because I entered as upper division. So, okay, so you talked a little bit about some of the changes. How would you maybe like to see Barrett change further in the future? The next thirty years?

ARAGON: Yeah. Oh my gosh, absolutely. Um I mean, I think that, you know, in terms of advising specifically, we want to keep personalizing the experience as much as possible. You know, really knowing the students continue to be creative about ways that we deliver our services. Like right now, we're kind of tied to a pretty traditional model of an office that functions eight to five. But we've started to look at things like group advising for second year students because that's a little bit of a more unique experience. I've actually been running some of those groups as kind of an experiment, and they've gone really well. I think that we could do more even with, like, virtual office hours, or just like some participation over technology. I would never want to replace that in person component, but like just accessibility with quick questions. Right now, we have a walk-in model, which we're proud of because we're open all day for people to drop in. But once again, that's just 8 to 5. So, I think expanding on that somehow would be interesting. I definitely want to see, like continued collaboration with faculty and staff, just in general, like you know, knowledge about what each party is doing. And like, for instance, I think it'd be interesting if a study abroad trip, for instance, had a faculty member and maybe an advisor who helped, like chaperone or run trip logistics, or even like, you know, did advising abroad with the students. That could be just a fun way for people to take advantage of the resources but in a different setting. And then I think just always our partnership with the university. You know, we hold a really special place within ASU. I think it's easy at a university of this size to feel kind of territorial. Everyone's really concerned with their college with what goes on and, you know, really need position that our students are in every college. So, I know in my role I actually feel like very personally invested in every college. I want to know how they're doing. I want them to be thriving. I think that they care about us, but it isn't always that same like level of investment because they're doing their own thing. And I'd really like to see this as more united, like "Oh, you know, we want to know how our Barrett students are doing in relation to the college," and, you know, we want to be kind of going back and forth a little bit more.

BRENNER: So, I actually read a short interview you did somewhat recently, and the one thing you talked about was how, like there it was an extremely unique sort of honors experience because you could study two totally different fields and you wouldn't be able to do that anywhere else.

ARAGON: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think that can really come out in the thesis in particular. That's another kind of dream of mine. I think going along with the college is that we would see a lot more pathways to the thesis will never want to lose that ability for students to have a unique experience like this is my idea, very specific project that I've been working on since high school, and, you know, I want to follow that passion. But for a lot of people, a huge stumbling block is that they really don't know what they want to do, or they feel like there's really no process to follow because it's extremely open ended, and I would just love to see more colleges and faculty say, you know, "This is something that we're working on. This is a very specific pathway. You apply to it, you follow these steps, and at the end you have a thesis that you produced," and that it benefits maybe that college get helps them, write a grant, or it helps with a center that they have so that there would be like a mutually beneficial exchange, but that our students would feel

like they were following a program. I think that would just make some of them feel more secure and will probably help us see, like a higher level of completion overall.

PARDHE: You mentioned accessibility that the office runs from and has the set time period.

ARAGON: Yes,

PARDHE: Barrett is unique in that almost all the honor students live on campus, like right here, just outside this building and across the street in Vista. How do you as the director of advising now see that as a benefit for students when they are pursuing their academic career in Barrett, The Honors College?

ARAGON: Absolutely. I mean, I think just the fact you know living on campus in and of itself is hugely beneficial. There's a lot of research that shows that that just lead to higher success rates on the fact that we're in a complex. I think you know, they're able to access advising offices as well as the staff and Dean's. But just even having that smaller community of you might not know every person in Barrett but it's small enough that people look familiar, that it does feel like its own neighborhood. I think, when I was in college, the whole university felt that way. So, it's essentially the size of Barrett on, and it was in the middle of the Bronx and we were in New York City, but we had our own kind of island. And when I left college and actually moved into Manhattan, I was struck with how lonely that was, like I hadn't really appreciated it, that when I was a student and I left my dorm, people were smiling at me. They were waving to me, obviously, like little York City, that's actually not necessarily like common behavior. So, I think our students, even if they don't realize, are benefiting just from that social network that occurs here. But then I know I was talking to a business student recently, like you can strike up conversations and because people are from different disciplines it could also be like an academic network or an entrepreneurial network where these are really bright people and the idea is that whatever people end up doing or pursuing, they're going to tap into the network that started kind of like organically here in Barrett.

