

## **Academically Speaking S3E3 with Jacob Isaacs**

Opening:

This is Academically Speaking, a podcast hosted by Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, Vice Provost and Dean of UCF's College of Undergraduate Studies. It features inspirational stories from the college's faculty, students, and alumni about the transformational power of education.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Hello, everyone. This is Academically Speaking. I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, and my guest today is the one and only Jacob Isaacs. Jacob is a College of Undergraduate Studies student, who will graduate this semester with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies, a minor in Urban and Regional Planning, and a certificate in Geographical Information Systems. He believes every decision affects society and the environment. He is an advocate for better planning and policy to address current and future environmental problems. Jacob has been a student assistant in the College of Undergraduate Studies for several years. Welcome, Jacob.

Jacob Isaacs:

Hi. Thank you for having me.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Thank you for being here. We are so pleased to have you on our podcast today. You are among other very notable students who have been on this podcast over the course of the year. And we just want to know a little bit more about you and your life here as a student. You're planning to begin graduate school here at UCF in January. Congratulations.

Jacob Isaacs:

Thank you.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And you're going to work toward earning a Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning. So, I'm going to ask a little bit about that in a minute. But first, I want to know a little bit about you.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, as I said earlier, I'm an Environmental Studies student. I really developed a passion for helping the environment growing up. I'm from Citrus County or Crystal River specifically, and it's a very small place and it's the home of the manatees, so it's very environmentally, like conscious. So, it's a lot of the environmental talk that is being talked about all the time is protect the manatees, stop the algae growth in our rivers, and stuff like that. And so really growing up there helped foster like, an environment for me to help like protect our earth.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. So, it kind of seems rational, logical that you would be interested in Environmental Studies as a major. So, tell us more about why you chose that major, and particularly putting together that major with a minor in Urban and Regional Planning.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, I chose the Environmental Studies degree here because it really combined all of my interests, whether it be like sociology-based classes, political-based classes, all of that. This major really combines all those classes into one major, and it really helps to provide me a holistic viewpoint of how we can help the earth and the ways that we can see how we got to the situation that we're at already. And I actually discovered the Urban Regional Planning from taking courses here at UCF because I'm on the Communication and Planning track. So, I took planning classes just like a, "What's that? Let me try it out." And it really led to me finding this passion for it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. So, tell us a little bit about your UCF experience as an undergrad. Can you share any memorable experiences from your time here as a student?

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, I entered during 2020, so it was very different times. So really my first like really true memory I had would probably be early 2021. That's when a few of my friends that I met, that I'm still close with. That's when they started here. And so, I think the first memorable experience I have at UCF is Universal Nights 2021. And that is a really fun time. They had both parks open for us and we were able to walk around and just be around our peers and other people that we know. Like I would see people that like I had a class with but I'd never seen in person just at the park. And so, I think just opportunities like that helped make UCF, this such like large school feel like one community.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, in thinking about the folks that you identify with as your peers, all of you started the year in a very interesting way and had to find new ways to build relationships. Talk to me about how you were able to do that.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, I think the opportunities that we were given through UCF to connect with one another. I lived at Tower during that time period and our R.A. really set up a lot of like socialization activities remotely so we can kind of get to know each other without being all in one room, like next to each other. And so, I think opportunities like that helped me to like have branch off friendships. So, I was able to become friends with my next-door neighbors through that and so on so forth. And I think opportunities like that really helped me. And then my roommates, I met a lot of his high school friends and a lot of them became also my close friends. And we started going to events with each other and I think it really did create, like a bonding experience.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Talk to me a little bit about the faculty that you had the opportunity to engage with while you were here.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, the environmental studies, we get to know our faculty a lot more so than a lot of the other majors or programs that are offered at UCF. So, I've had a lot of the same professors multiple times over. In particular, Dr. Gilbrook. I've had taken his classes plenty of times, I want to say almost once a semester since I started at UCF. Currently, I'm enrolled in his capstone class and it's really nice to have somebody that I can talk to one on one, whether it be in person, via email, and he actually knows me. Like I am able to talk about conversations I've had with him or ask any questions I have. And so really our faculty and our professors are really personable because our, we really just have more experienced bonding.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That's great. So, what advice might you have for our current students?

