

Evan Schneider:

Hello, this is Evan Schneider, and welcome to Let's Talk About, produced by the Pace Center for Civic Engagement at Princeton University. In this season of Let's Talk About, we are featuring Princeton University students who are passionate about making service a part of their Princeton experience and living lives of service after they graduate.

Kelton Chastulik is a rising senior in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Kelton's interest in education has driven his passion for service both at Princeton and beyond. He is the co-chair of the Student Volunteers Council executive board and a member of the Pace Center for Civic Values. Kelton is also a Princeton Access and Inclusion Ambassador, where he works to create programming for first generation low-income students. Kelton recently received the Spirit of Princeton Award for contributions to the Princeton community and service. He is also a shot putter on the Princeton men's track and field team and an RCA for Whitman College.

Hi Kelton, how are you doing today? Thanks so much for joining us.

Kelton Chastulik:

I'm not doing too bad. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah, well, I know you pretty well, and I know that you're really involved across the university with a lot of different projects. One of the main things I know you do though, is you're on the SVC executive board. So just want to give you an opportunity to talk a little bit about what SVC is and what your role is and why you chose to be involved in that way.

Kelton Chastulik:

So the Student Volunteers Council is a group of projects that are student led. All of these projects are student led and they run through a multitude of project areas. So there's health, arts, STEAM, which is science tech, there's an arts component there, there's mentorship projects, which I, before moving into my coach here position, was overseeing education, hunger and homelessness, special needs, teaching in prisons. All of that's to say that a lot of students have very different project ideas, and so they all fall under the Student Volunteers Council.

The work that I do there currently is I oversee the executive board. Each of those project areas have a board member that helps just project management. So they'll come together with questions about budgeting, questions around volunteer recruitment, just other items that are really important to run a project and just talk through them to have another vantage point from someone. I really love my position, it's really cool. I work alongside with Sam Frank and Dave Brown, and they're really great people to work with. I love our meetings and coming together to just get a chance to mentor a younger group of students on the board, frankly. And so it's really great work. I really, really love doing it.

Evan Schneider:

What would you say that you've learned from serving on the SVC board? What are you going to take away from that experience as you move out of your time at Princeton?

Kelton Chastulik:

I think that one of the things I've learned from the SVC board that I think is just really critical to all facets of university life is really just working with students. I've had an opportunity to reflect on this. I'm an FSI RCA this summer and I just get the chance to meet so many incredible students from all kinds of walks of life and I really appreciate that because they brought in my understanding of being a college student and being at Princeton. My biggest takeaway is just learning from my fellow co-chair, Sam, or working with other people on the board. This is, I guess, my second board that I've been a part of. Just learning what they're interested in and how they enter the room of talking about service and understanding project management.

Also just, I think as a more, not like a really skills based lesson, but just still have fun in the work you're doing. I think building a team camaraderie like that when you're working with 8 to 10 students plus, when you're on a small team, making sure that you bring just your full transparent self. Being fully whole in that position, I think, is really important and I think I'll take that away with everything that's happening on Princeton's campus and after Princeton,

Evan Schneider:

Do you feel like having the connection with other people and feeling like you've been invited to be able to be your full self are key components to also then be able to have fun in the work that you're doing? Is that what you're trying to say?

Kelton Chastulik:

I think so. I think that having the space to be fully present, to come in and be your whole self. I mean, just coming in and saying look at the end of the day, especially when we're talking about emerging issues like teaching in prisons is a very, I think, a lofty mission and that comes with so many intersectional, intertwined issues there. And coming into that with an open mind and trying to learn as much, but at the end of the day coming almost to the point of, look I'm here like a sponge. I'm here to try to take in as much as possible and trying to be myself in that. Because at the end of the day, not only as when you're working on a team like the SVC that's going to be beneficial, but into your own growth. When you come at your learning in your style and as yourself, you're going to learn way more and be able to engage with these issues in a much better way.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah, I've been part of a lot of different boards throughout the years and I can tell you the freedom to own who you are, maybe to embrace your own authenticity, isn't always present in a lot of cases. I think a key to sort of having that mentality is having Dave Brown as your advisor. I mean, he's someone who, I think, he's ever met anyone that he wasn't able to accept exactly as they are, which is an amazingly unique gift and it's something that he gives to every single person he interacts with.

Kelton Chastulik:

Yeah, I think Dave is just... It's so funny. He has some aura of him that is so unique to the work that he does. I've been so grateful to have him as a mentor of sorts and to have him as someone that I can come to, not only to talk about SVC things, but to talk about general student life, to talk about other projects I do back in my hometown. He's donated to our project and so I think he's a wonderful person that I'm so grateful to be able to work with. Even right now in the summer we're working together. So I'm really grateful to have him on my side.