PARDHE: For study abroad programs, how do you think that benefits students? Like, what experiences do students gain from study abroad programs that make Barrett so unique compared to, like, just say, issue in general and another university?

ARAGON: Absolutely. I mean, I think just to start any travel is just a really eye-opening opportunity for students. It's just very important to have that perspective shift of seeing a new place and experiencing a new culture. With the honors trips in particular, the diversity of the student body that participates is probably one of the unique elements. It's not necessarily major specific. And even if the classes are not particularly focused on like a specific discipline, - like oh, these are management courses- they're really rooted in the tradition, the history, the culture of the place. So, they're more focused on the destination, if you will. And I think then, the whole honors experience in theory is designed to then have you weave that back in. So, there would be additional maybe HON courses that you could take, it could influence your thesis directly or indirectly. So that hopefully the requirements of our program, you can actually capitalize on your study abroad to even enrich that further.

PARDHE: So, when you're looking at different honors halls here in Barrett, looking at different colleges, for example, the Fulton schools have Tooker House, which is just for engineering majors. You mentioned that one of the unique aspects of Barrett is that there's multiple disciplines working together. Do you have any input how students are arranged in the honors halls, are they arranged by major, are they arranged by discipline? How does that, like does that benefit study groups and studying and coming back to advising How does that work for the benefit of the student at the end of the day?

ARAGON: Yeah, absolutely. So, I personally am not necessarily holding any weight in these decisions, but I do know that we have some communities here so that there is a business community, engineering and Herberger. But if a particular student that's in that major wishes to be outside of that community they may. So that's significant to me, where it's like, well, you know, I just want to live in housing, but not necessarily in the business community. I want to just be placed with any student. Then, even for those communities, they don't occupy the whole building, so they actually still get to benefit from having a diverse building of others. So, I think, it's kind of both sides, like it is really beneficial when people understand your situation. I think Herberger is a great example of that. It is very stressful for freshman with the milestones that come up and the demands of the studio. I think it's nice that they have each other, but then I know it's a split floor. So, I have another student who's pre-med and she's on that floor and she was actually saying "It is truly like half the floor is Herberger and the other half is CLAS," but they're friends and they talk, and she's just found it really interesting to be around like those artistic people. So, yeah, I've had people of concerns like, "Well, I'm missing out, I'm not in Tooker House." It's not that far, you know. I think if anything, it's good to be stretched like you can still go over there. You can visit, and we want them to visit here, too. It is a two-way street, but it never hurts to meet others who are different from you as well as have that comfort of the familiar. So, I'm glad that we have kind of like a blend basically of both.

PARDE: Going off of that topic, what do you think about the Vista Del Sol Community Center, now that it's a main hub for Barrett students, upper division Barret students? How did that occur and what were the processes behind that, like, once Barrett expanded to start using that facility as upper division?

ARAGON: Yeah, that's a great question. It was a pretty organic process. So, you know, when we initially came over here, the plan was that all of Barrett living would take place here, in the complex. We didn't necessarily know at the time how big we would grow. And Vista was our competition. When students were told "it's a two-year living requirement so it's time to sign up for sophomore year," they would say, "I want to live in an apartment. I want to have a kitchen. I don't want to have a meal plan. I want, you know, kind of that next step" They wanted to go live in Vista, and we weren't affiliated with them. So, it was actually really gratifying the way it worked out to say, "Well, now you can live there because we have this partnership" So I think it's really important that it is different, that it is that apartment style because it's a good experience for people to have. I mean, it's nice that they could still stay on the side if they want to. Actually, I definitely have students that live over there that still have a meal plan, so you can still have that, you know, security blanket if you're not planning on cooking. But I think what I would like to see too is a little bit more back and forth, like the plan is not to have freshman over there at this time. But we do have human event classes and I just think it's really important that

we keep having the first-year students like also engage just to see what it is, but also to have that mentorship because the one concern was, if we really are separated so much, then first year students don't get the benefit of their older peers. So, we're gonna have to just be intentional to make sure that keeps happening, so that it isn't like, totally isolated.

PARDHE: And going back to the time you mentioned that when DARS was introduced to Barrett was super beneficial, I understand that there's a new student services building being built over in the Vista complex. So how do you think that will have an impact on advising of honor students in general?

