[Video: BriannaBlaserVideo.mP4]

MOON: Perfect. Alright. Well, I don't wanna take any more time than I need to, so we can just get started. So I'm Hanna Moon. And I am taking GWSS 460 this quarter and I'm with Brianna Blaser, who is a GWSS Phd. Alumni. And I guess we can go ahead and get started about kind of your personal history. And maybe just where you started. And so do you want to just start by saying like what pronouns you go by.

BLASER: Yeah. I use she/her pronouns.

[00:00:43]

MOON: Okay, awesome. And then where? Where were you born?

BLASER: I was born in Washington, DC, in 1980, and grew up in Maryland. I went to college in Pittsburgh. I went to Carnegie Mellon, in the late nineties, right? And at the time there were 2 men on campus for every woman.

MOON: Oh!

BLASER: In computer science there were more Dave's than women in the major and I showed up as a math major and it did not occur to me how skewed my classes would be. How few women they would be in them. You know my faculty members would know my name in a class of 100 people, because I was one of the few girls in the class. And I was, yeah. I mean, I was encouraged to take this theoretical math sequence which I didn't love theoretical math. But that's you know what you gotta do if you're gonna go to grad school in math. So I was encouraged to take it, and I was told don't worry about your grade. We want more women in the class, right, which felt like this - we have, like some supportive words of like you know, we want more women here, but it really - I heard it a different way right? So it was just a really strange environment to be in. I hadn't anticipated that right. I grew up in DC. My parents were old hippies. My mom dropped out of college because she was going down to the Vietnam war protests every day right like that is the environment I was raised in. I was really active in Girl Scouts, you know, which has this very feminist attitude of promoting stem education like I was encouraged to, you know, science and math so much that just did not occur to me what I was going to encounter when I got to college, right? So it was not uncommon in my math classes, for

there just to be a couple girls...women, I suppose I should say. I remember being in the hallway in the math building one day, and I passed one of my faculty members, and he was like, “Oh, are you here to see me?” And I was like, “No, I'm here to see somebody else” like, but he knew who I was, just because there were so few women in the class. So I got a little distracted by that problem and I started taking - there was a gender studies minor on campus at the time, so I started taking as many classes as I could in that. I took some science studies classes, too, which is exciting. To find those you know, to learn about what is science and what's the history of science? And I got distracted. So at some point I was like fed up with math, fed up with the department and trying to decide like what I was gonna do was I? And I decided to add a double major in psychology, so that I might be competitive. If I decided I wanted to think about this women and science thing more. Once I graduated I took some women studies classes over the Summer University of Maryland. I was spending my day doing math research at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. So go do my math research. And then I drive down to UMD and take my women's studies classes. So it was a very, you know one to the other.
But it was - on campus, too, when I was going between my math classes and the gender studies classes I was taking it was this like whiplash right? Because in a math class, you didn't raise your hand unless you knew what you were saying was going to be correct. So I mean, I remember clearly being in a class, and the professor was doing a proof and he assumed all prime numbers are odd. And I'm sitting there looking around the room like man, these are all math majors, right? And like certain New York classes like, we know that 2 is a prime number, and it's not odd. And he didn't account for it, and I remember being like Oh, should I raise my hand? You know, like I don't know if I wanna raise my hand, you know what, if I'm missing something, and like it was such a obvious thing that he had just missed something, you know, and I was still afraid to raise my hand, because, you know, it was like this real machismo around speaking up in class which is real uncomfortable, right? I - it was. Yeah. It was very bizarre, you know. It was not a great environment. I’d do math homework with the you know other math majors and you know, it was always a question of like, were my ideas being appreciated as much cause I would I was the only one there. You know, or were they being passed over? And
you know so still to this day I have very dear friends that I've met in a couple of those classes. So not. I'm not saying that everybody there was a bad person. It's just a weird environment. And then I would go to my gender studies classes right? And all of a sudden being like, Oh, I am supposed to talk in these classes. You know, as somebody who has a fair amount of social anxiety, like figuring out what are the dynamics in, you know a social science class compared to

a math class? Right? It was a very different atmosphere and needs. And so I spent a lot of time kind of doing some soul searching of like what am I to do when I graduate, and I don't know. I think I just thought at the time that if you were smart you went to grad school. My mother and I graduated from college in the same year. My dad had an associates degree right. I didn't come from a family that had graduate degrees, so I didn't really know what that meant, but I was really good at school, so you know, I could keep going to school for a while right like that was about how thought out my plan was. And it didn't seem like a bad idea, although my mom said, Well, maybe you should go get a PhD in math and take women's studies on the side, because then you'd be more likely to get a job at the end. And I was like I - That's I don't - That's not how this works, mom. I'm pretty sure I don't know a lot about what I'm doing, but I'm pretty sure that's not how it works. [laughs] And yeah. So - and I had, you know, some of my math - there was a man who's a faculty member at Carnegie Mellon, and also worked at NIST, and so I took a class with him at Carnegie Mellon, and eventually went back to NIST full time. But he was a mentor of mine that I spent a lot of time with, and he was like, “Just apply to one program. It can be an applied math program right like, just don't give this up.” And I just - I didn't see it. It's funny. I still see him every year at a conference that I go to on broadening participation in computing that is actually named after his graduate advisor. So I see him every year. And you know, at the time he was like, “What are you getting off into? This is a distraction. All of this stuff about diversity like, don't spend your time doing this. You know, you've really got to think about, you know, these technical skills”, cause I was good at it, and he knew I was good at it, because I was doing this work with him right. Yeah, but I was - It was also this message, I've been thinking a lot about, this idea of passion jobs, right? Which I think is a very gendered concept. And I think you know, it's part of the reason we still see women in so many low paying professions and careers, and right and it was very much I'm gonna go follow my passion. And you know I thought about it. And I was like, you know, I really loved it when I could solve a proof of math. It was like high-high. But I was also so frustrated when I couldn't get things figured out, and I didn't like the social environment. So I applied to - I wrote away to the National Women's Studies Association and ordered a book. It was a physical copy that came in the mail that had a list of all of the graduate programs in women studies across the country because there weren't that many at the time? I don't know what the current numbers are. There weren't a lot then it was something like 10 Phd programs, right? So like.