Evan Schneider:

Normally I wouldn't want to talk about another staff person when they're not present, but I have nothing but positive things to say about Dave and I also think that when I think of Dave, one of the main things I think of is his willingness and ability to uplift other people, to praise other people, to give people credit where credit is due. It's just so fantastic so I don't really feel that bad saying nice things about Dave, because he definitely deserves all that credit. So in addition to being invested in the Princeton community, both on and off campus, you're also really involved in your hometown of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. I want to give you the opportunity to just say a little bit about the service that you do back home.

Kelton Chastulik:

So when I think about the stuff I do in Chambersburg, other than just being a very committed citizen, I guess, I mean I do co-direct a, I don't call it a nonprofit because we aren't 501(c) recognized, but an organization of sorts, the Chambersburg Holiday Book Drive, which I can definitely tell a story of how that all started. It's just been an incredible ride. We kind of a two pronged mission. So first was giving access to educational resources like books to communities in the greater Chambersburg area. And so we collect, we buy, we repurpose books from all kinds of places in the greater Chambersburg area and donate them. And then there's also, inside of that organization, there's kind of a mentorship aspect of it of taking students in our school district and kind of just giving them the tools to be engaged with the community in their own way.

Right now, I think I'm seeing a lot of it just in this current climate, but many of our students are really involved with local demonstrations and giving them the tools to be able to speak up, to be advocates, to be allies in that space. I think we're seeing some of the fruit of our labor in that. Just recently I've also been involved a lot, because of COVID-19, I've had the wonderful opportunity to work on a county task force with some other nonprofit leaders in the community on food insecurity. I've worked with a local foundation, our Chambersburg High School District Foundation, which had the mission of getting books, I think I'm known as the book guy in Chambersburg, and so their mission, at least in this campaign, was to get five free books to all kids K-5 in our district.

And they had a little wall in fundraising due to COVID-19 and so I was able to kind of offer just some ideas and kind of be a part of that mission. I've also just been involved with local demonstrations. I can talk a little more about that in detail later, but I was able to help plan a demonstration with a group in Franklin County called the Racial Reconciliation Franklin County group. I've been able to keep my hands full whether it's through just some of my own work. I also had the Davis Projects for Peace program that I was going to this summer that was moved to, hopefully, next summer because of COVID-19. But I do find myself really entrenched with the Chambersburg community, yeah.

Evan Schneider:

Well, I want to know why, because in a lot of ways you're sort of the guy living the dream. You're from a small town in Pennsylvania, it's like an old coal mining community and a lot of people in your position I think would be really focused on the future and kind of really thinking about what's next in their own life and not really concerned about their home community. So just curious what draws you back to Chambersburg? Why do you care so much about that city?

Kelton Chastulik:

That's like a million dollar question. I've been asked that by many students and so I think that, I don't know, it's a multitude of things, definitely. I think it intersects with family and just kind of the way I was raised. I'm the first, along with my twin brother, first people to go to college in our family and I think a

lot of students in Chambersburg, at least in the space that I'm in, in terms of just educational access, I think a lot of the students we work with are kind of in the same boat. I think it's values that I was raised up in. My mother always used to have this saying, and I think I took it and then the wrong way so it's kind of funny that it is this, but she used to say that "You're never better than anyone else and nor does that mean that anyone is better than you."

And so I think she used to say that because she didn't ever want us to be rude or hateful to anybody, but I kind of took that as, well if that's the case and we're all in this together, let's raise everyone up together. I think that plays a role in it. I think also there's just some valuing. I was recently watching a TED Talk. The speaker's name is slipping my mind right now, but she was talking about just where we're local from. I think a lot of those questions I have within the pace centers a lot of people, what is it like to be working in your home? And I think I really like her framework of it's not necessarily home because that's a fixed place in time. And where I'm local I think it's the people, it's the values, it's the things that I was raised up on.

There were times when I was younger I would bike five miles to go to the library. Just the people I faced with and I've had such a wonderful opportunity to be in Chambersburg seen as a leader, whether it's through the athletic portion of my life or just working a job in the grocery store. I also think it's just a place that I'm taking serious. As a first generation college student, I think at Princeton it was really tough at least for that first year. Like, Oh who am I here? I know where I am in Chambersburg. So I think it's parts of that too. I always make a joke I'll write a memoir or something someday, because I think a lot of people do see it as I am someone living a dream, but I think that dream is built upon my parents and their parents. And so I think that question is always just something I continually ponder.

