

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Good morning, and welcome again to another edition of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris. Once again, we're trying to get you all the information so you can experience college, not survive college. Today, as usual, I know you hear me saying, "This is special. This is special," but this is very, very, very special. We have with me today the provost of public safety, Dr. Jamie [Wicker]. Already talked to Dr. Jamie a little bit, so instead of my regular question, which is, "Tell us about where you started and how you got here," I'm gonna have a little twist to it.

But before we get into it, please help me welcome Dr. Jamie. Dr. Jamie, how you doing?

JAMIE WICKER: I'm doing great.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

WICKER: Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm so excited to be here to talk to you, Dr. Chris.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No.

WICKER: And to get an opportunity to talk to your students as well. So, thank you so much for the invitation. I'm really excited.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: The pleasure is all mine, Dr. Jamie. So, usually the question I always ask when we start is, "Did you see yourself right where you are now when you went to college?" But I'm going to a different twist for you because I want to get your exciting story from beginning to end since you also have – again, my students, I think, "Now, Dr. Jamie, she's just like Professor Chris," but it's not – because I want you to tell us your story. And as you're telling the story, we have some gears here to show the students so they can really know that you are a true trooper.

WICKER: Sure.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: All right, so go.

WICKER: So, I guess kind of how I got here, well, I, I did not see myself when I was in college in this role, in education or in public safety, at first. So, like a lot of people, I had an idea of where I wanted to be in life, and I, I wanted to be a doctor, like a physician.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You are a doctor.

WICKER: I know. But, but I wanted to be a physician or maybe a lawyer. So, in high school, those are the things that I wanted to do. And my mother always told me I should be in education, that I was really good at explaining things to people and had a compassion for people, and I was, felt like I wanted to make the world a better place. I was, just kind of felt that, but I felt that was a characteristic of just who I was. And those are some ways that I could do that. So, when I went to college, I, I did not at all enjoy all the time that was required to be in a science lab. So, sorry to talk about your sciences.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No, you're good. Right.

WICKER: I enjoyed the, the coursework, but I felt like I just didn't wanna spend my time that way. So, suddenly, I had no plan of what I wanted to do. I, I didn't know, and my, my advisor at the time, and, of course, in college, like a typical college student, I went to my friends and said, "What, what should I do?" And they said, "You know, just take a lot of intro classes and see what speaks to you." So, I took a lot of introduction classes, and Introduction to Criminal Justice was something that I just, I loved it. It was fun. I enjoyed it. It made sense to me. That was the first time I started thinking about it career in law enforcement and public safety.

I didn't grow up in a family that had a lot of public safety. I grew up in a family, my father's retired military, and pretty much everybody in my family has been in the military at some point or another. So, I, I come from a family where we wanna help people who wanna do well, but not necessarily public safety.

So, I decided I wanted to go into law enforcement and eventually did graduate with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. And the funny thing about being here today and working in higher education is, when I was finishing my senior year, I remember, I remember saying, putting out in the universe, "Lord, if you just let me get this bachelor's degree, I promise you I'll never go back to school again." And here I sit with several graduate degrees and, and a doctorate. So, I guess I didn't really, didn't really keep that promise, but, but anyway, so to answer your question ...

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Well, God kept his promise.

WICKER: Correct.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You didn't keep yours.

WICKER: That's correct. But, you know, I didn't understand all the things that would happen in my life at that time. And I'm so, so grateful to be where I am now. So, anyways, so a few, a few careers. I became a police officer and went to Basic Law Enforcement Training at a community college, and it was a wonderful experience. Got into the profession. I loved it. I love being a police officer.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: What proof do you have that you were a police officer?

WICKER: What proof do I have? Well, I have, well, I have a picture in my office.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No, I wanna see the vest.