MOON: It could fit into a book [laughs]

BLASER: Yeah. Oh, it was. Yeah, it was. It was not big. And it covered masters programs. And I just like I applied all over the place because I didn't really know what I was doing. I got into a bunch of masters programs, and I got a fellowship from Ohio State to do their masters program, and I think they were just about to start a PhD program. And so I went out to Ohio State to go visit cause it wasn't that far from Pittsburgh it was easy to get there. And they said while I was there, they're like, “Oh, so you want to study women in science…is that like Donna Haraway and the Cyborg?” And I was like, no, like, I was thinking, actual women that are scientists right? [laughs] And it was kind of like this immediate, oh, I don't think this is the right fit for me and to this day, I will tell you, I'm not a big theory person. I'm very much kind of boots on the ground. And I was like, I don't think this is the right fit. I don't think that the right people are here, so I think it was the week later, I flew out to Seattle. Never been to the West Coast before. But you know I was really an East Coast girl at heart. Never thought I would live this far away from home. Never thought I would live to even move away from DC permanently. Cause all my family is in the DMV area. So I came out here and I visited, and it was, you know, it was like this time of year spring, and it was beautiful. It was green and you know, I enjoyed the meeting the other students and I met my advisor, Angela Genorio, who was interested in women and science, and when I said, “Women in science” to her, she was talking about those women who are actually scientists. Right? And yeah, decided, okay, well, this is a better - this is gonna be a better fit. There's only one year of guaranteed funding which was scary at the time, right like, what if you go for that one year, and then it doesn't work out and so I went back home and told my parents, that's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna move. I flew out to Seattle for the first time on the anniversary of September 11th - the first anniversary, so it was September 11th, 2002 which I remember only because I accidentally packed a pair of scissors in my

MOON: Oh! [laughs]

BLASER: In my carry on because I was moving, and everything was chaotic, and I was like, I only own one pair of scissors, so there's no way they're in my carry on. Well, they were in my carry on. The guy was like, “Do you wanna mail them to yourself? I hear you only have one pair of scissors.” No, I will get a new pair of scissors in Seattle, man. So yeah moved out to Seattle, luckily I had a friend who was coming out to work for Microsoft, right? Because Carnegie Mellon was a big computer science school so a lot of my college friends ended up in Seattle. And so I sent a bunch of boxes with him. He moved them as part of his moving that Microsoft was

moving his things across the country, and ended up out here. So I - maybe I should pause because I just keep talking.

MOON: [Laughs] No you're good!

BLASER: I want to make sure that -

[00:11:40]

MOON: Honestly, I mean you've you've answered a lot of the questions that I already kind of had planned, and that I was curious about. So that's great. But you mentioned like, when you are doing your undergrad, that you kind of were like - like, did you always plan to go to grad school, or do higher education after undergrad? Or kinda were you just kind of going with the flow?

BLASER: I didn't have a plan. And actually, I've just had this realization in the last year. Right? So my work now is on disability, inclusion and accessibility in STEM right? So that's what I focus on. And I - there was this assignment in my first year I was taking a class that was like an introduction to the College of Sciences right? And there was class during a week where the Career fair was on campus and they canceled class and said, "There's no class but you have to go to the career fair and talk to an employer and then write up a paragraph about it." That was it. That was the whole assignment. And at the time I mentioned NIST, I had been - a family friend had gotten me this job at NIST over the summer after I graduated from high school. I was real mad at my mom because I was going to go be a counselor at my Girl Scout Camp and instead of doing that I had to go do math over the summer and sit in front of a computer right? And as a matter of fact, while I was there one summer, I wish I had a copy of it here, but while I was there one summer there was - I was working under a black woman, and there was an Asian woman working with us, and they took a picture of the three of us working together because it's like this perfect picture of like, look, there's three women working on a project. And then for years in every NIST publication they used that picture or every from - the math department or math division, because it was like, look at how diverse we are. And I was like okay, cool, cool man but oh, yeah, so so. Anyway, I had that internship. I knew I could go back there, and they didn't give us any structure for what it meant to go into a career fair and talk to someone. And as somebody who at the time I would have just thought I was shy, you know. Now I recognize I have an anxiety disorder, and have had an anxiety disorder my whole life. I just it was like not something I could do to just go walk into a career fair. And talk to - so I made up a conversation - I wrote a great paragraph about a pretend conversation I could have had turned it in. It was fine. I passed

the class right, and it's only in the last few years, you know. I - you know I'm in my mid forties now, and I was thinking well really has my anxiety impacted my education and career? I was like, oh, totally there - I was not somebody to lie about assignments that was not my MO. But that just was not something that I could do, particularly without scaffolding of some sort. It's funny also in that class. At one point we had to like write to an employer or something I don't know, but I had found this organization called the Association for Women in Science, and I wrote an email to them in that class about their internship program. I don't think I ever heard back from them, never went anywhere. And then, years later, after I finished my first year, at UW, I did go back and do an internship.

MOON: Yeah I saw your page on it, and I was like, wait!

[Laughter and indiscernible conversation]

BLASER: I didn't know. It took me years to remember that. Oh, I have done this organization before I knew they existed. You know, which now there's tons of that kind of stuff. But there was - the women in science kind of community was much smaller back then.