Jacob Isaacs:

So, I would recommend get involved, like reach out to your professors, talk to them. And that goes beyond, like go to the socialization events that UCF offers. Go to like Spirit Splash, get involved with Pegasus Palooza, all of that stuff. Be involved because that's when you're going to really feel like you're in college.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, did you do Spirit Splash?

Jacob Isaacs:

I did one year, and that was enough for me. I had to fight for my life.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, watching from my office window, and that's a perfect spot for me.

Jacob Isaacs:

I was so lucky, two ducks came flying at my head and I snatched them. Held them for my life.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, when you think about other kinds of campus traditions, tell me more about some of the ones that you've had an opportunity to engage in.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. So, Spirit Splash is definitely one. I think Universal Nights, because UCF is so diverse in the way that we are in a big city such as Orlando. And so, I think those events like Universal Nights and stuff like that, we really, we're one of the only colleges in the nation that can do stuff like that. So, I think that's one of the key events that UCF offers besides like Spirit Splash. And I

think also anything around the football games, like we've had a lot of different and like very popular people here this past year at the football games and I think those are like a very key memorable part about UCF as well.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, have you been to a game this season?

Jacob Isaacs:

I was actually at the one on Saturday that rained. I got rained out, though. The game didn't get rained out but I--

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, I bet you were done.

Jacob Isaacs:

I was soggy. My shoes were squishy. I had to go home.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, it's interesting how the environment around our entry into the Big 12 has really changed the games and the campus and the entire atmosphere. Would you say that the environment has sort of amped up or is it just moved in a different direction?

Jacob Isaacs:

It's definitely amped up. I feel like before you would see a lot of people at like the games and the tailgates and stuff like that but now you can really see a presence like you see, like we come out in numbers now.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It's quite interesting. I remember going to my very first game with my niece, actually, who was a senior in high school, and we would, and I told her when we walked into the stadium, I said, now they call this the Bounce House. And there's a reason why they call it the Bounce House. And you will discover this as things get exciting in the stadium. And she kind of looks at me and rolls her eyes in her head, like, "You act like I've never been to a football game." I'm just like, "Okay." And sure enough, at one point there was a touchdown and people start cheering and we are sitting in our seats and we could feel the entire stadium just create this whole wave of movement. And she looked at me, her eyes got really big. She was like, "Oh my God, the stadium is moving." I was like, "and this is why they call it the Bounce House."

Jacob Isaacs:

It's almost like you're on a cruise like rocking around.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, the bounce house is still bouncy.

Jacob Isaacs:

It's still bouncy, it's bouncier than ever, I think, now that we have such like positive motivation in our stadium.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. You're beginning graduate school in January. That's a whole other world. I can tell you from experience, it is very different from being an undergraduate student in good ways, however. And you're focused on urban and regional planning. Why did you choose that as a focus area?

Jacob Isaacs:

So, after taking a lot of the environmental courses, I've seen a lot of like our issues lie with either in policy or within our existing infrastructure, like not promoting environmental reasons. So, I want to try to be like the positive force behind changing that. So, whether that be through helping to learn about how to enact policies that will benefit the environment or helping to readjust or fix some existing infrastructure to be ways that will actually help the environment. Rather than just adding a third lane onto our existing road, maybe we can find a way that we can actually help the environment at the same time.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, after you earn this master's degree, if you could be in the optimal position to make the most change, what kind of position would you like to be in?

Jacob Isaacs:

Ooh, that's a hard one. I'd probably see myself, like in the public sector of the urban regional planning because I feel like they have the most changing, like they are working on like public roads and stuff like that. And probably in a big city that has a lot of lacking of environmental things. Because we can see a lot of the new cities, they're taking into account environmental factors, they're leading green spaces for residents and trees and stuff like that. But a lot of the existing historic cities, we can see that they kind of just ignore the environment, it's an afterthought.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Really?

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah. A lot of like old cities--

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Such as?

