

Amy Interview Transcript

My name is Amy Bauer. I'm the assistant director at Fusion but previously I was the finance department head and I taught chemistry, biology and anatomy.

I am still the science department head, even though I'm now also the assistant director. It's been a busy year.

Oh gosh. This is not my favorite question and everybody always has like these inspiring stories and like 12 different jobs that came to bear on how you end up at fusion. I have done a lot of different kinds of things. I was a graphic designer and I shouldn't touch my face.

I was a graphic designer and I studied human biology as an undergraduate before that. So I've always had kind of diverse interests but I have always been interested in education and I have done a lot of volunteer work with teenagers and so when I moved to this area and was looking for work I found fusion and the one on one teaching model just sounded so appealing.

I come from a family of teachers and the idea of getting to teach one on one of the science that I have kind of gotten away from as a graphic designer being able to come back to that; just sounded really really fun and it was.

It'll be four years this August which is a veteran in fusion.

I think the things that make teaching at fusion feel meaningful are the parts that come in under the slash mentor part right. We are all teachers slash mentors and it's been really interesting. It's just been really rewarding being able to be there for a students.

As a mentor, I feel like I've always believed that teenagers need a lot more than just their parents to make it through and be well adjusted adults and it's need to be in a building full of people who also believe that and who want to work with students in a way that helps for prepare them for adulthood and you know we have a student body who had been through a lot of things and so they oftentimes need a little bit more TLC.

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And it's really been inspiring to be able to work with students academically but also to try to meet the other important needs that they have and just see that the two can go hand-in-hand. So I hope that's what it would be like when I applied and I did find that to be the case and really being able to help students understand that they have worse even if they're not good at chemistry and that we can get them through this class and know that they are worth the effort of learning and all the things that we put into them like so often they come to us now feeling like they're worth very much.

And I think they leave feeling differently. I think they leave with a sense that there are a group of people who thought I was worth some effort and they they put that effort into me and what I was able to accomplish. It feels really good.

The mentor role, it's a really nuanced role I think and it can be hard to understand and as an assistant director it can be hard to coach people sometimes into what that mentor role means.

I think that-- first and foremost it's not being a friend or a pal although I can include joking around and being fun like ideally it is those things. But it is so much more powerful because it's also thinking about that student's development, thinking about what they need to become the best version of themselves, thinking about sometimes--sometimes thinking about what the other adults in their lives aren't things to them that you know they need to hear.

And just being that voice in their head that they can carry forward with them that tells them the things they know they should believe even when it's hard to believe. I think just really helping them to see themselves; but also holding up firm boundaries of not being just buddies.

It's so much more. It's more of a leadership role rather than a friend role. Even though you're going to joke around and chat it's really more. It's more deliberate than that.

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One of the things that never seems to crack me up was how much students love putting on a lab coat and goggles and gloves like they feel so official. Even like seniors in high school I get really excited when all the lab gear goes on and that always surprised me.

They're so jaded and cool right in so many ways but merely offer them a lab coat. They get really excited so that's fun. So you said some of the fun things?

I think some of my other favorite times are at our evening performance events. So we do an event called art speaks and eats and then we did a variety show as well this year and seeing the students perform and we've had a lot of different kinds of performances.

So we'll do musical performances but also we had students do short scenes; like acting scenes and poetry readings. And like our jam club which meets during lunch to just make music. They perform some songs [Inaudible 06:38] soloists sing and I looked at these kids and they aren't necessarily the kids who would ever have performed at a big event at another school.

But they felt totally comfortable. I mean they had nerves but they felt comfortable performing in front of this group of people in a way they never would have at a large high school. which is just really-- it's really sweet. They feel safe with each other and they've been taught that they can make mistakes in front of people and it's okay.

And so it's just really fun to see them have the confidence to get up in front of everybody and sing a solo or play a song on the drums they just learned that day which happened this year. So those events are really fun, just to see them confident enough to be in front of everyone.

It's a dynamic system as you can imagine when you have a roomful of teenagers and we have these two homework cafe spaces and one of our top priorities is that that's a safe space. We talk about it in family orientations that students are new. We go over the student learning outcomes one of which is being compassionate.

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The students all go over that with their lead teachers when we have our hierarchy process three times a year. And I think you know in the moment sort of things happen with the homework cafe teachers. So we try to give the students as much leeway as we can with regard to how they interact with each other in the homework cafe.

So we don't-- we try not--it's a fine mind to monitor the conversation, to keep it appropriate but also to really allow them to explore topics that can be controversial and people have big feelings about. But it's such an important thing for them to learn how to do that in a safe space like this.

Oftentimes it's just a matter-- like we as an administrative team have to think about like what are outside boundaries? what do those look like? So that we can decide on how well we'll enforce any boundaries. And because one of the things I've noticed about our student body is they love to talk about the big issues and we don't want to shut that down.

But we also need to make sure it's appropriate for middle school students and that everyone gets a chance to speak their mind and that they do it in a respectful way. So oftentimes it's just understanding the dynamic of the students.

The homework Café teacher keep-- kind of has their thumb on what's going on and when they need to intervene. But I think part of why they feel confident with each other when they are there singing in front of everyone or do a poetry reading is because they have talked about these like really you know these are topics they've seen that other students have listened to them.

They've had these interactions where it felt kind of like tense right about all these big topics and so-- and they saw that those went fine. And so they can kind of go out on a limb in other ways too.

So before I became an administrator Katie was one of my students. I think my second year teaching here. Katie is a new student in the fall and we're taking, we're doing chemistry together. And Katie's one of my favorite students to talk about because her change is so dramatic.

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So when katie showed up at fusion, she did not care about school. She was pretty sure it was super lame for anyone to care about school. She didnt--Yes she was only here because her parents made her come here. And it was hard to quickly buy in, You know she wasn't she's never rude or mean. She just didn't care.

And over the course of our class together she said-- she has such a good heart that it wasn't that hard to win her over because she's really like a kind and a sweet person. And when she saw that her teachers cared about her she wasn't going to be rude back because she's a nice person and so we got our buy in because she was inherently like a kind and good person.

And so when she saw that we cared about her even if she didn't care about our class I think that got the ball rolling that she could 'oh maybe it's not so bad here like my teachers are cool even when I don't like chemistry'.

So the remarkable thing about Katie has just been watching over the last three years that she actually really cares about school now and she isn't embarrassed to be smart or to be good at things. And so she's fun to talk about because she's exactly what you would hope happens for a fusion student over their time here.

A graduation, we say it all the time; it's the best day of the year and it's not just because it's short although that doesn't hurt and it's great because you actually get to celebrate students in a very personal way instead of just reading their name.

You actually get to hear from somebody who cares about them, who have that mentor relationship with them. You get to hear from the student if the student wants to say anything. And it really does feel like the celebration of an accomplishment.

And I'll add to that, that as an administrator now and sitting in on intakes and performing intake interviews with families who want to come here and seeing-- they often come to us in a moment of crisis right and so I wasn't in the intakes for any of our graduating seniors but I've seen kids like them now and they come to us in a moment of difficulty.

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And so I have a little bit of a peek now into that transformative period of time they have with us that it really is celebrating going from oftentimes a really hard place that that student has been in and celebrating that they came out of it. They came out of it stronger and with all these skills they have this new like tribe of people who love them and it's just super meaningful. it feels it's a great night.

Well it helps because I'm an admin; because I have to message things to people a lot. So it's actually probably helpful to have an admin do one of them [Inaudible 13:38] getting to talk to families about stuff.