MOON: Wow! It's a full circle moment. [laughs]

BLASER: Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

[00:15:18]

MOON: That's fun. Well, so I guess you mentioned that UW was kind of the second place that you had visited. And so did you kind of...Was the deciding point just the fact that you were able to be on the same page with that counselor? Or were there other factors?

BLASER: I mean, money was one factor, right? So I had mostly applied to master's programs. One of - I got a fellowship at Ohio state, so that would have paid for my - a whole master's degree. I'd gotten into a bunch of other places. One of them was GW. George Washington, in DC. Which was appealing only because that's where my family was. I could go back home, live with my parents if I wanted...I guess I don't know. But I- when I came out here to visit, I remember saying to Angela, when I was meeting with her in our office like - I don't know if I want a PhD. You know, I also got into this master's program, and I got funding there, and you know, and what she said was, "Well, if you come and don't like it, you can leave with a master's. You don't

have to finish the PhD." I was like, "Oh, okay, sure", you know which I also in retrospect, I'm like, I'm not somebody who's gonna quit something. And I think that in years, when I was in the later years of my PhD, when I was like, I don't really know what I'm doing. I don't know that this is gonna lead to a clear career path. I also knew that I was not somebody who just stopped with something I was in the middle of, so I finished it because I don't know, and I am glad that I did. Now, there, there is credit and recognition I get because I have those 3 letters after my name, that other colleagues that work in my office and do very similar work don't get so I recognize that I'm glad that I did it. But there was - there were moments there where I was not happy.

[00:17:09]

MOON: Mhm I mean, it's a lot of work. I can't - I cannot even imagine [laughs] so yeah. And did you always know that you wanted to focus on like women studies? I know you said that math was kind of an option, but.

BLASER: I mean, I just really left that program needing to figure out this problem of why weren't women in science you know, and engineering in the same ways that they were in other fields, like what was going on. Because this is something I was really passionate about. You know, the cultural environment was really weird. And so I just really needed to solve that problem. And I, you know, I think I thought a lot about what that meant when I went to graduate school and a women's study program just seemed like the best place in terms of thinking about gender. You know, I got some advice from a family friend about, you know. Oh, you should go into a traditional discipline versus something that's interdisciplinary, because you'll get better methods training. Which is interesting to reflect on. You know, in hindsight there's some truth to that right there were - when I was in graduate school at UW there was some like, well, you have to get methods, classes. Well, it's sometimes hard to get into methods classes in other departments, and we don't have that many methods classes in the women's studies department, or we didn't have the time, you know. It was a while ago at this point. And I do feel like as somebody who continues, I don't do a lot of research. I do some research these days. That's definitely a weakness for me is methodology, and like there. There is some truth to that. Oh, it would be - have been helpful to have had kind of more rigorous methodology training. But I don't think that I knew well enough coming out of college. What discipline would I go to? Right? I remember looking briefly at like science and technology studies programs, which I think MIT and Harvard both had some at the time, but I didn't apply any to any of those, and I don't know why. I think that's the other place that would have been a good fit for me, right

I - and there were things that once I got here [indiscernible, laughs] When I got to UW, we you know, the very first week, it's like, okay, you're TAing Women 200. And I'm like, great. I have never learned a lot of this stuff before, like total imposter syndrome stuff, you know. And also I expected every student to be, I think, just as dedicated as - of a student as I was, and learning that like oh, you know, this is a little bit - not every student is me. It was also a culture shock coming from a university that had a lot of resources to coming to UW. I remember, during one of - a departmental meeting during my first quarter. Judy Howard was chair at the time, and she was like, “Here are the - oh, we already ran out of the overhead markers for the year. But I got everybody an overhead marker”, you know. So I'm gonna give everybody, you know. And then I like cherish that overhead marker right, which sounds so silly now, right? Because we don't use overhead markers. But also, you know, it was just that was - the resources were different. Right? I don't know. I was also amused. Every time I would get to the Padelford Hall, and it would feel like you would go in and you could turn left to get to the math department, you know, or right to get to women's studies. And I would think about that a lot when I, you know, and I would often pick up my library holds, you know, at the math library upstairs, because at the time - I don't know if this is still how the library works, because I get them in my inbox. It's like staff and faculty can do that right. But at the time, as a student, if you wanted to read a book, you could get it sent to any library on campus. So that was the way I could avoid going to other library. Other buildings I just then sent to the math library, which was in Padelford. So yeah. So I'm I - I don't know if you want me to tell you more about when I was a graduate student?

[00:21:07]

MOON: No, I mean that I mean that makes sense. I mean I’m just curious. But you - I feel like this might be a good segue because you mentioned kinda the lack of resources at UW. So do you want to kind of go over like what the department was like at that time, because I'm sure it's changed a lot since then.

BLASER: Oh, man, it was wild. I think I was in maybe the fifth year that they even admitted graduate students right? So we had I think, 15 graduate students the first year I got here. So it was very small, which was nice, because you got to know everybody. I mean, sometimes I felt a disconnect from the department like I said I’m not much of a theory person, and the number of times people would tell me I should be reading more theoretical stuff and Foucault. And that wasn't quite a fit with what I wanted to do. And so I think that was one of the beautiful things about the department. Is that there was a lot of flexibility to determine what you wanted to do.

Right? So Angela and I, my advisor, had a good relationship, and she was very much on board with me doing things the way I wanted to do so when I put my committee together, Nancy Kenny was also on my committee. She was a faculty member in women's studies and in Psychology and then I had a third committee member who is in the College of Education. And I chose them because I knew they weren't going to make me read Foucault do things I didn't want to do like that was a very strategic choice. But again, it was like. I think that was part of the weirdness of the program is that in some ways I was able to push things to do what I wanted to do. But could I have come out with a different skill set and maybe strengths that I don't have now had I been pushed to do things that I didn't want to do right? And you know, I don't really know.

MOON: But I feel like you were able to use it kind of to your advantage to strengthen things that you wanted to do so.