WICKER: But I'm still a police officer, so I have, yeah, my vest with me. Let's see, excuse me for going off-camera here. This is my current vest that I wear when, when I'm on patrol, which I still do. So this, it says police, got a badge on it. This is for the Lillington Police Department, which is in Harnett County, and I gotta give a shoutout to my people in Lillington. So, Lillington Police Department takes great care of me. I'm a reserve officer there. So, I was a police officer on, I started in 2003 as a police officer and was a full-time police officer until 2010, and I went to a sheriff's office. I was a sheriff's deputy. I was a school resource officer. Had the great fortune to have such an incredible career. I worked as a detective, special victims investigations and worked domestic violence, sexual assault cases, child abuse, child death investigations. And while that is a difficult caseload to work, that was, that was what I had a passion for because I felt like I wanted to be an advocate for people that maybe couldn't advocate for themselves.

So, I had a wonderful career full-time in law enforcement and had gotten my master's degree, and my plan was I wanted to teach. I started teaching in the academies, and I really enjoyed the example that I could set for young officers.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, were you and police officer right after your bachelor's degree? That's the first ...

WICKER: No.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No.

WICKER: I was not. Right after my bachelor's degree, I, I decided to get married, and like many people in public safety, I got divorced, So, so, at that time, I, I was married, and my, my spouse wasn't too keen on having a wife that was in public safety full time, thought it was dangerous and, you know, things like that, which is understandable. And so, I, I actually was a high school teacher. I taught high school a little bit. I was a social worker that worked in Children's Protective Services, and I worked also with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. And so, being around public safety in that way just reinforced to me that this is where I want to be – I wanna be in the hands-on part of this. And then I went and got my master's degree, and I was teaching in the academies, and I was really enjoying that.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: And what was your master's degree in?

WICKER: My master's degree is in justice administration.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK.

WICKER: And my goal then was to progress up the ranks through a police department or sheriff's office. And I learned a lot in that degree, but it also allowed me to teach. It so happened that the community college locally needed someone to teach part-time adjunct, as we know that, but I wasn't as familiar with that terminology at the time, in a curriculum program. And I was already teaching something in their academy, and they asked me would I be able to do that because I was qualified, and I did, and I loved it. And I had the good fortune of having a, an agency that was supportive. The sheriff's office allowed me to do that, and I had a great experience. I loved talking about with the students.

Shortly thereafter, I applied for a full-time position teaching criminal justice, and I was, I was selected for that position, and that's really where my love of community college was born. I love the community college system. I love what we stand for.

One of the things that maybe some of your viewers may not know is that North Carolina is one of very few states that decided that our community colleges would be our public safety training academy. So, there's 58 community colleges in North Carolina. We have a wonderful community college system, and one of the reasons that we're so well positioned to train public safety personnel is that there, there is a community college nearby pretty much everyone. So, in some other states, they have like a training academy for that state, and so, people who are training in public safety have to travel great distances. The departments are put out with staffing issues. They have travel costs, per diem. In the state

of North Carolina, it's, the community colleges are the primary training agent for public safety. It resolves a lot of those issues, and so, we do a tremendous amount of public safety training for fire, police, EMS personnel, and, and I realized that, and I got to learn about the system. And I became so, such, such a tremendous fan of what the community college system does for public safety, and that's what ultimately made me decide that I wanted to be an administrator at a community college so that I could advocate for public safety, and I can make sure that voice is always in the room. Because sometimes, you are having decisions made about you, and you don't have that active voice in the room.

So, I continued to be a police officer part time as I was working full time. I just couldn't, I just couldn't find a way that I could leave either of those professions. I didn't want to leave education, and I didn't want to leave public safety. So, I, again, have been so fortunate to be able to have a foot in both of those fields. So, I decided to get my doctorate, and I went to get my doctorate in education and emphasized community college executive leadership. And I had moved and been promoted and had several other jobs during this time. And I had the good fortune to be in a position where I was in a role, an administrative role over public safety at another community college, and I thought, "You know what I'm gonna do?" Because in public safety, it's about doing, not about talking. So, I decided that I was going to get a certification in every area of public safety.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Wow.

