

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Hello, and welcome again to Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris, where our goal is to get you the necessary information that you need so you can make your college experience an experience and not just survive college.

We're gonna be talking today, really, about best practices of learning. We're going to do a little bit of time management. It is key. We've done advising, we've done counselors, and this is also a very, very critical component of your academic career.

So, again, if you haven't subscribed, please do so. But it is my pleasure and honor to have Ms. Kay [Ruth] with us today from our ILC. I'm gonna have you, I'm gonna have her tell you what ILC is. So, welcome, Kay.

KAY RUTH: Thank you very much. It's just so good to be here. Thanks.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great. It's great to have you. So, my first question that I always ask my hosts, and I, I say, maybe I should stop saying that it's a trick question because then people start thinking, "Oh, no, what is this question gonna be like?" It's a very straightforward question, which is tell us a little bit about yourself, but more so, is this where you've always seen yourself? When you were in college, did you think you're gonna end up in the ILC office?

RUTH: Well, I'll tell you. So, first I'll start with my college self. My college self never envisioned that I would be in any kind of educational setting at all. Yes. When I was in college, I was a writing major, you know, English, all the literature. And I thought I was going to be a great writer. So, fortunately, my writing skills have helped me, you know, as I was a teacher first here at Wake Tech. I started in 2000, so it's been a little over 21 years. But first I was an English instructor, then I moved to Academic Foundations, where I was an English instructor there. Then I moved to the ILC, and I was a site coordinator for a while, and now the department head for the ILC. So, never in a thousand years did I think that I would be in education even. So, yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, just so you know, I haven't had anyone yet that has told me, and we've interviewed almost about 20 something people ...

RUTH: Oh, wow.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Nobody, and this was including myself, "Is this what I want? OK, I want to do bridges," that I would do bridges, and now this is where I am. But I love it. It's great, and I'm sure the same thing for you as well.

RUTH: I love it.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK, let's talk about ILC. What is ILC?

RUTH: ILC stands for Individualized Learning Center. So, we are the free tutoring services here at the college. Mostly we tutor students who are in those classes where they want to get an associate degree of some kind, but we are trying now, because of the strategic plan and because of the idea that we are one college serving all students, we are trying to build services so that we can support Workforce Continuing Ed students as well as curriculum students.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great, great.

RUTH: Yes.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: This is a great opportunity because, again, in my college days, there was nothing like an ILC. Is this, since, again, you know, this interview is gonna go out into the world, everybody's gonna see it, which is great, does every institution have an ILC, or is this unique to Wake Tech?

RUTH: Well, most institutions now have at least a writing center.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

RUTH: And when I was in college, I, I got to be a writing center tutor when I was a senior. And, again, I still had no idea that I was going to be in education, but I, that's where I had my first experience. Now, most colleges universities have at least a writing center. Some of them have more help. You know, they might have a STEM center or a math and science lab where students can go and get more support. They might encourage students to join study groups for different areas of study. Luckily, at Wake Tech, we have it all. You know, we, we've got the ILC that has math, writing, science, computers.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Wow.

RUTH: Yes, and health sciences. But then we have our success centers like STEM and REAL and Think for the different departments. So, we've got everything here.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's, that's amazing. That's great. So, there are two things that I want us to kind of focus on, and I'm sure each of those two probably take us about an hour. But we're gonna do our best to keep it short.

RUTH: OK.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: And one is best practices. And, again, I watched your, when you did a Teams presentation, and I was like, "Great, this is why I want Ms. Kay here to kind of help me with this to help students out." And also, the other one is time management. So, let's start with best learning practices.

RUTH: OK, best learning practices. So, a lot of times students think that when they do their homework, that's all they need to do. "I've done my homework. I'm ready for class." But students have to do their homework, they have to read their textbooks, they have to take notes in class, they have to have separate study time just to go over their notes. So, there's a lot that goes into being a successful student. And so, best practice is, is really making sure that you're doing all of those things throughout the week and having the schedule that will allow you to do that. Yeah, that's one.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

RUTH: Yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Well, so usually when I, when I ask that question, best learning practices, I go with When should I be doing it? Why should I be doing it? How should I be doing it? So, maybe we could break it down that way.