BLASER: Oh, totally totally even, you know, I think one of my one of the things that was kind of weird is only getting funding for that first year, right? And you wouldn't find out about funding for subsequent years. Like, if you were gonna TA in the department, you wouldn't find out till quite late, and so, after my first year, at the end of my first year, I had met my now husband, spoiler alert. [laughs] We met in May that year, and so we'd really been dating about a month and a half, and I was like, I got this internship back in DC. I'm about to leave for the summer. I think I'll be back in the fall, but I don't know what my funding is yet, so see ya, you know. [laughs] So I went back to DC and worked for the Association of Women in Science, which again, much more real world and application oriented, not, you know, theory heavy, and that is still the sort of work that I do. I actually still work with AWIS - some folks from AWIS now in the broadening participation in stem work that I do right. And so that was a good experience. I made some connections. And of course, over the summer I ended up finding, yes, I did get funding for my second year, and was back in the fall, and that was all fine, but that preparity was also, I think it made it hard to like, really jump in and feel like, yeah. This is a place that's got my back, which I understand that that is because of the preparity of funding in you know the university. It's different if you're in a service department or I work a lot now with computer science where they've got tons of funding and tons of need for TAs, that's a very different environment than what it was to be a women's studies at the time. And so during that second year. I was still taking classes, and I saw a job ad for a place that was then called the Center for Workforce Development in the College of Engineering, and they were looking for an RA, a

research assistant. And it would cover funding, and I went down to go meet with them. The name means nothing right, Center for Workforce Development. But they housed the women in science and engineering program at the time and did a lot of grant related work related to women in science and engineering. At the time, UW had one of the first NSF Advance grants which Advance is a program that still exists today - I have an Advanced grant right now! Right? [laughs] This is like very this, not realizing how things would come back right? So Advanced as an NSF program that works to increase the participation of women. I was about to say with disabilities, that's my work now, the program is about women in faculty, in stem generally right? And so they would do - give these large institutional transformation grants to universities. And so it was very exciting. This is a very new program in the, you know, early 2000s. NSF had one or sorry UW, had one of the first grants and at the time, the Dean in the College of Engineering was a woman, too, which she was the first dean of a college of engineering that was a woman. Super exciting time to be here, and I still - the people that were running Advance at the time some of them are - have left. But Joyce Yan, who was there then, is still there. I talked to her last week, right? Like I built some connections then and at the same time, you know, I TA'd my first couple of years in the department, and I very quickly decided teaching was not for me. I hated - strong word. I didn't like the constant conversations about like, oh, I have to miss class for this. And here's why my paper was late. And is that an okay reason and I didn't really love that. And so I started this RA position. I went down to go interview with the Center for Workforce Development people, and they had funding from Advance for an RA to run a mentoring program for graduate students. And so I applied. I went down, talk to them. And they said, "Look, once we have you, we're not gonna let you go, right. We will keep funding you until you graduate."

MOON: Wow.

BLASER: Yeah, which is amazing. And that was like a load off like, okay.

MOON: Yeah.

BLASER: I will be okay here.

MOON: Mhm.

BLASER: Which I - you know, I think about that, too. I grew up my dad was in construction right? And I have memories of him, you know, a few times coming home, being like, well got laid off today you know, and then be like, okay, guys, we got a tightened belt. Until dad gets a job, right? And so I think that economic precarity, I hate it, right? And so that okay, somebody's got my back. They're gonna keep funding me and so I ran a faculty and graduate student mentoring program for women graduate students. And I did that for the rest of graduate school. Towards the end, I started thinking, god, I don't want to do research, either. I don't know. It was burned out on my dissertation. I think I didn't always find as much community as I wanted, partially a lot of that is related to my own anxiety, and not necessarily understanding how to navigate an academic career. Part of it is being in a small department where you know, there are a few folks whose interests were well aligned with mine, or aligned in some way with mine, a lot of folks that you know we're doing totally different things, and so it was hard for me to find the community. I think I also realized that it didn't - there was a lot of women's study stuff that was very far afield from what I did. You know, I was really staying kind of in the science studies kind of realm. I remember sitting down with Angela, you know, a few times talking about my career, and she'd be like, well, maybe to get, you know, a grant from these folks to turn your dissertation into a book when you finish. I was like, "Oh, maybe that'd be an option." Not sure I really like that option. I don't know what that means about health insurance right? And the economic, you know, implications of that. And so I remember another time she and I sat down. She was like, "Kiddo, I just don't know what you're gonna do when you graduate." I was like "Me, neither! I don't know, either! I need a job, though, you know. Shoot. Why did I decide to go get a PhD. in women studies", right? At the time the department was women studies without an apostrophe on the "s". And I remember having conversations with folks about like such a weird name. And in particular, there was another graduate student who had a undergraduate degree in women's studies, and they're like, so do I put women's studies there and then women studies and then does it look like a typo to everybody else who doesn't realize that our department is named differently than all the other departments across the country, right? And I still in my head call it women studies, even though it's been renamed for probably well over a decade now. So I spent the last part of my last year just trying to apply a job and figure out what I was gonna do. I applied to jobs all over my - he's still my boyfriend at the time. My now, husband was like he was in law school at Seattle U and he was like, "Well, just apply wherever we'll figure this out later." Like great, you're in law school. You're busy, anyway. And so I applied all over. I ended up getting a job back in DC, so I could just keep going from one Washington to the other. For the American Association for the Advancement of Science doing Career Development Programming

with them, which was very well aligned to the programming that I had been doing with the Center for Workforce Development. It was neither research nor teaching which I both kind of been like, I don't know if I like these and so I moved back to DC. And I was very quickly figuring out how to go out and talk to postdocs and graduate students, mostly biomedical scientists, about resume writing and networking and career exploration. And I spent about 2 and a half years doing that. I traveled a 100,000 miles a year.

