

# NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 221 Transcript

OTC From the Field: NASFAA Members Share Career Advice

Allie Arcese:

Hey, everyone. Welcome to another edition of Off The Cuff. I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team filling in for Justin this week.

Owen Daugherty:

And I'm Owen Daugherty, also with the communications team.

Allie Arcese:

So yeah, it's been a minute since I've been on here. I kind of feel like the day that I came back from maternity leave, where I opened up my computer and I was like, "Great. What is it that I do here, again?"

Owen Daugherty:

But it's still like home for you, right? I mean, you're an original podcast founder member.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Yeah. And I love telling the story of how the podcast started. Justin had the idea and he brought a few of us into his office and was telling us about the podcast. And we were like, "Great. So when do you want to do this? Three months from now?" And he was like, "How's next week?" So we literally threw this together in less than a week. Yeah. Going back and listening to some of the old episodes is quite cringe-worthy, but here we are, over 200 now.

Owen Daugherty:

Yeah. It's come a long way. And I think it's cool to have you back. I know some people I talked with at the leadership conference said they missed hearing from you and of course, Megan, who's no longer here, but...

Allie Arcese:

We'll have to get Megan back as a special guest.

Owen Daugherty:

We'll get Megan back. Yeah, exactly. Justin will be like, "Hey, are you free tomorrow to record with us?" And she'll be like, "That's not how it works anymore. I have my own schedule." But she'll come back.

Allie Arcese:

That new job, NASFAA takes priority.

Owen Daugherty:

That's right.

Allie Arcese:

So yeah, a lot has changed since I was last on here. I have a baby now, which is crazy. And along with that comes a lot of sleep deprivation, as I'm sure many of our members can relate to. Some days I'm

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literally stumbling out of bed and going straight into the car to get her to daycare. And the other day I stopped at Starbucks on the way back and was legitimately in my pajamas and slippers.

Owen Daugherty:

As one does.

Allie Arcese:

To make it even more embarrassing, my shirt was on inside out and the person in Starbucks pointed it out to me. And I was like, "Oh yeah, I meant to do that."

Owen Daugherty:

That is peak mom mode.

Allie Arcese:

Peak mom mode. That's my default these days. But Jill actually shared with us recently, one funny, embarrassing thing she did while sleep deprived was kissing the wrong kid at the bus stop, which I feel like is probably in my future as well. What's the most embarrassing thing that you have done while over tired?

Owen Daugherty:

I can't top Jill's story. That got a good laugh-

Allie Arcese:

I can't either.

Owen Daugherty:

... from everyone. I think the dominating conversation on our work slack that day was just people sharing their stories and hoping to make Jill feel better and laughing with her because that was great. I do not have a kid. I'm not as sleep deprived.

Allie Arcese:

But you're a dog parent.

Owen Daugherty:

I'm a dog dad. He sleeps in. It's pretty easy all things considered. But we've all been there in college. I was extremely sleep deprived, cramming for something, and I went into the wrong class and began taking the exam. During finals week, sat down. They just passed it out to me and I didn't recognize a single thing, had to get up like 10 minutes in.

Allie Arcese:

You're like, "Is this a joke?"

Owen Daugherty:

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Turn this back in, and I was just so out of it. And the worst part is you can't go start the actual exam in the actual class that I was supposed to be in. And so it was a huge ordeal trying to explain it and getting this makeup time, because it's like, "Once you miss your final, you better have a pretty good excuse and you need to make up for it." So I explained it, they were understanding, but I'd sit some makeup exam.

Allie Arcese:

Was there even a little bit of them being skeptical as to whether that actually happened?

Owen Daugherty:

For sure. Yeah. They were like, "What?" Then they wanted to ask me what class I went to on accident. I was like, "I don't remember. I don't know what this course was. I just know that the exam was not the one I was supposed to be taking." And they wanted to probably corroborate my story and I just was unable to do so, but I think it just came down to it hadn't happened before and they gave me the benefit of doubt, I guess.

Allie Arcese:

Oh my gosh, that's a good one. I didn't even think of going back to college. Definitely some sleep deprived nights there and some hungover days.

Owen Daugherty:

And I'm sure they assumed that was-

Allie Arcese:

Which is similar to being sleep deprived.

Owen Daugherty:

... And I'm sure they assumed that was part of it like, "Oh, you were partying." I don't know why I was fully sleep deprived, but I think it had more to do with cramming than it did to do with recreational activities.

Allie Arcese:

Knowing your personality, Owen, I see you as a very hard worker in college, definitely up late studying.

Owen Daugherty:

I was a procrastinator though, which I think more so lends itself to forcing myself to have to cram. I mean, I didn't love studying. I wasn't a late night at the library person.

Allie Arcese:

Who does? Well, listeners send us the most embarrassing thing that you have done while sleep deprived. I think it's been a little while since we did a fun listener question like this and when Justin's away, we do whatever we want as long as we'll keep it in a don't get fired range.

Owen Daugherty:

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But bonus points if it involves a sleep deprived situation with a student where you completely mess it up, something with a student that you're able to later fix. So bonus points if it's like work related but appropriate.