Jacob Isaacs:

Ooh, that's hard to pick just one. I know. Not to call Orlando out, we are not an old city, but I feel like we did not do a great job leaving space for green space. We have Lake Eola but like

that's like the only notable green space that we have. I mean, you look around and it's like there's a building, there's a building, there's a parking garage, a parking lot. Like, we didn't leave enough green space for the earth to actually like, flourish and be surrounded by it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

But I think some cities, because I visited a lot of cities up and down the East Coast in particular, but even along the West Coast and in some other spaces south, have started to realize that if they want people to live in the city, they have to create green spaces for them to enjoy, even if they put in a high rise building somewhere in that neighborhood. And some cities have done a better job with that than others. Others, some cities have engaged in that process simply because the citizens in that particular area have demanded it, while others, probably for more capitalistic things and said, "You know, we probably should get a green space here if we want people to live here and pay \$500,000 for a house." Right?

Jacob Isaacs:

Yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And I'm a bit partial to my hometown because we've been really great at green space. Philadelphia has the largest park system in the country, so there's lots of green space, lots of old trees that sometimes some of our construction friends bemoan the fact that we have lots of old trees in the city, but other places do have some room to grow in relationship to molding together livable spaces with green spaces and workspaces with green spaces. It'll be interesting to see how we evolve in that way.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah, I think when we're looking at changing things, I think we need to take into example a few standout cities, like a lot of New England has like a very good infrastructure for the environment. But also, Savannah Georgia. They have those big town squares, those like nice like little park systems.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I love Savannah.

Jacob Isaacs:

It's so nice. I think it's a great blend of like revitalization but like they kept like historic elements. They left room for the environment, like they have a really good system down.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, what do you think is the most significant environmental change that has happened?

Jacob Isaacs:

I think people are actually starting to address and know about the environmental issues that we're like causing to the earth. A lot of people before, I think were just wanting to like live in

ignorant bliss almost. They were just like, "Oh, I can't see it, that's not happening." But I think people are becoming aware now and like I think that's a big issue that we were having prior is people didn't know about it so they couldn't do anything to change it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, I mean, I remember when former Vice President Al Gore started talking about climate change and global warming. There were a lot of people who thought he was just making it up, "This isn't real, it's a hoax. He's just trying to persuade people for his own personal gain." You know, he did the whole docu-series around climate change and whatnot. And here we are now, you know, 25, 30 years later and people have started to realize that there is significant change happening and that we need to address it. So, if you have your elder wand from Harry Potter, right, how might you address some of these environmental changes?

Jacob Isaacs:

That's hard to say because we need to see small changes to see what kind of impact they have first. I think a lot of it is we live in excess, in America especially. We live in excess. And I think that has a lot of effects both on like, the environment as a whole. So, we need to start getting rid of our excess. I think that would really lead a big change in changing the environmental impacts that we're having.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, I'm going to play devil's advocate here. And part of the excess that we live in has to do with the materials that we use for things like food and beverage, you know, plastic cups and Styrofoam containers that we put things in. But by the same token, in some parts of the world, the only way that they would be able to make a living was to have access to these containers, these materials, that have harm to the country. So how do we address being able to support those communities and rid ourselves of these materials that are causing harm to the earth?

Jacob Isaacs:

I think we need to have alternatives. I think that's like, really the best way. Like maybe instead of plastics, I know that they're doing a lot of like biodegradable, like reusable cups that you can like, or like disposable cups even. Like Starbucks--

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Those are expensive.

Jacob Isaacs:

They can, oh they can get pricey.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, I think when you're in a second-class or third-class country...

Jacob Issacs:

Yeah, you don't have access to a lot of that stuff. So, I think the people who do have access should take advantage of the sustainable options and leave the people who don't have access or can't afford stuff like that to have.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

But is there a way potentially that the people who wouldn't necessarily normally have access to help them to gain access?

Jacob Isaacs:

I think we're seeing some changes. I know I've seen on Tik Tok recently, I get into my little doomscrolls on TikTok. But there's a guy who owns a sustainable shop online and he sells laundry sheets so you don't have to buy like the big tubs--

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

--plastic bottles. Right.