ARAGON: Absolutely, so despite, you know, our smaller size right now, there is still some sectioning off of certain services. So, the idea behind a student center is that it really does become this one stop shop for everything that needs to occur. So, you have your advising. but you also want to talk about internships, and then you need some career guidance, and then you're going to take, you know, a professional development/leadership course and then we're gonna have you apply for a national scholarship. You don't do all those things in one day, but you also can hang out because there will be just open space as well. So, I look at it almost like an MU. I mean, it is another hub for students, but just that convenience factor. Like I'm in this study group and we're talking about our thesis, and I, like we all have a really specific question. Let's just go upstairs and ask advising and they'll tell us, you know, so just this idea that, uh, the convenience factor and then I think even just for the staff, I mean, it's that much more of a chance to collaborate because people get busy and they try to make meetings. But when you are in the same space, it's more organic that you're having conversations in the hall, you're bumping into each other in and out of work, you're eating lunch together and, like those things do benefit the students. Like when the staff can really work together, that's when the creative stuff happens. That, like, ultimately benefits the students.

BRENNER: So okay, we've talked about a lot of stuff. I still live in Vista as a senior because I think it's convenient. I know you were talking about some of the things maybe like you're not quite in charge of. So, what exactly do you oversee, maybe more specifically?

ARAGON: Yeah, absolutely. So, I oversee academic services. I directly supervise the Tempe Advisors here. So, I help hire them, train them, so I'm definitely overseeing more of our logistical processes. So, when do we offer mandatory advising? When do we put holds on students? How do we communicate with them? How do we implement systems like DARS automation? We've had to make decisions about different tools that we've had built for us. We've got an online scheduling system. That was something I helped, you know, research. We looked at different groups. We had meetings. I had to propose into the dean's because it has a cost associated. Then we had to go through a period of testing. We've recommended changes to the system. So those are things I participated in. I work with the other campuses in kind of an advisory role. So those adviser's report to the associate Dean's, but what we've you know, have a relationship and actually almost all of them at one point worked at Tempe so we were colleagues at a point in time. We're just making sure that we're staying consistent, like they're allowed to have some deviation. So, for instance, West does a little bit more of a group advising model like they have historically. But I want to know that we're all; using the same thesis folders, that we're all adhering to the same contract outlines. And then I just am responsible for pushing out

information, you know, since they are separate, just keeping them in the know, on you know, different things. I meet with the Dean's office, for instance, like we'll talk about course scheduling. So, I'm in charge of the new student orientation, so our dates, I deliver a speech, I help manage the logistics. I've been giving feedback most recently on, like honors sections versus honors contracts. This whole thesis pathway idea. So different areas like that, but I'm directly supervised by the assistant dean of students. So, I mean, really, this is all her area, and I just kind of, you know, support her goals and vision but handle, like, daily operational kind of things. And then another aspect of my job is our partnership with all the other academic units. So once a month there's a big meeting on campus for all heads of advising called AAB- Advisor Administrative Board, and we come together. We give updates and reports. But for me, like I was saying earlier, it's also about relationships, like "How's it going? What's new in your world?" because then when we have a student issue like I want to know, I could pick up the phone and say like, "Hey, Casey from CLAS. Help. We have a shared student." That's definitely something I usually emphasize first, like our student who's a bio major because it *is*. But I think people forget right away. So how can we help our student? And that took a while when I first took the roll as manager. I was replacing someone who was very well established and respected, and it took a while for people to get over, like, "who are you?" you know and start trusting me and seeing that I was reliable and that I would follow through and that I would support them. I remember really clearly early on we had a student who was really upset about a decision that was made in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and wrote something to the effect of like "Barrett will back me up on this" and, you know, I had to come in and say like, you know, I'm really sorry that this is happening, but actually, the decision that was made by CLAS is what we support, because that is the appropriate decision. And I know that meant a lot to them because they were like, "Well, like I really didn't think you would do that" and I was like, well, you made a fair call and obviously, like, I want what's best for this student but in this situation, we do support that. And so how can we kind of come together? So, some of the job, it's just that kind of thing, like meetings and getting out there and stuff like that.