Allie Arcese:

And we will read these on the next episode. We can keep things anonymous if that is your preference. But in other news, so Owen, like you mentioned earlier, last week you were at the leadership conference here in DC. You got to meet a bunch of members who you've probably talked to over the last two years since you started. That's the crazy thing both you and Hugh started right when the pandemic began. This was our first in-person really gathering for NASFAA in almost two years, first in-person conference since the pandemic started. And yeah, you and Hugh both started right at the beginning of the pandemic, which is crazy. We had a little gathering around the holidays for NASFAA staff. And I remember Justin saying it was funny watching you and Hugh meet for the first time in person.

Allie Arcese:

But yeah, you got to hear straight from members about some of the best career advice that they've received and what career advice they would give to someone just getting their start in financial aid. And NASFAA has been particularly interested in how the pandemic and what people are calling right now, the great resignation, is impacting financial aid offices and our members. That's why there was a succession planning pathway at the leadership conference for the first time. And it's an issue that has been really a focal point in our news coverage, the past few months. You did a deep dive into that not long ago.

Allie Arcese:

And so that's why we were excited to hear from members about how they have navigated their careers in financial aid and what advice they've carried with them along the way. We still want to hear from you. So we're going to go ahead and share some of the snippets that you got Owen at the conference on career advice, but, listeners, feel free to leave us a comment or share with the feedback form, some career advice that you've gotten. First, Owen, what's the best or maybe the worst career advice you've ever received?

Owen Daugherty:

Oh, this is a tough one. I spent some time thinking about it. There's a lot of great career advice out there and I think it's just so applicable to the individual, right? It's so much about your character and personality and what you need to hear. So for me, I have a habit of comparing myself to others a lot in life, but especially in work. And I think as a journalist, it's easy to look at friends you graduated with and be like, "Wow, they're doing big things. They published this cool thing." I have a few friends who are in sports journalism. So seeing them cover a Super Bowl or a college national championship game, it's very public. Their work is out there. And so it's easy to see what they're doing. And a career advice I got early on in college is live your life, not someone else's.

Allie Arcese:

That's a good one.

Owen Daugherty:

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Focus on yourself. And it's hard to compare because you are in different mediums or just different cities doing different things. And so for me to be progressing in a career just might look different from someone who's flying all over the country, covering sports games or something like that. And so that's something that's resonated with me and something that I try to remember when I'm scrolling Twitter and I'm like, "Look at the cool thing they did." It's like, "I can focus on myself."

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. And sometimes even when you are in the same field, you might have different goals within that field.

Owen Daugherty:

Exactly.

Allie Arcese:

Like not everyone wants to move into management or editing or whatever. So that's always good to keep in mind. I like that one.

Owen Daugherty:

How about you?

Allie Arcese:

Two pieces of advice. One is good advice, one we'll just say is advice, I don't know if it's good or bad from the same supervisor I had when I interned at the San Francisco Chronicle when I was in college. The one that I've always remembered in my own writing, even today in editing is always be more specific. If you're asking questions when you're reading something, be more specific. And it seems tedious and it seems unnecessary sometimes. But when I actually applied it to my own writing, the story turned out better every time. So that's one.

Allie Arcese:

The other one came when I was actually interviewing for the internship. I was given a scenario where if I was writing a story down at city hall and trying to interview a city council member and they told me to go buzz off because they don't talk to interns, what would I do? And I gave some answer like, "Oh, I would try and convince them and say I'm running the story with or without their comment, and it would be in their best interest to talk to me." And she was like, "That's fine. But if someone in city hall tells you to go buzz off, you tell them to buzz off right back." Obviously not buzz, but it was a different word that I can't say, because this is a family show."

Owen Daugherty:

That is classic journalism editor response. That's so good.

Allie Arcese:

So yeah. Everyone, send us your best or worst career advice that you've ever gotten or just advice that you would like to share. And let's hear from our members

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LaVerne Walker:

LaVerne Walker, former Director of Student Financial Services. I work at the Icahn School of Medicine in New York City. The best advice I've received is that you can't want it more than they do. And what does that mean? I tend to look at things and want to try to control it. And then it's kind of just like, step back and look at the big picture and be pragmatic about it.

Daniel Matamoros:

Daniel Matamoros. I'm an Associate Director of Financial Aid with Loyola University Chicago. And the piece of advice that I've always really appreciated is, don't discount yourself, give others the opportunity to reject you. But send in that application, take advantage of those professional development opportunities, volunteer for a community, get involved and engage with the community because that ultimately leads to growth. And if you don't get it this year, I mean, seek mentorship programs where you might be able to get to the ability to be able to do it, right? But yeah, try to fight that negative self talk. Just do it. Put yourself out there.

Patti Donahue:

Patti Donahue with Binghamton university. I'm the Financial Aid Director of Operations. And I'm also president-elect for NYSFAA, which is the New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association. The best career advice I ever received was someone said to me, "Build on what you know, and the rest will follow. And you know more than you think." The best advice that I can give now out is to take the wheel and don't let others make decisions for you because they will.