MOON: Oh gosh!

BLASER: I was like always on the road, and because Noah was still here in Seattle, sometimes I'd be like, "Well, I'm going to Boston, but if I make it a 3 way trip and go through Seattle, it only adds $100 to the plane ticket, and I get a weekend into Seattle. So you know. So I was doing these crazy you know, really - a lot of it was a ton of travel. There was another trip where I went, like Seattle down to LA to New Orleans, to London, and then back to DC. I mean it was a lot. It was a lot but…it was fun, right, and I was at a point in my life, I was in my late twenties. It was like, "Yeah, whatever, I'll go travel," you know. I didn't always know where I was, because he would just call my cellphone and be like, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. I went up to New York today". And he'd be like, "Okay!"

BOTH: [laughter]

BLASER: And I still think it was a blessing that I was not here when he was studying for the Bar exam, because I couldn't make him pass the bar exam, you know. I could like make dinner for him, but I couldn't help him study, and I would just be stressed out about it. So I was at triple AS and he was finally graduating law school. This was 2000 - well, we decided when he graduated in 2010, that we were gonna live together. And so we had a conversation about, well, is this going to be DC. Is it going to be Seattle? And he was like, "Well, I've got contacts back in Seattle and you love Seattle. Seattle's a cheaper place to live." Haha!

MOON: Not anymore!

BLASER: No, it's totally, right like it's a joke to me that, like traffic used to be better here. The cost of living was lower, the climate was more mild, and all of those things like over the last 20 years…Mm…Not so sure. But so we decided we'd settle in Seattle and 2010 was the worst year on

record to graduate from law school. You know, economic down - It was the economic downturn. Nobody was getting jobs, coming out of law school.

MOON: Yeah, I do, actually remember my parents struggling [laughs].

BLASER: It was...it was not a good year, and so I tried to work with triple AS to agree that I could work remotely because I was on the road all the time, anyway, come into DC once a month and just be on the road. And they said, “Well, let us look into it.” And then they finally came back and said, “Oh, there's huge tax implications for us. If we have an employee based in Washington State. We'd have to pay sales tax on all of the income,” or some kind of tax on all of the income that we make in Washington State, which that you know, includes all of their journal subscriptions. They have the journal, Science, a large journal, so they said, it won't work. So I continued to kind of do this bi-coastal commuting thing for a few months while I looked for a job in Seattle. And I ended up applying to a bunch of places, some at UW and some not. And one job that came up was the job I have now, at the DO-IT Center which stands for disabilities, opportunities, internet working and technology. And they do work around under representation of people with disabilities in STEM education and careers. So aligned with my interest in running participation in STEM. It was not pitched as a research job. Great. Wasn't teaching. It was career development stuff like I could do this. And I definitely walked into the interview and was like, “Look, I don't know a lot about disability, but I can learn. And I did watch the little couple on TLC. And I have seen that documentary Murder Ball,” like I'm just throwing out anything I know about disability, right? And I think what became shocking to me after I started doing this work is that when we think about equity a lot of times we are mentioning all of these dimensions of equity. But I really came out of the women's studies program without much depth of understanding of disability. Right? It was definitely something I should list. Sometimes I think, thought I saw data on it, but I didn't know what it was, right. I couldn't have told you much about accommodations and universal design and so I spent a lot of time in the past - I've been at this job 13 and a half years...14? I don't know whatever. I spent a lot of time talking about, “Okay, how do we get other people who are interested in equity in education and careers to really think more about disability. How do we get them to even just start collecting disability data on their participants?” Right? And make it so that this is more equitably included in the conversations. Right? And sometimes I get to be troublemaker on other things right? Because often it's very focused on binary gender and race and ethnicity, right? And so even being able to say like, “Oh, well, maybe we could think about gender differently. Oh, you know you don't have

pronoun stickers at this conference, right? So sometimes I can play those other cards in. But when I first got here it was like, “Well, great. So I'm really familiar with the literature on women and girls. Show me the literature on people with disabilities,” and it was like, “Oh, well, there's not a huge literature base. So there's this here and there, and but we don't - there's not a whole lot of people doing this work.” And so it's - I do work that's very aligned to what I was thinking about in graduate school. I slowly have started doing more research. Our director just left. I'm now PI and Co-PI on several grants that we have. You know and have a leadership role. I mostly work in computer science. So I work closely with faculty down in the Allen school on a national alliance that works to increase the participation of people with disabilities. And STEM education and careers. And I love the work. I don't think I will ever do anything outside of accessibility and disability, you know, for the rest of my career, because I think it's so important. You know, and it's also made me, you know, it's helped me gain frameworks for things in my own life, as I've you know, gotten some chronic health issues and thinking about the impacts of that on a person. And what does that mean? And how does it impact your day? And you know that's been a positive thing personally, too. But I also appreciate that it's a work environment where we all kind of talk about our strengths and weaknesses like, “Okay, Kayla uses a wheelchair, and she needs the files to be on this drawer or that drawer because she can't reach the top one and the bottom one. Great. Okay, that's fine. Hey? I'm feeling anxious about this. So I need to walk into your office and tell you how I think I'm gonna handle this interpersonal situation. Here you say that that's okay. And then I can go do my work.” And that's not seen as a weakness, because that's part of how we work, you know. You know, I find that to be a really nice thing about working in the disability space.

MOON: Yeah, I mean, I was kind of doing some snooping around. And I saw - I found a video that you like recorded about kind of like accommodating for people with disabilities in like meetings and stuff like that. And online meetings. And yeah, I was like, I think you mentioned something like it helps people with non disabilities, too. And I'm like, I was like, yeah, me, because I benefit from reading from like the captions on the bottom or having recordings.

BLASER: Oh 100%!