PARDHE: You talked about like coordination of the other departments in Tempe. You know, could you talk more about the coordination between campuses? Because there's four campuses Barrett's part of, and they have now had a major influence across the entire, like Phoenix Tempe metro area. So how does Barrett advising specifically like monitor students as they go across campus with the shuttle system like make sure that everyone's always together towards one same goal.

ARAGON: Yes, great questions. So, our system's track all students. So, when we have reports, for instance, on the status of our students like what year they're in, their honors credits; all of them always show all campuses, and then you can filter out if you're looking at your specific campus. And then we have a shared note system. So, any notes that I put in about my advising interaction could be seen by advisers of all campuses, which really does occur, I think, between Downtown and Tempe the most frequently. Just yesterday, someone who's a journalism student is a Spanish minor here. And she was like, "Well, can I just do my mandatory advising here?" Yeah, absolutely. But it was helpful to see the notes from her downtown person, you know, just to give context. We hold a weekly advising staff meeting Tempe, but the other campuses are invited. They're not expected to physically come, but they can call in or Skype in. They do that if we have guests typically, but if they don't we just send them the meeting minutes as like a best

practice. And then once a semester, all campuses come together. We just rotate where we hold this for, like, a half day, all-advising meeting where we can just catch up with one another. We might do professional development and then just sort of get on the same page. Like “How's it going? Any issues?” and then as needed, I will go travel to the other campuses like once a semester, just to check in. Downtown, for instance, they had a lot of transition. They had a new dean, so I was going there more frequently. Then there was a period where they were short staffed, so we actually had one of our advisors work their half time, like they did advising here and then spent two days down there. That was a good example of the partnership. Like, I know they would help us, you know, if necessary. And then it sounds silly, but we use Skype for Business IM'ing. So, like throughout the day, we can just IM each other, which is really helpful, actually, the whole college is on that. So, like you know, Vista, it takes ten minutes to walk there. So, if I can IM you know, admissions. I might do that. Just like with a quick question.

PARDHE: I'm talking more about the unique experiences of Barrett across four different campuses. You mentioned how, here at Tempe the collaborative nature and the small nature of the honors college campus allows students to interact more frequently with each other. Uh, how does the design of the Barrett complex on the other three campuses also help with that same feeling of mutual coordination for the honors students?

ARAGON: No, absolutely. I mean, obviously, they're smaller in scale, but each other location has a specific Barrett hub. So downtown, that's in University Center, so they have a suite in a pretty busy area. So, you know, Downtown's a good example, like, there's not necessarily a lot of university space like real estate is prime down there. So, I think it's great that the students can come in and just even hang out between classes. But the dean is there. The advisers. There's faculty, so that's kind of where they come together and then West and Poly have beautiful suites where there's like a place for the studio. You know, a computer lab. I mean, I love West in particular. They have a larger commuting population. They have a kitchen for the students, a microwave. They have refrigerator where someone can put their lunch, like just those elements that are important to them. And it's funny because their walk in model- here at Tempe we scheduled times on people's calendar to have walk ins- and there it's like it's like way more organic where they'll just sort of even go to the students, like there's a bunch on the couches and they're like, “Oh, you know, Liz, I have a question” and she'll just sit down with them. So, given how small they are, she's able to, which I love like here, that would be a little bit more challenging, but they're able to do that at the smaller places.

PARDHE: And, uh, if we go back to the study abroad programs offered at Barrett, how does that, in addition, to, like, benefiting students by providing cultural experiences, diversity of thought, how does that academically help students with honors credit, honors courses? And how does that translate towards their progress? To a degree?

ARAGON: Absolutely so I mean in the longer study abroad experience, you could earn up to nine honors credits for upper division, so that's like a whole semester's worth right there, three to six credits is fairly common, and they mean, at a minimum, one credit, if let's say it's like a global intensive experience. So, there's always an honors credit outcome, which is helpful. There's a requirement to do upper division outside the major credits, and all of those trips count for that. And then, I think, kind of like, an indirect benefit, though, is just another faculty

connection, which is helpful with thesis. Even if the thesis isn't directly about your study abroad, experience, those are pretty diverse experiences and I think it is common that that Professor either will connect you to someone who will be your thesis director, they might be your reader, or they're just gonna be a source of support when you're feeling stressed. So, I'm always very thesis driven, and I think that those trips have a direct impact on people having like a more positive experience and definitely a stronger network to draw from.