Jacob Isaacs:

And he sells sheets of it and he's diminished his profit margins on that product to have like one or two products that like stand out to like draw people in. And I think companies like that are trying to offer alternatives at a cheap cost, I think that's what we need to see more of.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Well, this has been an interesting conversation, but now we are about to shift gears and get into what I like to call the Lightning Round. And this is an opportunity for the audience to get to know a little bit more about you while at the same time, having a little bit of fun.

Jacob Isaacs:

Yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, I'm going to ask you some very basic questions and I want you to just answer me from the top of your head.

Jacob Isaacs:

Okay.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Favorite color?

Jacob Isaacs:

Green.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Of course.



Jacob Isaacs:  
Like my green water bottle.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
That was a setup, right? Okay.

Jacob Isaacs:  
Brought my prop.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Yes. Favorite song?

Jacob Isaacs:  
Ooh, it's hard to say. I'm a big Taylor Swift fan.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
He's a swiftie.

Jacob Isaacs:  
I am. And one of my favorite albums was re-released last month, 1989. So, it's hard to pick just one but I'd probably say Now That We Don't Talk.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Okay. All right. So, am I to assume then in your favorite musical artist is Taylor Swift?

Jacob Isaacs:  
Yeah, it's a tie between a few people, but I think recently she's been taking number one. She's a very lot like autumnal vibes in a lot of her songs. I feel like right now especially, number one.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Okay, alright. Favorite movie?

Jacob Isaacs:  
That's hard. I'm going to throw it back to Legally Blond. I think that's been my like, my all time.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Reece Witherspoon.

Jacob Isaacs:  
Yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Who is phenomenal, by the way, on the Morning Show.

Jacob Isaacs:

She is. I've seen a few episodes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite book?

Jacob Isaacs:

I've really gotten back into The Hunger Game series now they're releasing the new movie.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Yeah. Favorite actor?

Jacob Isaacs:

Ooh, I don't really have one. I don't, I know it's a controversial opinion. I don't have a favorite actor, I like to just watch movies and not like, not actors.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite place to visit?

Jacob Isaacs:

Ooh, I would say just, I think I'm going to go for the beach. Just like not one place particular. It's interesting to see all the different places, like the atmospheres of each beach. Like you can go to Panama City Beach and have a totally different experience in Anastasia.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Have you been to West Coast Beaches?

Jacob Isaacs:

One, I only went to San Francisco for the first time during last year for spring break. It was amazing. I love that city.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It is a great city.

Jacob Isaacs:

It is.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. A place to visit on your bucket list?

Jacob Isaacs:

Ooh, I would have to say the Pacific Northwest.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Okay.

Jacob Isaacs:  
Yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
All right. That's interesting. If you could meet anyone dead or alive, who would it be?

Jacob Isaacs:  
I would probably say, probably Barack Obama. Just, he is very inspirational and very, like he spearheaded a lot of different movements in the country that we needed to have done.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
Okay. And one last question. If you had not majored in environmental studies, what would you have studied?

Jacob Isaacs:  
That'd be hard. I probably would have gone more towards either like politics, like public administration, pre-law, something like that instead.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
All right. That's an excellent way to end. Now, I do have one final question.

Jacob Isaacs:  
Okay.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
And it is a question that I started asking after I started watching a show that was on Max, which used to be HBO Max, which used to be HBO, you know, all these things, right. That featured Laverne Cox and it was called If We're Being Honest. And one of the things that she did on her show, it's a one-on-one talk show that she does with up-and-coming artists. And so, she would often ask her guests, is there anything that she didn't ask that she should have asked? So, I'm going to ask you, is there anything that I didn't ask that I should have asked?

Jacob Isaacs:  
I don't think so. You cover a lot of the topics I wanted to bring up. So, I think you've covered everything.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:  
So, I'm thorough?

Jacob Isaacs:  
You are very thorough.

Dr. Theodora Regina Berry:

Okay. Excellent. Well thank you, Jacob Isaacs, for joining me on Academically Speaking. And thanks to our viewers and our listeners for seeing us here on Academically Speaking. I am Theodora Regina Barry, Vice Provost and Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies here at the University of Central Florida, and have a great day.