MOON: And I was like - I definitely related to that. So I was like, yes, this is helpful to everyone involved.

BLASER: Oh 100% the captions keep me paying attention, so I don't get distracted right? They also I use them all the time when I'm trying to refer back to, “What did somebody just say?” I go back and read the captions. And I find that I miss them when they're not on on a meeting right? Because I'm just so used to using them. Because that's what we use all the time. Yeah, there's so many things like that. Even I think about how faculty members give instructions for assignments like, the more clarity you can provide in that context helps everybody, not just the kids that are maybe neurodivergent, and need really clear instructions. Right?

[00:39:11]

MOON: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's very...And I was most interested because I saw you on the list of people that we were like allowed to interview. And I was like - and then I kinda looked up what you were doing. And I was like, that's really interesting work. And I wanted to hear more about it, and I didn't even know that UW had a center for this stuff. So it's really interesting. And I'm kind of wondering so I know that you kind of didn't - you said during your graduate school like schooling - that you weren't exactly sure what kind of career path that you were gonna do. But before you started, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do in terms of career?

BLASER: No, no, I didn't. I didn't. And I think about this all the time. Right? So particularly if I compare my career path to my husband's right. Well, he's a judge now. He's a lawyer, right? But like it is a very clear thing. You go get that degree. You take the test, you pass the test. These are the kinds of legal in, you know, jobs that you get in your first year. And here's how you got the latter right, even even as he became a judge, it was like, well, you go do some substitute judging, and you know you do this and do that. And then there's that job right? My mother-in-law is an accountant right? Like very clear career paths that people understand what your background is. And that's not what my background looks like right? [laughs] And knowing that going into a job, then you kind of have to explain everything about what you do, and why you've done it. I think sometimes that's hard to do. But I also think it meant I didn't know exactly where I was gonna go right? And even I've been in my current position for a long time and every time that I've thought about like well, what I could go do something else. Then it's always like not exactly clear how to get there right, even as you see, like positions pop up in industry, I'm like, am I gonna have exactly the background they expect? Or am I gonna have to really explain how I fit in the holes? And is the AI that they're now using to screen resumes gonna screen me out because I don't have the magic words that they're looking for for that position. But no, I think there could have been better - as somebody with a lot of anxiety - I think there could have been this - as a

matter of fact, on the way walking home- I walked my kids school and walked home this morning, and I was like “God, you know, if you like, just go get some degree that has like really clear career path, like, there's some benefit to that, you kind of know, like what you need to do to move up.” Reading a book right now. It's a cheesy book, but the woman's in HR. Right? And it's like these are the kinds of career sizes, and I think there would have been simplicity in that for me, and I think part of the reason I have stayed in my current position, as long as I have, is because it's like, “Oh, I don't know where I'm gonna go. This is fine.” And even so, I've been able to change what I do, being in a grant funded position at a university. Right? So when I was in grad school and thinking about future careers being on soft - being on soft money means you're totally funded by grants. You don't have any hard money, which would be money from the state right, that is, paying for you. And at the time, nobody would want to be on a soft money position, because you have to continue to go get grants to fund your job right? So that's the situation I'm still in. I'm 100% grant funded and I have to continually write grants to get money to pay for my job, right, which is sometimes fun, because you can be like, “Oh, I really like working with this person.” You know, I have a friend I work with at University Nevada, Las Vegas, and he and I like working together. So it's like, “Oh, let's find more work we can do together!” And then I can do more work with you, and I don't have to do this other stuff that I don't like doing as much. So there's some fun in that. But there is more preparity in terms of always having to be thinking about your next meal.

MOON: Yes, yeah.

BLASER: And it well, and it was funny when I came to this job in 2010, at the time I had some contacts in the career center, and as I came into the position got to know stuff people that were in disability services, disability resources for students and at the time it was seen as very precarious to be on state money, because there were so many budget cuts with that economic downturn in 2008, and so all of a sudden it was like, “Oh, soft money is a great place to be. Go write grants.” And get those funded, and then you can, you know, do whatever you want. And you know, I think I have been able to shift my job, as I've wanted to do different things. I've taken on more and more responsibility as I've been in these positions, and you know there was a must be - I was pregnant with my daughter so about 10 years ago [laughs] because this is how I figure out when things happened in my life.

MOON: [laughs]

BLASER: Somebody organized a career panel in the women's studies department for the current graduate students. And so I was on the panel. And then there were 2 other grad students that were at the same time one had gone to become a faculty member, and another one was Amy Pellof, who was working in CHID as an advisor, and she was saying, “Well, you know, as staff, I don't really feel as respected as faculty are.” And I feel like somehow being outside of an academic department. I don't have that problem, but I am often given a lot more credibility because I have a PhD, than other folks that are on my team. And so you know, glad I came to it with that background. I wanna make sure I'm answering all of the things you need me to answer, though.

[00:44:27]

MOON: Oh no you’re good! Yeah, it seems like everything kind of fell into place for you, though. Because like, you kind of had that background where you're working that job in DC. And that kind of tied in with everything, and even though you like didn't know what you're doing, I feel like everything just like fell into place, which is really cool to look back on, I guess maybe for you?

BLASER: Yeah, well, and I think oftentimes we don't have a reason we're doing the things that we're doing right? And being able to tell a story - and this is me going into creative on that I can tell story right? I didn't know what I was doing at the time, but you're right. It fell into place. And now I can tell a story that makes it look a little bit more logical than it actually was...but yeah, and you know, and it's hard to make shifts. I think when I made the shift from math to women studies. I remember that at the time the math department would put out a flier every year about like this is why you should be a math major. And here's where our graduates from previous years have gone. And for some reason, I was back visiting campus or something and I looked online, and I found the flier that listed the graduates for my year, and it'd be like one, you know, so and so went to indust - there's this many that went to industry and this many went to graduate programs, this many in math and one in chemistry and one in mechanical engineering, definitely didn't list one in women's studies. And I was like they definitely knew what I went to go do because I was vocal and critical about things in the department like, is this an oversight? I don't know, you know, but I still...ugh I have feelings about that. But yeah, yeah, things - things came together.