BRENNER: So, one of my favorite things about Barrett is that we do offer those like HON 394 classes like this one I get one credit for and I took, like, the Design Sun Devil Stadium class last year. Does advising have any impact on those at all?

ARAGON: So, the faculty really do get to choose on those, but I mean indirectly I know that's something I've been advocating for. Like they think it's very important that we think about marketing those classes because some of them are a little bit more obscure. And so, you know, unfortunately, it's easy for them to be overlooked. And so, we just want to make sure that, "are we putting up the right kind of fliers? Should there be a direct email, maybe to certain, Major's just to get more eyes on the class?" There have been occasions where maybe one was really under-enrolled and so the dean's office asked me, "Can you send this to students or can you promote it?" So, we definitely promote them. And then, you know, I've just been a part of conversations about like how can you continue to maximize our efforts? The Sun Devil Stadium was a really important example because that was a collaboration outside of Barrett. It was unique because it was short. I mean, it wasn't the whole semester. It was hands on. There was a competition. There were just a lot of cool elements. And so, I mean, personally, I would love to see us continue to be creative so that not only do people get honors credit, but they have a very unique experience because that's kind of what our whole aim in Barrett is. Just keep making it different.

BRENNER: So, what is sort of your maybe vision of making Barrett like that optimal place for students to grow?

ARAGON: Absolutely. I mean, I think more and more, there's so much pressure when you enter college to right away be specialized, to right away be thinking about what's the most lucrative career path, what's guaranteed, times are uncertain, how will you make money? And those things are really important. We hear this information like, well, you still need soft skills. So I mean, I just want Barrett to be a place where we provide a solid liberal arts foundation because there is still a lot of value, especially in terms of those soft skills to human event, liberal arts, argumentative writing, but that because of the security of the honors framework, knowing well, I have to meet these requirements, it would allow people to take creative risks. So that, you know, people would feel like "I know I'm going to finish my major. Being in Barrett does not prevent me from doing that" because it's supposed to be supporting your major up, but that we could get to a place where people truly felt "Oh, but it's okay for me to, like, try this other thing" or "it's okay for my thesis to be something really different because that doesn't mean I won't get a great job." In fact, it might help someone get a better job or promotion leader. So, I'm not sure exactly what that looks like yet because I know we have a lot of conversations with students of the value of honors, and that's a hard concept, like it is more philosophical. It's very personal and individualized people. What I've found myself saying more and more is "What's your why?"

What's your reason? What's your motivation? Because it's really different than your friends, and it's really different than mine. So that sort of introspection and letting people know like it's okay that you're a reason is different. So, it's like, I think, just a little more time for that. But a lot of security where it's like, let's look at really successful alumni. Let's continue to hear their stories so that you also see "Oh, it did help them" because I think that makes people ultimately feel like it's worth it. So that they just continue to see, like the value of their investment. It's a financial investment. It's an intellectual- It's an emotional investment to do honors. It's hard. It's stressful. So, we want people to feel supported. We'll also, like have that reassurance that while, okay, it's not one hundred percent guaranteed, nothing is in life, it is kind of that, like insurance policy, if you will, towards maybe, you know, more unique experiences in the future.

BRENNER: Could you maybe talk a little more about the importance of, like that liberal arts foundation? I know for me as a business student I definitely struggled with that, and my brother does as a finance student.

ARAGON: Absolutely. Yeah. So, I mean, I think the Human Event at its core foundation is thinking about building habits of the mind, which really means like tackling questions that do not have easy answers, don't have clear outcomes, and are really open to interpretation. And it's funny because I feel like it's business students in particular who really are the ones who're going to tackle that, like, "How is the industry going to change? How will we continue to meet the demands in a global society? In a technology evolving world?" There are no answers because these are brand new things. And so even though it can feel like, really disconnected, when you read primary texts and you're forced to come up with your own answers, not what someone else said, and it's really dense and difficult, you just struggled through it. You are sort of building that muscle to deal with those questions that will occur on being in a situation where you have to speak up and there's people next to you who totally disagree, and it's like, kind of uncomfortable, that's training for when you're going to be confronting that in the work force or politically or what have you. So, I think we can continue to do a better job like being explicit about those parallels, because right now you know, I mean, I love the faculty and, you know, they're all academics, it's like "I just love it. Love of learning." It's like, yes, but it also does connect I think to these more practical, like life skills. With the student center, that's actually another outcome is to start kind of bringing that together by also talking more about like, leadership development career building and how what we've always done in honors. The dots are all there but let's draw more clear connection so that people feel like it's worth it to go through this experience because you will come out like that much stronger and diversified.