WICKER: So, I decided to go get my EMT credential, which is something that I've wanted to do but just hadn't made the time for. And I decided that I wanted to get qualified as a firefighter.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I was just waiting for that.

WICKER: I know.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I was like, when is that coming?

WICKER: It's coming, it's coming.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I keep looking at it, right.

WICKER: And in the meantime, my son has grown up.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: And my son had a passion for the fire service. So, my son became a career firefighter and EMT.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: What is it with boys and firefighters, by the way? My son is the same way, so ...

WICKER: It's a great profession. It is a great profession. But my son, he just really enjoys the structure and the problem-solving and the teamwork of firefighters.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You're missing, you're missing one thing: The fire truck.

WICKER: The fire, the fire truck, yeah. The ambulance and the, the lights and sirens and all the fun, and we get to wear all this cool stuff.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I, I gotta see that. Can I, can I see?

WICKER: Yeah, sure. So, this is my, this is my helmet that I, that I wear. I have another one in my office, but this is the one that I actually wear these days.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Wow. Can I?

WICKER: Absolutely. Now that's backwards. It goes the other way. There you go. Yes, you got it. You can wear it if you'd like.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: It would be an honor.

WICKER: Have at it.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Thank you.

WICKER: And so, I, I asked my son after I got qualified as a firefighter and an EMT, I said, "You know, how would you feel about us doing firefighting together? What do you think about that?" Because a lot of firefighters work at multiple departments, and he worked at multiple departments, and one of the departments that he worked at was a volunteer department near our house. And I said, "How would you feel about us doing that?" And he was kind of like, "OK, Mom, you want to be a teacher, or you wanna be a firefighter? Sure,

Mom.” But he also knows I’m a little bit crazy and I’m a whole lot of what I tell you I’m gonna do, I’m gonna do. So, he said, “Yeah, come on.”

So, I put in an application and became a volunteer firefighter at the department that he was also a volunteer at, which is his second department, and it was such a wonderful experience. And that’s where I really fell in love with firefighters and particularly volunteer firefighting, which, which is different. But when you get that, that call and your pager goes off and you know that, that people need your help, it was, it was amazing for my son to go, “Come on, Mom. Get in the truck. Let’s go. Come on, let’s go. Let’s go.” And then, you know, we get to the station, and we’re going to calls. It’s just wonderful. So, I love, I love public safety, and I love all aspects of public safety.

Let me show you something else that I have.

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: Just based on what you just said, you know, and I just kind of pause a little bit, and I just wanna say thanks for all you do. For that reason alone, I don’t even think I deserve to wear this because, boy, what you all do and, again, on behalf of everyone, you know, for all the work you all do, out of respect, I’ll take it off, but I’m gonna hold on to it.

WICKER: OK.

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: I still like it, but thank you all for what you all do, sincerely. All right.

WICKER: Thank you for your appreciation, and I am honored and privileged. I am truly honored and privileged to be able to serve my community, to serve this community. Although my public safety experience is not in Wake County, I feel that I get to serve this community through this role as provost and this region, and in, in all sincerity, that is what I, I am so deeply grateful every day to have this position at Wake Tech because we, we have the ability to have a position where you have a provost of public safety education and training. We have a beautiful public safety campus. We are expanding. We have tremendous community support. Our Board of Trustees, our president, our executive leadership team, they support us tremendously in doing the job of educating and training public safety personnel at advanced levels and at beginner levels, and that is something that I am so incredibly privileged and honored to participate in and provide for, and, and I’m so proud of what we do here. So, thank you for that.

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: You’re most welcome. Now, let’s talk about public safety.

WICKER: Let's talk about it.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, when I hear "public safety." for some reason, I don't think about anything else but the police. Is that wrong?

WICKER: It is.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: It's wrong. OK.

WICKER: Yes.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, what is public safety?