RUTH: Yes, we'll break it down. Yeah, so every week, and this is, you know, there have been studies that say, for every three hours of, of a class, you know, if you have a three-hour class, then you should be practicing, you should be studying and doing homework and reading at least six hours a week. So, if you've got a 12-credit course load, which is what most of our students have here if they're going full time, then that's like 24 hours of work a week for their classes outside of class.

So, the best thing is to make sure they have an organized schedule, or they can figure out: When is the best time for me to study? When is the best time for me to read, which is gonna be separate from studying? When is the best time for me to do my homework? And then, if I need support, when's the best time for me to go talk to my instructor or go see someone in the ILC? Or, you know, sit down and have this quiet place to study? So, the, being organized for your week every week is very difficult, but that's what students need. So, that's the what?

OK, the where is you need a specific place to study. You need to have a regular place because our body goes into work mode when we're at work, our body goes into, you know ...

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Rest mode.

RUTH: When we're, yeah, getting into bed, going to sleep.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Yep.

RUTH: And so, we need a specific place where we have our, our, our desk, our books, our calculator or computer or laptop, whatever we're going to use. We need to have that space in our, our house somewhere.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

RUTH: It can be in the bedroom, but it can't be on the bed.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I was going to go there.

RUTH: No. When we get in the bed, we go into sleep mode.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

RUTH: You go into rest mode. Yeah, we don't wanna think anymore.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Good. Yes.

RUTH: So, we can, we can set up a, a TV tray, you know. We can set up a little desk. When I was in college, there wasn't a lot of room in my house, so I, I sat at the coffee table in my

parents' living room. It was a room we were never allowed to go in unless we were older and doing something productive, and so they allowed me to go in. I would sit on the floor and do my work there, and so now, when I need to think, I have to sit on the floor because my body goes into that mode still.

Yeah, so that's the where, OK? We need a specific place. It can be in the library.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I was gonna ask you that. OK.

RUTH: Yeah, so if, if there's time after class and, and you have time to go sit in the library, and you want your favorite spot, go sit in that favorite spot and make sure that you are staying focused on your work. Allow yourself breaks if you need breaks, but, but have that certain spot because that's how you go into the mode of, "This is the time to get work done for school."

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great. So, when you talk about the how, I actually had a question about it. Well, not really a question because I've been trying to tell students, you, you just said reading is not just it, right?

RUTH: Right.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: It's very, very more, what's, what's the right word to use here? What's more critical for the technical programs, like I tell students, "You can't read engineering. You, you, gotta be doing some work.

RUTH: Yes, yes. So, yes, so it's important to do homework. Homework is the, the way we practice what our students – ha, what our students – what our instructors are telling us to do, right? So, it's important to do homework, and it's also important to explore. So, if you are someone who likes taking a break and going online, well, do some online exploration for whatever your homework is about. You know, draw pictures, do things that are hands-on, because that helps.

So, read your textbook, take notes when you're reading, write down questions. A lot of times students say, "I don't know what to say in class because I don't know what the teacher wants me to, to ask or what the teacher's gonna be talking about." Well, if you've got questions from your homework, that's what you wanna ask in class because you want clarity before the teacher goes on to the day's lesson. So, yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great. All right, so now that we've talked about all the good stuff, let's put all that into scheduling time management. First, do you all help students with coming up with a schedule?

RUTH: We do, yes.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Really?

RUTH: Yes, we have a study skills center on every campus. We have a study skills center online, and that's one of the things we do. We call it time management, as well as choice management because, when you say "choice," you are thinking about what you want to do, what you are choosing to do. And that's a way to empower you and have that mindset of, "This is very positive. I'm going to do this." So, yes, we help with that – all campuses.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK, so I'm gonna give you my process of how I used to help students do their studying, and I want you to tell me how you all do it. Usually, a student will come to me, and the challenge is they're not getting their homework done or they have, and immediately I recognize that it is because they have way too much going on. So, I will tell them, I said, "Monday through Friday," I said, "No, you know what? Let's do Monday through Sunday, I want you to tell me everything that you do. Just list it. Bring it to me, and we'll put it in the, in a schedule.