PARDHE: Oh, Barrett, like, at least for me as a freshman, seeing my older sisters gone through the entire thing and graduate with honors, I can definitely see the worth of Barrett, and it culminates in the honors thesis. So, could you explain more about the honors thesis? What exactly it is, how that correlates with your education and how that relates to your undergraduate degree in your future career?

ARAGON: Yeah, definitely. So, I mean, like, we were just saying, with the Human Event and building those skills, that's a pretty controlled environment. The professor plays a huge role in mentoring and sort of training the students. It's a lot of hands on. So, the thesis has a similar outcome, but you're independent. So, the idea is that you've now evolved to the point through

your human event or history of ideas, through your contracts, your course, just life maturity, you've arrived at a place where you can identify an area of interest and you can essentially convince a professor to collaborate with you. And that in and of itself is a pretty challenging thing to do to, you know, not only approach a faculty member, but have them agreed to sponsor you, but then be willing to adapt and shift so that you come up with a shared idea. I think a lot of people have a misperception that you, as a student, will spend all this time coming up with the perfect idea and that a professor will just sort of appear and say, like, "Yes, good job" when really you'll identify areas of interest because that's how you'll know who to speak to, but what really occurs is that you are interested in these things, you find a professor who feels similarly, has a background, and then together, collaboratively come up with an idea, which often means compromise. Where it's like you thought it would be one thing. Maybe it's another. Maybe through the project development, a whole new idea emerges that you haven't even thought about. So, it's really more like that mental training. So, when you leave, yes, you have a product and you learned something. But you also learn the skills of persuasion, evolving, compromise, dedication, failure, because there's always moments of failure throughout the process. Hopefully, they're small, but disappointment, time management. It's a lot. And so, I think that's where we feel like you'll see it play out again in various stages of your life, but we want you to also have that tangible benefit of like, look at this thing that I did, that I'm proud of. I have a letter of recommendation from someone that knows me in a really different way than just being a teacher in a course I took but was my mentor. So that's kind of what we're hoping you'll get out of it.

PARDHE: And, uh, just tying everything together about the accessibility of Barrett, the study abroad program, the honors thesis, how it all provides a super unique experience for Honors students to grow them academically and as a person before they graduate. What do you think about the honors college's terming of being "the gold standard" now in the United States after only existing for about thirty years? Seeing that as the gain of this title, what do you see in the future that overall can improve the entire experience and make Barrett even more like innovative for the future generation of students?

ARAGON: Yeah, I mean, it's a big title to carry, you know, so it definitely holds responsibility that we need to maintain our standard, so definitely keep that level really high. But being in a place like ASU that's already so innovative, it just means that we also have to be open. Just like we've asked the students to be in Human Event. How will we answer questions that don't have easy solutions, not get too comfortable with doing things just because that's the way they've always been done, you know, listening to what our students are saying in meeting, you know, realizing it's a new generation that have new needs a lot to offer. We're our traditions and things that we hold as core values but how those continue to be expressed in creative ways because I think you can maintain your sense of identity and tradition, but try new things and if they fail, own it and move on and you know that will keep us at the top of our game.

BRENNER: All right, well, I think this was very good. Any final words of advice or anything?

ARAGON: I think, you know, I'm in my mid-thirties, and so I have a lot of friends who have changed jobs many times, and it's pretty unique to have stayed around a job for so long. I've had different roles, so I've been evolving, but it really is, I mean, Barrett. I know that sounds kind of cheesy, but I do really love it. I love being a part of ASU. I really believe in what we're doing. I

think that we will be around in thirty more years. I think that we will continue to forward. It's just really exciting to be a part of all of this and to see what the students are doing and being an adviser is all about helping shape the future. So, knowing that like we're putting this out in the world, is just a really exciting thing to be a part of.

BRENNER: Thank you for your participation. If you have any more thoughts to share later, please feel free to reach out. And if you have any questions about this interview or the thirtieth anniversary Oral History Project, please contact Vice Dean Nicola Foote. Thank you.