WICKER: Thanks for asking that question. So, when you think of public safety, you think broadly of anything that would involve the safety of the public. Now, I know that's taking some words and twisting them around, but you think about the safety of the public in a couple of ways, and that is as a group and that is as individuals. And sometimes public safety involves incapacitating some type of threat or issue. So, that would be maybe what you think of when you think about law enforcement. And so, a good way to think about public safety right off the bat is you dial 911, something that you call 911 for and who may respond. So, it may be police, may be sheriff, may be fire, may be EMS. And so, there's delineations within all that.

But then, also it's all the other systems that support that. So, the correction system, the court system, detention, probation, juvenile system. It's hazmat and code enforcement and even, even drones and search and rescue and so many other things, emergency management. So, public safety is not always some type of a threat like a person to a person. Sometimes it's weather, so we're going to have a hurricane, or we're gonna have a tornado, or we're gonna have a tremendous snowstorm, and how do we prepare for that, and how do we all work together and interface? So, public safety generally is, is very broad. When we say public safety, it encompasses all of that. In general, public safety means more like fire, police and EMS in umbrellas.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: All right. So, I'm going to narrow it down a little bit because, again, the whole purpose, as I mentioned to you, is so our students have a better understanding of public safety, but also specifically on campus. So, on campus, we have campus security, right? Are those real police?

WICKER: Yes. So, you have, we have a model here that is kind of a mixed model of security, and at Wake Tech, you have security who are not police and then you also have Campus Police. So, we have Campus Police officers who are real police officers, who have guns and badges and authority and jurisdiction.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: They train to the same standards. They go to the police academy. Many of them have extensive law enforcement experience prior to becoming an officer at Wake Tech. And that all reports then through Chief [Michael] Penry, and he does an outstanding job, and his team does an outstanding job. We have wonderful men and women who, who manage that and handle that. And I think that's a great model and one of the reasons I think that's such a good model is because, if you think about how big Wake Ttech is, we have campuses all over the county. So, we have campuses that are, some of them get into the issue of jurisdiction.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: So, this campus, for example, is in Raleigh's jurisdiction, Raleigh Police Department. So, if we didn't have Campus Police here and something happened, Raleigh Police Department would respond. We have other campuses might be in Cary, so a Cary police officer would be responsible. Some might be in the county, so Wake County Sheriff's Office would be responsible. When you deal with that, although there's generally best practice of how they're going to respond, you're dealing with different policies, different procedures, so it puts us as students and faculty and staff, well, our day might be at any of those campuses that we don't know exactly what to do in response because of the protocol of who would be handling the emergency.

So, by having Campus Police, we're giving us the opportunity to say we have the authority and jurisdiction on our campuses, and we can set what our policy and protocol response will be. So, I think that's a very good model to use.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: OK. So, for the student that is on campus, and I, I mentioned to you a student is on campus late at night and they have an emergency. It could be, "I locked my keys in my car" or "I need to get into a building." We'll start with that, and we'll get into some of the more serious ones. The student calls 911 and tells them, "Where are you? I need to see you on the campus." How quickly is the response? Who responds? Is that the campus security or the police? How does that work here?

WICKER: That's a good question. So, generally speaking, when someone would were to call 911, and there's protocols locally on things like that, which I won't go into great detail on, but generally speaking, they're gonna try to triage what's happening. So, is this like a life-and-death type of emergency? Or is this just an emergency to you? So, my car is, "I'm locked out of my car, and I need some assistance," but there's not a child in the car, it's not 90 degrees outside, everybody's OK can wait. So, what else is happening, and what assistance can we provide you? And so, sometimes it might be, "Well, we can't do anything, but we'll come stand by while you get some to bring you a spare key to make sure you're safe," or "We will assist you in locating a locksmith," or, you know, "Make sure you have a safe place to be while you're the resolving this problem while we can help you with some suggestions for how to resolve this problem."