MOON: Yeah, I kind of relate to that because I mentioned to you in my email that I was an engineering major. And so that's a very like you take the steps that you need to take to get to where you're going, and then

BLASER: Totally.

MOON: I was like don't like this! And so you know, I ended up taking three years off. And then I was like, I actually wanna do art. And so and that's a lot more - you can kind of choose your path of what you wanna do. And so I totally relate to kind of what you went through as well. So that's very interesting.

BLASER: Totally.

[00:46:28]

MOON: You mentioned briefly that you were like burnt out on your dissertation, but I was kind of interested in it because I saw the title of it, and I was like.

BLASER: Oh yeah.

MOON: I was like hmm... so I tried to like, go read it, and I didn't have enough time to go to the library and actually go check it out because there wasn't online access to it.

BLASER: I was going to say at the time you had to bring a printed - two printed out copies to the graduate school and yeah, I got there, and it was like 300 pages. I didn't write a short dissertation. Maybe I should have, but I got there, and he was like they had - 2 weeks before you turned it in, you showed up with, like the first 20 pages, and they would verify that the first 20 pages were formatted correctly, or tell you what you needed to fix. And I got there and went to go turn them in. And they said, “Oh, my God, this is done wrong here!” And I said, “But you told me that was how I was - you didn't tell me to fix that. Look, here's my!” And they were like, “No, no, you have to go fix this,” and handed me 2 reams of paper. And it was in the Communications building, and I walked back across to Padelford with 2 reams of paper to go print 2 more copies, and sitting in the women’s studies at TA office, we all shared one office right, all 15 of us. Eventually more of us shared one office. I'm printing out a second copy or a second batch of copies. But yeah, I mean, you know, I think that was an interesting choice, too. So I was really

intrigued by this idea that so many women in science ended up marrying or partnering with and again, this is very heteronormative. But most of the data is on straight couples that was what I could find in these national data sets. It was very hard to find data on it. But the little data you could find was that many women who are in science and engineering were partnering from marrying with other scientist engineers which is fascinating to me like, why does that happen? And what is that indicative of which is not the the questions people were primarily asking about it at the time most of the questions were about, what implications does this have for hiring decisions? Right? So they talk a lot about the 2 body problems. So the idea that if one person is recruited - one spouse is recruited by university or, you know, gets a position at a university. How does the other spouse find a position at the same university or in the same geographic area? Which is a big problem for folks coming out of graduate school at the same time with a spouse to find positions in the same area. Right? I still have some friends who have been academics, for you know, decades, and one works in Connecticut. One works in New York, not close by New York, upstate New York because they can't find jobs in the same place. Right? So you kind of hear these horror stories like that and so I was really interested - that I wasn't so much interested in that right like that's that's an interesting thing. But what does it really mean for our interpersonal relationship like, are these people going home talking about their careers all the time. Many of them did research with their partners like, that's a really interesting dynamic. And if I think about the department that I was an undergraduate, and all of the women in the department, which was 2 were married to faculty members in the department. Right? What does that say to the women coming up through that department as students like, this is the role model I have. You know, there was another graduate student in the department who was married to a faculty member. Right? So I could name 3 women that were marriage men and department. And it's like Whoa, like that's interesting. And so I think, too, I again I made a comment when I started talking about this thing. “Well, I made an interesting choice there” is that it was another place where I think I wasn't savvy enough at the time to think about how could I choose a dissertation topic that would make me clearly employable on the other side?

MOON: Mm…

BLASER: Right? That somebody would understand the connection to policy. I mean a lot of the work that I do is very policy oriented these days right? And get me a job. And that was not what I did, because I had this passion. I was going to go study this thing that we thought was interesting, right? And so that kind of tension of like something I'm passionate about and

interested in, and I think is weird. It's had a couple of times versus, you know, doing that versus doing the thing that has is more clearly connected to economic stability. [laughs] But yeah, I think I just got really burnt out like back then, you know, we had to transcribe our data manually and type it all out, because we, you know, actually, the recorder I bought - so every year as a graduate student, you got like, I don't know $300 from the department that could go towards travel to a conference or something else, and I use my one year towards a voice recorder that I could use because we didn't have anything that would record voices, I mean, this is seems so silly because I don't think in my head the mid 2000s don't feel like that long ago, but apparently it was long enough ago. So I bought this voice recorder from Sony that I could put out and record the things, and then I could upload the files to my computer. And it came with a very old version of Dragon. But it was so old - Dragon is a speech recognition technology - that I still - I have students that use Dragon today. But at the time it could only be trained on one voice. So it's like, oh, so I can't just use it to like transcribe the interviews I have. But what if I played the interview and resaid everything I said, and resaid everything the person I interviewed said, and then it could do it. And I was like, no, I just have to type everything everybody said. So I there was some of that, and I think I think the burnout came from it was a little bit - it was very solitary, which is, you know not the way research is done, most often. But it was very solitary and focused on one thing I, whereas is right now I have so many different projects going on right. And I'm talking to people all the time. I spend most of my day in meetings, not sitting alone. And not knowing what the point of it was because I needed to get a job. And how was I gonna get a job? And was this gonna lead to a job? But it worked out.

MOON: Yeah, I mean it would - It seems very interesting. I'll have to check it out from the library at some point!

BLASER: You know, one of my takeaways was that a lot of these couples worked it out. They found jobs in the same position, and I also think about it [indiscernible] of like some people really like to talk about their work, and like other people, don't.

MOON: Mmm.