RUTH: Yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: They go, those who come back, that is, and that is the question I was gonna ask you, those who actually come back just put in their classes, and I go, "I wanna know when you go to bed. I wanna know when you eat. I wanna know when you do your laundry. I wanna know when you go and do groceries." So, I'm gonna stop right there to kind of see, is that wrong? Is that a wrong process?

RUTH: No, that's actually what we want to do, too.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK. Great, great.

RUTH: Yeah. We call it inflexible time.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

RUTH: You have to know what are all the things I have to do. If I have to be in class from 9 to 12, put that down. If I have to drive from 8:30 to 9, put that down. When you eat, when you go to bed, get it all down so you can see what's open. Then, the open time is your choice time.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Wow. OK, thank you.

RUTH: You're welcome.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I'm happy I wasn't doing the wrong thing, so that's great.

RUTH: It's great. Yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, how many students do you actually have coming to you to say, "Can you help with my schedule?"

RUTH: Oh my goodness, I, there are so many I actually don't know. I know that I usually work with a handful, and I don't even tutor anymore. But we, we have, we used to have time management workshops. Now, we do it so that it's a 50-minute session, and I can't tell you how many students, but I know that it's a lot. Time management is, time management and procrastination are the top two issues for students, for college students. So, if, if anybody is out there and feels like, "Oh, I just have work-life balance. I'm not doing it, I'm doing something wrong." It's not that you're doing something wrong, it's that community college students have a lot of responsibilities and so ...

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Not only community college students, all students.

RUTH: Yeah, students have a lot of responsibilities. All of us have a lot of responsibilities. But we can help you figure out how to choose your open time, what to do with it.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great because I must be doing something wrong. When students come to me to help with their schedule, when I tell them, "Go do this and then come back," first of all, I, I go through a process. Very few come back to say, "OK, this is, this is it." Those who actually come back and I help them with it don't even stick to it. So, from your experience, I'm just surprised that students actually will come to you and say, "We need help with our schedule."

RUTH: Yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: How many do you think actually follow through? Because I'll be honest, Kay, I create a schedule, and it's so, so difficult that I know that it's what would be best. But if I follow through it, I'm gonna, it's so challenging to go through, even as a graduate student. So, for students, how closely do you think that they follow your schedules?

RUTH: You know, I've had a lot of students. I used to say, "Come and tell me how it works," and I would have very few students who would return. So, I am, I feel you there. But when I tell students now is, you know, it, studies say takes seven months for something to become habit. So, you would have to practice that schedule and creating that schedule and having that choice time for seven months for it to feel natural to you. So I say, "You know, if it doesn't happen immediately, don't worry about it."

And we always have distractions, and we always have disruptions. And so, when we get off our schedule, we tend to feel bad. So, now I tell students, "Don't feel bad." We always have to punt because life changes every day, and so, as long as you are making that good-faith effort, then you will be OK, you know? And you may say, "OK, I'm gonna study for an hour and a half," and you only study for 30 minutes, but that's OK. That 30 minutes is gonna help. So, you know?

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Yeah. That's good. So, unfortunately I don't know have data to support what I'm about to say.

RUTH: OK.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: But the very few students that have actually, you know, come to me, "We've got a schedule. We've got it down." They follow it. They do their best to follow it. That's a very few who really do well. I mean, those are some of my really good students. Again, you know, I would love to tell students, somehow I honestly believe it is true that, if you do actually follow a schedule, you can be successful in school, college.

RUTH: Yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: But you know, when I say that, they're like, "Well, how many students have really followed that?" So, from your experience, would you say yes?

RUTH: I would say the students who I know who really have that dedicated schedule and follow it are the more successful students. But I'll also say that, if students are creating that schedule and they can't do everything that they put down, it really is OK. It really is OK to forgive yourself. "I didn't do all the things I said I was gonna do today. Tomorrow, I'm gonna try." Because if we, if we have the mindset of, "Oh, this is not working," then we just give up, then we're not reinforcing those practices that are gonna eventually help us get better.

So, the change is not overnight. The adjustment to a schedule is not overnight. I'm, I'm a number-one procrastinator.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No, you're not.