It could be that, you know, I would say, generally speaking, like you suggested, if there is any type of emergency – medical, safety, anything like that – call 911. Call 911, what happens is you're going to get a dispatcher. They're gonna ask you, they have this flip chart of questions that they have to ask, so that's annoying a little bit, I mean, to be honest, because you're like, "This is my emergency! Send somebody!" And they're like, "But I have to ask you these exact questions." So, you're kind of like, "Stop asking questions and just handle it." But they're gathering that information to do specific things and to share that information out so that information then comes to first responders like me who know what to do as a result of that. So, they'll, they'll ask a bunch of questions: Where are you? What's going on? Have you ... based on what you report, lots of different questions, a lot of times dispatch will go ahead and start sending somebody as they're still gathering information. They'll send somebody, and they'll say, "We're still getting information." Sometimes, they'll wait, but there are protocols in place for what happens. And, and they'll tell you, "Are, are you able to get to a safe place? Are you hurt? Are you injured? Can you see them now? You know, depending on whatever is happening.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: That information goes to first responders that tells us what to do. So, for example, let's say someone was injured, and maybe there's still an active threat of something. Then we may need multiple people to respond. So, it helps us know what to do, and it also helps us to know what to bring with us. We also can determine, OK, we need to try to stop this threat of whatever it is. Maybe it's a power line down, so there's a power line down, and someone has been injured. But we also know we got to keep other people from getting into

that same active threat situation of this power line, so gotta get the power company to come and shut that down.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: What is all the blue poles, lights we see all around campus?

WICKER: I'm so glad you asked that. That is the best way for someone that is outside to, to get help. You go and you push those blue lights, the blue light cameras. They're emergency stations, and it immediately calls the dispatch center for Campus Police, which is our own dispatch center.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: And it would know exactly where ...

WICKER: And it has a camera, and it has a video, and it captures what's happening, and they know where you are, they know what camera it is. They're still gonna ask you questions. There's a two-way. You go straight to them, and they can talk to you and send somebody right to you.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great. Perfect. Tell me a little bit about your programs. You mention all the different areas for students that are interested in public safety. Do they come in knowing exactly which one they want to go into? How does it all work out?

WICKER: So, we have programming that, anything public safety, we can get you into, whether you want to, whether you come in the door and you say, "I wanna be a police officer," we can, we can put you on that track. Or if you say kind of like me, when I was in college and said, "I just wanna take some intro stuff and see what I like." We can do that. We have both what's called Workforce ConEd [Continuing Education] classes, which will be more training. So, training is more like we need you to be able to do something more practical-based. And we also have curriculum, which is more like we want you to know stuff, so more theory-based things. We have programming in public safety arenas on both sides for fire, police, EMS, public safety administration, forensic, criminal justice technology. We have EMS. We can, we can get you to paramedic. We can get you to EMT. We can get you to firefighter. We can get you to corrections officer, detention officer.

One of the great things about public safety that we do here is we are very, very strongly connected to our stakeholders. And so we have pipelines to jobs, and many, many, many of our students have jobs before they graduate because we trust our stakeholders, and they trust us. So, they come to us and say, "Hey, we need some great people with this skill set," or "We have this many openings," or "This is our culture. If you know a student that you

think would fit well in our culture, let us know.” And, many times, they will hire them and pay them to go through the training or finish. One of the things that happens, though, to your question, sometimes people just come in and say, “I’m interested in public safety.”

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: Just interested in public safety. And we sit down with them, I sit down with them if I can and say, “What interests you about public safety?”

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: It almost sounds like someone said, “I wanna be an engineer.” Which one?

WICKER: Yeah. Exactly. What interests you about it? What did you enjoy in high school?

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: Why do you wanna do this? What do, when you think about a career in public safety? What does that look like? Is it a day that’s in the air conditioner behind the desk? Is it a day that’s on a fire truck? Is it a day that’s hot and dirty? Are you wearing, are taking people to jail? Are you in a jail? Like, what is ...