BLASER: And a lot of these couples would come home and talk about their work with each other, and really enjoyed that. And I don't ever talk about work at home. I mean, sometimes I do. My kids and I read a lot of novels about kids with disabilities mostly because I think that's

interesting. But I don't talk about what's going on on a day to day basis. But, like my husband, I could tell you intimately about every workplace conflict he has. I could tell you about why he's making decisions on the bench that he's making, because he loves talking about it right? And I like talking about that with him. But I - at the end of the day, I want to be done with my work and go do something else, you know.

MOON: Yeah, no, it - it's very interesting that you…when I saw that title I was like, why I thought of Grey's Anatomy because everyone is dating everyone.

BLASER: Oh yeah! [laughs]

MOON: And I was like, yeah, why is, why hasn't someone studied about this? Because it does happen. So, yeah.

BLASER: Oh totally! I think there are other fields that it happens in right? I remember reading a book about artists and a lot of artists marrying other artists. Oh, yeah. Well, that makes sense, too. Right? Even if you look at the Nobel Prize winning women in science. A lot of them were married to scientists right. Marie Curie, famously, of course, was married to a scientist as well. But yeah. I wanna make sure you get anything else you want me to answer.

[00:53:57]

MOON: Yeah, I kinda just have one last question just to kind of wrap everything up. But I'm just kinda curious, like what you've taken from your time in the GWSS, you know department into like what you do today in your - at the DO-IT Center?

BLASER: I mean, I definitely - the ability to work across disciplines with people is something I learned as a graduate student. To learn how to listen closely enough to learn - figure out what terminology people were talking about and how to talk intelligently to them. So I am not a computer scientist by training. I took some computer science classes. The last one was in the year 2000, right? [laughs] Not recent, to say the least. But I still, I mean, I interact with computer scientists on a daily basis. And they think I understand everything that they're doing. And I know enough to know when I need to ask questions and to also know like this is not the level of detail I need to know about what they are doing in order for the work that we are doing together to be successful. Right? So I think I definitely picked up that skill and the ability to fake

it. You know, I did the same when I worked with biomedical scientists. Oh, yes, spectomac or whatever, I can even say, it now, yeah, but I knew, yeah, mhm, mhm, and I could say the word back to them and act like I understood, and I knew enough to talk to them and then talk about what the thing I needed to actually talk to about was and I definitely - that is something that I picked up. I think - I wish that I spent more time reading like I could as a graduate student and using all of you know, the knowledge I gained in, you know, academic research. I'm doing a lot more project management on a daily basis and not doing that. But I think I also learned a lot about conflict management in some ways. Or, you know, seeing disagreements in a workplace in a politically charged kind of environment, right? When I was a graduate student, I can't remember his last name, David. Wonderful man! Was appointed chair of the department. He has a last name. Can't think of it. David Allen! That was his name. Was appointed chair, and it was very controversial. You know, that a man was appointed chair of the department, and you know, sitting in on these conversations that sometimes were very hard, because there were a lot of really intense feelings. And it was a very political decision and a very political atmosphere. Lots of different viewpoints, you know. At the same time there was a lot of strong feelings when there was a hire was being made, and you know, would it be a woman of color? Was there a woman of color that applied? That could - would be a good fit? And how important was that to the department? Even, you know, conflicts about like, how much should we require a professional development kind of seminar graduate students and I as somebody who hates conflict. I think, seeing that, and seeing that you know our politics can influence the work that we are doing, and how that can be done and how to do it. And thinking about how to do it in a way where I am maintaining relationships with colleagues but still sticking up for you know what I think is right and important is something I think about today. I'm very much somebody who is conflict avoidant and I, you know, don't want to be in that position. But I think I learned a lot about those skills.

MOON: Those are interesting - yeah. Well, they're very important things to carry on, because conflicts do happen. [laughs]

BLASER: They do! Well, and you know, even I use a lot of what I learned about interdisciplinarity, not interdisciplinary...oof. Intersectionality, right? That is something that is in the broad movement to participation work, something we are always thinking about right? And we are - NSF calls us on that right? So you're alliant. The alliance that we have is focused on disability. But how are you also thinking about women with disabilities? How are you also

thinking about black folks with disabilities. Right? And so they - we are called to task on those and literally have to say, “Oh, here's how our program is addressing those issues.” Right? So we talk about things like, well, we don't ask students pay out of pocket for a plane ticket when we send them to a conference because we understand the economic barriers that presents for students. Right? “Oh, we are working with this other program that focuses on African American graduate students and helping them make their programming more accessible, so that black students can participate in that as well as our program,” right? Like giving them that option. So they're not showing up to program [indiscernible]. So literally, taking these, you know, very abstract ideas and putting them into practice and doing it in a way that we can respond and very clearly point to, “Here's some ways that we are doing that in our work that satisfies your demands.” And allows us to be funded and seen as somebody who's successful in doing this work.

MOON: Yeah, that's awesome. Yeah, well, I don't wanna take - it is 11. So I don't wanna take too much of your time. But I really really appreciate you sharing your story, and it's really inspiring and clearly you are a very hardworking and determined person, because you kind of - I feel like you made your own path, and you made it work. And so that's really impressive and very inspiring. [laughs]

BLASER: Well, I am so glad you emailed me. This is a lot of fun, and you know, let me know if you need anything else, and good luck, and I'm glad that you made your own transition. There are great things about it but engineering is not for all of us!

BOTH: [laughter]

MOON: But yeah, thank you so much. And yeah, I will reach out to you with the follow up. So you can review everything and make sure everything looks good to you.

BLASER: Okay

MOON: But other than that. Yeah, we'll be in touch.

BLASER: Sounds good. Have a good one.

MOON: You too, bye.

BLASER: Bye bye.

[End: BriannaBlaserVideo.mP4]