RUTH: I am, so I have my little calendar, and I have my online email calendar, and I have to sync them up. And, and then I try every day, and I, and, and I love checking stuff off, so when I get it done, it's such a gratifying feeling. That's what makes you wanna keep doing it.

And when you start seeing those better grades on tests and, "OK, I did all my homework. I got all my participation points for homework" because you've taken that time and you've managed your time, those rewards will help you wanna keep doing better too. And so, eventually it'll, it'll become habit. So, yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, when you mention the how, or actually the where in best practices, and my students want me to ask you this.

RUTH: OK.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Because I've had a student, I've actually had a few students who have said, "I have to study with some background noise."

RUTH: Oh yes, yes.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Is that normal?

RUTH: It is normal.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Please enlighten me. Yes.

RUTH: That's normal, and that's OK. So, we, you know, it, it doesn't matter if you're an introvert or extrovert. Sometimes, we need that background energy to help our, our brains do whatever pinging they do to process.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, are we talking, like, rock music, background loud music?

RUTH: Well, I always say no rock because then, then you're paying more attention to the music, you know, instead of concentrating.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK, yeah.

RUTH: So, I would say no words.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's a good point, right.

RUTH: Soft, gentle music. And you can even put your earbuds on. Yeah. And, and that'll help, it helps us get rid of other distractions. So, having music on this can be very helpful.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Now, I'm happy you said that because I always thought that was my students' excuse for not going to the library because that's what they would tell me. They're like, "No, I can't study in the library because it's too quiet. I have to have background noise." And I go, "You know that's not true." They're like, "No, no, it's true, Professor Chris." So, it is true.

RUTH: It's true, yeah.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I'm happy, I'm happy you kind of confirmed that.

RUTH: For some reason, it helps us concentrate, and the library gives out earbuds that you can keep. So, you can go and put your earbuds in and listen to music in the library and get your studying done.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Ms. Kay, this is great, great advice. I always, by the way, every time I interview someone, I, I really don't wanna end it, you know? I just wanna just keep going. But, of course, we have to kind of come to a close at some point. Thank you for all the advice, but I'm gonna have you do a quick closing for students. So, as far as best practices, time management or doing a schedule, what would be kind of your advice for students?

RUTH: OK. Well, the, the simple advice is to, one, make sure you're cultivating a growth mindset for yourself. Make sure you are telling yourself every day that you belong at Wake Tech or whatever school you're in that you do belong, that you are learning and that you can improve. You can do it. It takes time. It takes hard work. But you can do it. So, make sure you have that mindset every day before you go out the door.

The second thing I would say is that, you know, you wanna set up that schedule. So, look at the time that you have that's free after you put everything else down that you can't choose and choose when you are going to do your homework. Choose when you are going to do your studying. Choose when you are going to do your reading, and let it go through the weekend. But also choose time for when you're going to take care of yourself because it is important to have a break. Even if it's 30 minutes looking out the window when it's raining, you know you need a brain break.

And then use your resources. A lot of times, students think that they have to go it alone, and college is built so that you get support, whatever you need. We built in free tutoring because we know students need support in their classes. We built in advising because we know students need support in making a plan for their academic pathway. So, use your resources. We're here. We get paid for you to come see us. Come see us. Make us earn our money.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Where can students find you?

RUTH: Oh, students can find us on our website. On our website, we have our appointments listed. We are on every single campus: South, North, Perry Health Sciences, West.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: RTP?

RUTH: RTP, yes, thank you. And Public Safety.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

RUTH: And we are online.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great.

RUTH: Yeah, so please come talk to us.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Well, there you have it. I cannot close it any better than Ms. Kay has just done here. So, again, best practices, if I have to recap again, know your where, how and when. I'm still thinking whether this whole rock music background noise, but Ms. Kay said it's OK. You need it, so we're, we're good there. As far as a schedule goes, again, I just say that I don't have data, but we also have some proof that, if you do have a good schedule, I think that would be good.

So, with that, please do subscribe if you haven't subscribed yet and stay tuned for the next edition of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris. Ms. Kay, thank you.

RUTH: Thank you so much for having me.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Thank you. It was my pleasure.

RUTH: I really appreciate it.