Evan Schneider:

So I know that you do a lot of service on campus with helping and working with first generation low income students. I know part of that's because of what you were just talking about. And so I just kind of wanted to talk a little bit about how you and your life experiences have prepared you for that kind of work and what that community is like on campus. I think it's becoming something that is a little bit less stigmatized, it feels like, on campus, but there's certainly something there as well. So I just kind of want you to reflect on that.

Kelton Chastulik:

I don't know, I hold this theory of change of just being able to give back places or to organizations or to ideas that have given you so much. I think that coincides with the last question I was talking about and I think at least when I was home some of the terming is so different. I realized that I was a little less wealthy than the kids. I was able to be in the International Baccalaureate class, the inaugural class, in my high school and I remember being afraid to not be a part of that because the tests were so expensive. I actually ended up getting a job so I could pay for some of those tests. And so I always knew in high school, I was a little less wealthy than my parents didn't have nearly the same experience as other students.

So I think when I go back into Chambersburg, at least in that context, seeing kids just like me who, I mean I wouldn't call myself these words, but these students they're so wildly talented. They're so intelligent. They're so passionate. Giving them the space to raise some of their aspiration, giving them the space to be able to think "I can do something so much bigger than what my parents did before me, because they were able to give me the space." I think a lot of people when I'm back in Chambersburg, they're like, "Are you coming back because you see yourself? You go to Princeton and that's good for other people to see you." And I don't ever look at it that way because I think I come back because I see

myself in kids and I see that just because of how talented they are or how intelligent they are, they can do amazing things.

And I guess there's just some responsibility there to be able to do that. I think in the Princeton context, I've just had so many incredible mentors. I'm an RCA for the Freshman Scholars Institute program, I think I said that before, this summer and I've been reflecting on just the amazing mentors, people I've been able to speak with. People like Maria Sanchez who just was on a team to help support DACA. She was my PAA and we had multiple conversations. People like Jordan Thomas, who I still keep in contact, who's a road scholar. People that were incredible. It actually blows my mind that I could be mentored by such people. And so I think when I see students coming in for the first time through the FSI, the [inaudible] program, or as an RCA in Whitman College, I see it as a duty to try to be able to give some kind of experience back to them in the same light almost as Chambersburg. The kids that are coming to Princeton are incredibly talented, incredibly intelligent.

So giving them the space or giving them some guidance as to how they can do great things. I had a [inaudible] who was telling me, "Oh, you do such great things." And I was like, "Well you can do that too. I want to be the person to be able to open up opportunities or to help raise opportunities to you to be able to do that." I think a lot of that has been shaped by being back in Chambersburg and has helped me to do that at Princeton in a very interesting way.

Evan Schneider:

I want to shift back to your hometown and just talk a little bit about the holiday drive, the book drive and it's a really interesting project that you just... My perspective of it when you were talking to me about it is it kind of just happened and then you just sort of lived into it a little bit, but I know that you also were doing a ton of work too. So it was not like it just fell in your lap or something. So I'm just curious what did you learn by starting that program and also what is the program? What is the holiday book drive?

Kelton Chastulik:

It started about three years ago with an idea between Madison Mountain, their class of 2023 and I, and we were hoping to just do something for each other for Christmas. And it devolved into where we were originally hoping to get 200 books for one shelter turned into 5,000 books for over 15 organizations. And I think, like you said Evan, it popped up on us, it really did. And I have to thank just Madison, I have to thank my brother, I have to thank my family for just being so supportive in all of that. I could not have done it at all without them. I think I'm also sounding like I'm saying that I do this alone, I definitely don't. They take leadership roles and they're super important in it.

I think the biggest lesson that I've learned from it is I remember when coming to Princeton and I was looking at what schools to go to and it was such a crazy thing. I was really afraid of losing this blue collar mentality I had about me of just grinding it out, putting your head to the dirt and just going. And my father, he's worked construction for over 30 years, and he had said to me, "Look Kelton, you're going to lose it. You're going to go to a white collar school." And this is coming from a place we didn't know what we were getting into. And I think he was wrong in the sense that taking that mentality and using the tools that I'm getting from the university, using the tools I'm getting from people in the pace center, using the tools from students that are involved with our project, whether we mentor them or they're volunteers.

Just putting in a little bit of elbow grease will really get something really incredible. And so I think that along with letting students have the opportunity to go about doing their things and letting their vision coincide yours, I think, is just really powerful.

Evan Schneider:

So it seems like a lot of the way that you get involved with things draws in others as well. I want you to talk about what advice maybe would you give to students who want to get involved in service or activism on campus now?

