

Emma J. Jones

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Information Interview

Dr. Tracey Norrell is a professor in the geography department at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Dr. Norrell and I met on November 11th, 2019 at 11:15 in her office and spoke for 30 minutes. I recorded the interview with Dr. Norrell's permission so I could better focus on our conversation. I chose to interview Dr. Norrell for several reasons. For one, Dr. Norrell took an unconventional route to become a geography professor. She originally received a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and worked as a manufacturing engineer for many years before changing career paths. She then went back to school, receiving a Bachelor of Science in Geography, a Master of Science in Historical Geography, a Master of Art in German History, and a PhD in Modern European History. She also lived and studied abroad for several years. I believed that her diverse life experiences would provide a wholly unique perspective on a geography career. Secondly, Dr. Norrell loves her job as an educator. Her passion for teaching is apparent in all of her classes. She has told me many times in and out of our interview how much she loves her job. She puts everything she has into her classes and I think she sets an excellent example for someone aspiring to be a professor. I chose this institution because it is where I hope to receive my graduate degrees and someday work.

Based on what I learned from Dr. Norrell, being a professor may be the perfect job for me. For one, she spoke of her ability to set her own schedule and decide her own workload, two characteristics that I value in a career. She also stated that her goal is to do well for her students, not for a boss. As someone with authority issues, I can definitely appreciate that. She added that

a strong work ethic is a skill a professor should have. While she may not be working directly for a boss, Dr. Norrell described the large amount of research that goes into her lectures alone, not to mention her own personal research. A strong work ethic is required to balance both of these responsibilities. Another skill Dr. Norrell mentioned as very important is patience when working with diverse groups of students and faculty, all with varying opinions and experiences. Both patience and work ethic are skills that I have grown exponentially during my college career and continue to grow still.

When asked if there is anything Dr. Norrell wished she knew when she was in my position, she gave me some excellent advice on what she recommends for my next steps. She first recommended I take at least a year between undergraduate and graduate school. She recalled giving herself three years between completing her first undergraduate degree and entering the workforce in order to cross many things off of her bucket list. She moved to Colorado, became a bike messenger, and learned to snow ski and raft, among other things. She recommended I give myself at least a year to do something I have always wanted, something new, or at least to just take a break. She then recommended that, when I do go back to school, I consider getting my Masters in child and family studies, my other academic interest, and then return to geography for my PhD. I had already been considering both suggestions, so hearing I am on the right track was very encouraging.

One point that Dr. Norrell made that will stick with me is that you have to love school to be a professor. She described school as being a safe haven for her throughout her life. That is something I can definitely relate to. I personally love being a student more than anything. While some students cannot graduate fast enough, I have been dreading my inevitable departure from school. Learning that my love for school and being a student can translate into a love for

academia and being a professor like it did for Dr. Norrell has assured me that I am on the right career path. Throughout all of my changing career goals, from political science to geology to geography, I have always had the idea that when I am older, I could retire from my career and become a professor. It only occurred to me recently that being a professor could be my career and that it may be the best career for me. My interview with Dr. Norrell as a whole has only further encouraged me to continue on my current path.