Grace Taylor:

Hi. My name's Grace Taylor. I'm from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Philadelphia. And the biggest piece of advice I would give to a financial aid administrator or really anybody is, when you notice that something's wrong and there's a problem that needs to be solved, don't come to the table with the problem, come to the table with potential solutions to the problem. You're going to get way more respect from your colleagues and you're going to get a way better result.

Brandi Miller:

My name is Brandi Miller. I work in the financial aid office at Drake University. I'm the Assistant Director and I've been in the profession a little over 21 and a half years. I would highly recommend connecting with your state association as soon as possible. My first week on the job, they sent me to an IASFAA conference, and I really believe to this day, that's why I've been in the profession for as long as I have. And today I'm actually IASFAA's president.

Brandi Miller:

So for me, when I came in, it let me know that financial aid was more than a job. It was a profession. And I think being connected to an association allowed me to network and come together with a community of a very niche group. We're very specialized, but it's a great community to be a part of. And going to the various conferences that I've been able to go to shows that community. And then we also kind of work for the government too. So it makes me feel proud to be American and administering those federal funds and helping our students accomplish that postsecondary education. So anyway, I just see what I do more than my job. There's purpose behind it.

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Brenda Hicks:

Brenda Hicks from Southwestern College, Director of Financial Aid, past chair of NASFAA. The best career advice I can give a new person starting out, and I often say this too, at Summer Institute in RMAFAAs, is give yourself a little grace. You're going to mess up. It's going to be bad. But you're not going to die. And it will get better. Just give yourself a little grace and get yourself through it.

Joe Donlay:

Joe Donlay, Director of Financial Aid at Colorado State University. And I think the best career advice that I would have for somebody starting out in this profession is that you will never be able to know it all. So lean on your resources, lean on your friends and colleagues and associations like NASFAA to help that. This work can't be accomplished in a vacuum by yourself. You really do need those networks, those colleagues, and the training opportunities to do it well.

Robert Bode:

I'm Robert Bode. I am the Director of Financial Aid and Veteran Student Services at the University of Wisconsin in River Falls. And I was given some great career advice when I was in my first year in financial aid many years ago. And that was that it takes one year to learn all of the rules and it takes one year to learn all of the exceptions to the rules. And so it's not everything you're going to learn at once, but it takes you a couple of cycles to get through the whole process and really understand what's going on.

Lisa Martin:

My name is Lisa Martin and I'm the Senior Director of Financial Aid at Baylor University. Some tips I would give to my younger self as an aid administrator is to continue to seek out other professionals that have been doing what you're seeking to do for your career and get some career advice from them. Learn constantly, be open to learning. Get to know your students, connect with them, figure out what their needs are, so then you can be impactful.

Allie Arcese:

That was some great advice. There were some good ones in there. Now, let's do a little news rundown. Owen, what's going on?

Owen Daugherty:

Thanks to all the financial aid members who were able to share that with me. That was really fun getting to talk to you all. In the meantime, there has been some news out of the White House. Late last week, they extended the national emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic. The national emergency was set to expire on March 1st, just next week, without an extension. So something that we were kind of on the look out there. This really matters for financial aid office, as it extends some important waivers and flexibility such as the use of the R2T4 waiver and withdrawal benefits as well the transfer of unused federal work-study funds into the FSEOG program. There's some different dates and timeframes, depending on these various waivers with the extension that was announced. We've got an article on that and an AskRegs update that ran in Today's News this week. We'll link both of those in the show notes.

Allie Arcese:

Great. Anything else?

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Owen Daugherty:

Yeah. One more thing. Some news out of the Office of Federal Student Aid on the student loan servicer front. This is something we've been following, and this week, FSA said it would be looking to bring on new student loan servicers as part of its bigger overhaul of the servicing apparatus that borrowers interact with. This fits with their Next Gen strategy that was kind of on pause during the pandemic and they are making some moves with it. FSA made clear that it is not looking to create a single platform for borrowers to make payments through. Borrowers will still visit their respective servicers' websites to make payments and will receive communications that are now co-branded with FSA. So it'll be a little bit more streamlined there. Still a lot to come that we're following on this so we'll keep members posted as news comes out from FSA.

Allie Arcese:

Awesome. Thanks, Owen. And I particularly appreciate, you can leave this in too, Owen is so prepared. He wrote a little script to help me out because I'm so rusty and I used to laugh because often when we would record and we get to the end, Justin would turn to me and be like, "What do I say here? How do I sign off?" And it's written out here and I was like, "Thank God Owen did that because I don't remember what Justin says."

Owen Daugherty:

I've been doing it during your hiatus. And I had to go back and listen to the ending as well, because I don't remember the exact order. And it's good to keep consistency. So I plugged it in there for you.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Thank you. Well, financial aid friends, here's our standard sign-off. Thanks for listening to Off The Cuff. Remember to subscribe, leave a review, tell a friend, and we'll see you next week.