Kelton Chastulik:

I definitely think I see this in my role as just being in SVC a little bit and just advising students more so on passion. I think passion is going to outweigh every skill or technique that you'll ever learn. And so I think of course we want to enter the community and do this right and without harm, but when someone comes to me and says, "I see injustice and I want to do something about it," that alone shows so much already that you've done. That you want to learn more, that you have a desire to do so. I think digging into that is a really helpful thing to drive towards learning about an issue, learning how to enter the community in a good way, entering in creating a project, all those logistical things that come with a project. I think if you dig into that passion first, all that other stuff will be super easy. Let that drive the work that you're doing.

Evan Schneider:

I think that's great career advice as well, actually. A lot of people go into, say for instance, medicine because they really like science or maybe they're really good at solving problems, but they may not be a good fit because they don't really like working very closely with people. Well, as it turns out, if you're a doctor you kind of need to do that. You really need to be passionate about doing that. Then I think a lot of the time, and I see this a lot with Princeton students and I think it makes sense, you're just coming out of college. Your perspective of a career is very focused on maybe one or two possibilities and you haven't really thought outside the box in terms of what are my passions and then how does that match or fit a potential job out there.

Kelton Chastulik:

I definitely think even as I've, I mean, being a senior is just, first, crazy in my mind, but seeing what is going to be after Princeton. That's some of the best advice that's been given to me is kind of, "Look, at the end of the day, you have to be happy and you have to do what you want to do irregardless of the pay, irregardless of where you're located, irregardless of the people you work with, you have to like what you're doing." And so I think, I don't know, I've taken that motto not only in just kind of, I guess, career opportunities, but also just general life. I think service, I think my friendships, I think in my personal life, that's a really good way to follow it.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah, and this kind of touches a little bit on a soap box moment that I often have with students, especially Princeton students. I run the senior cohort and one of the things we talk a lot about actually and dig into is what implicit learnings are you getting from your Princeton experience? Because one of the things I see happening is that you are all being taught that being really, really busy is normal. That not having boundaries around your time is normal and I think those are both really dangerous things to internalize because from my experience working at Princeton and watching students and then staying in

contact with students after they graduate, there's a burnout moment usually that happens because there needs to be a transition into a space where you do have, "Okay, this is work. This is not work. I'm going to live in to not work for a little while and maybe not take an 88 hour a week job," or something like that right out of school.

Kelton Chastulik:

Yeah, definitely.

Evan Schneider:

All right. So what are you passionate about right now?

Kelton Chastulik:

I think right now, I mean everything education based, I think, I just find myself so intrigued about education and I don't know if that's because I'm a first generation, low income college student myself, and I think I've seen the inequality firsthand. I think it also, again, I firmly believe in the power of education. Right now, I mean, I'm very intrigued by the amount of work that's happening on the ground for educational justice. Having spoken to people in Chambersburg, I mean, having to work with the foundation. That alone has been really intriguing. I think having the opportunity to see movements across the country right now in all kinds of forums, I think has been really intriguing. I'm also as passionate about reading right now, too. I've read a lot of really intriguing stories that's kind of given me new perspective, especially as, I mean, this is probably the most unique time I may ever live in and so coming here and getting a few new perspectives from people, both through Zoom calls and through books, I think I just been really excited to get to do more of.

Evan Schneider:

What are you feeling hopeful about right now?

Kelton Chastulik:

Just seeing the students that I've had the opportunity to, I hate using the word mentor because, again, I think it's something you earn. I shouldn't ever call myself a mentor, but I think seeing students that I've had the opportunity to work with and to advise in some sort do really amazing things has given me a lot of hope because in the end, it's not just one person that's going to make a change, it's going to be many students, many people coming together with some kind of goal together, really, that offers things. If I think in my hometown and seeing there's one person specifically I can think about who actually was leading in the demonstration we planned and he's been through our organization for the last two years. And seeing him grow up to be someone that's committed in his university, that's committed to the Chambersburg community has been just so, it inspires me a lot. And I think just also too the amount of young people broadly in this country that are speaking up. I think that too is giving me a little bit of inspiration.

Evan Schneider:

Well Kelton, we've known each other for several years now., I'm excited to see you grow and evolve as a student. You spent the summer with us after your first year working on CA and so it's been fun to just watch you develop as a person, as a mentor, I would call you a mentor for sure, and I really appreciate your time. Thank you so much for joining us.

This transcript was exported on Jul 20, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Kelton Chastulik:

Thank you.

Evan Schneider:

You've been listening to Let's Talk About, the production of the Pace Center Civic Engagement. This podcast is intended to be informational only and does not reflect nor represents the views of the Pace Center for Civic Engagement or Princeton University.