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: How do you feel about blood? You know, because you’d be surprised how many times people say, “I wanna go into public safety,” and, and, and then the first time they see blood, they’re like, “Ugh, I can’t do this.” And so, you know, I, I don’t want to be, you know, gross or anything, but if you’re in public safety, you are mostly gonna see blood. But there are some careers in which you maybe don’t. So, trying to ask some of those key questions of where students succeed, knowing that, from our training and experience, and our staff knowing where people typically succeed or fail in their training or in their education, and asking some of those key questions to help people decide.

And then we do what I like to call parallel planning. Oh, I, I left out one group and totally by oversight: telecommunicators. Telecommunicators are a very, very important part of the system.

O’RIORDAN-ADJAH: Those are the ones that get the 911 calls?

WICKER: Those are the ones that get the calls. And, you know, they get, they hear all of these things, and they get all of this information, and they give it to us, and they tell us what to do. So, they get the information, and we are only as good as our dispatchers and telecommunicators are.

But sometimes I like to call it parallel planning. So, you have a student who comes in and says, "I really wanna be in public safety. I wanna be a law enforcement. I wanna do whatever." And then you think, "OK, let's get them down this line," and maybe they decide, "This isn't for me. I don't want to do this." But that's also part of our job is that career exploration piece because who wants to spend all this time to get a degree or certificate or something that you actually don't want to do?

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

WICKER: So, if you can learn that you don't wanna do it ...

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Don't want to do it, right.

WICKER: We can help you move to something else.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great. I had a question on that, and so, I kind of wanted to make sure I don't forget it. How long does the typical program, like, if I want to be a firefighter, I wanna be a police, how long is it gonna take?

WICKER: Well, I wish I could take credit for creating this phrase, which I didn't create it, but I love it. I call it "career in a year." We can get you from zero to a career in a year in public safety.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Wow.

WICKER: And we, you can become a firefighter in, depending upon what level we can get you into the fire service, in four to six months. From zero to a career, and, and what I'm saying, a career, now sometimes it's eight months, sometimes it's, it's longer, depending upon how far you take your training. But we're talking about at a department – full time, benefits, retirement, medical – from nothing, and I think that is so impactful that people don't even realize you don't have to put in years and years. You learn it as you go, but you can get those certifications. For police, generally, it's gonna be in and out of, it depends if you do it full-time training or part time, about four, four, six months again, and a part time

will be about eight to 10 months. And then EMS, we can get you in as an EMT, again, about four or five months, and then you can go on up to advanced EMT, critical care paramedic, and, well, critical care is separate, but paramedic, and we can train you even into like, you know, life flight and so many different, different avenues. So, within a year, with, within less than a year, I can take you from zero to a career in policing, fire or EMS.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, how can students reach out to you, for anyone that needs more information?

WICKER: Yes. Thank you for asking. I'm gonna look at your camera here.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Yes, please do.

WICKER: You can reach me by email at J, F, F as in Frank, Wicker, W-I-C-K-E-R at waketch.edu, jfwicker@waketch.edu. I'm on the Public Safety Campus. I'd love to hear from you, and I'm very open about public safety, not just because I love it, but I want other people to understand, and I believe that, we talked about it in the past, I believe that you should have a safe space to ask any question that you want to ask. That's coming from a good place of truly wanting to learn. So, I would, I would love to have anybody reach out if they're interested in public safety, if they want more information or if they wanna know how, how they can better interact. I will tell you that public safety personnel, we love it when people just say thank you. Just say thank you.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Again, as I promised, this was a great session. Thanks to Dr. Jamie for everything. If you haven't subscribed, please do so. You already have the information to send all your questions in. Dr. Jamie, thank you for all you all do. Again, I was coming in thinking public safety, that's police, right? You got firefighters, you got EMTs, you got everything else. So, thanks for the education and for what you all do, and I'm going to have to give you a hug. Thank you.

WICKER: Thank you. It's truly, it's truly my and our honor and privilege.

O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Thank you.