

Academically Speaking: Season Three, Episode Five

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:

Greetings, everyone. Welcome to Academically Speaking. I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, Vice Provost and Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies here at the University of Central Florida. With me today is Wayne H. Bowen. We have big news. Yay. On Friday, February 9th, Dr. Bowen agreed and signed an agreement to serve as Associate Dean for the College of Undergraduate Studies, and we are so excited. I'm going to tell you a little bit about Dr. Bowen, and then we're going to chat for a wee bit and get to know Dr. Bowen as a scholar, as an educator, and as a person, and dig a little bit deeper into some of his likes and interests.

Wayne H. Bowen is Professor of History and Associate Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Central Florida. As Associate Dean, he is responsible for developing and implementing policies and practices for undergraduate students at UCF, and in the College of Undergraduate Studies. Additionally, he provides oversight for the university's General Education Program. Bowen is also a retired Colonel in the US Army Reserve, and served in Iraq, and with NATO in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

He received a BA in history from the University of Southern California and an MA and PhD in European history from Northwestern University, and a Master's in strategic studies from the US Army War College. He is a specialist in modern Spain, focused on the era of the Franco dictatorship. That was a long period in history. We'll talk a little bit about that. Bowen is the Author of nine books, six on Spanish history, from the early modern era to the Cold War. He has also published more than two dozen articles in academic journals with subjects including the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Great Power Relations since 1800.

His articles have been published in 10 countries and translated into Spanish, Polish, French, and Turkish. Bowen is currently finishing a contracted book on Spanish workers in Nazi Germany, and conducting research for a subsequent monograph on relations between the Spanish and Ottoman Empires from the 17th to the 20th century. Bowen is an active member of the Central Florida community. He serves on the City of Oviedo's sustainability task force as a member of the Seminole County and Oviedo-Winter Springs Chambers of Commerce, and is an Assistant Clerk for the Seminole County Supervisor of Elections. He is a graduate of the City of Oviedo's Community Police Academy, and a 2023/24 participant in the Seminole County Public Schools Community Ambassador Program. Welcome, Dr. Bowen.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowenn:

Thank you. It's great to be here.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It is great to have you here. My understanding is that one of your proudest moments, as a individual connected to the College of Undergraduate studies, has been watching our graduates walk across the stage. Tell us a little bit about that.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, one of the great things we have in this college is, we take students who sometimes have a dream that doesn't work out, we help them rediscover a new dream. So, a lot of the students who come to us think that they have no way to graduate from UCF. They started on in a degree or a major and they encountered something, some obstacle they couldn't overcome. So to see those students cross the stage, that's real victory for them. I'll get most excited by the students who cross with no bling, no awards, no honor society, because I know that for them the victory is just crossing the stage. For so many of them, they're first generation students, so they're the first in their family. So it's a victory not just for them, but for everyone. They'll often have nephews and cousins, uncles and aunts who say, "Well, you did it. I can too." So, it can have real ripple effects across generations.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Your insights on that experience come from your time having served as Director for the Interdisciplinary Studies Program. Tell us a little bit about that program.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Right. Interdisciplinary Studies is an incredible major, where students can put together two or three different things if they have multiple interests, or they started in one area and are changing to another one. So it's great to see those students come in, often lost, and to say, "You know what? We can build on what you've already done, and we can help you find a future in a career, in graduate school." We have other majors as well.

For the general studies degree, it's for students who just need to finish. They've often changed majors multiple times, changed institutions multiple times. We tell them, "This is a way for you to finish as quickly as possible, and then go on to achieve success." As we know, most jobs that require a degree don't care what your major is. So mainly, the thing here is just to finish. Of course, we're excited by our Environmental Studies Program, which next year we'll award the 400th degree since it began six years ago. It's grown so much, we're now going to expand it into two new degree programs that we could talk about later, if you'd like.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Absolutely. Thinking about our Interdisciplinary Studies Programs, what might be three words that you would use to describe the students who are in these programs?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, self-directed for sure. Many of them will come to us for majors in which the departments in our colleges said, "These are the courses you're going to take. They'll be very similar to the students sitting next to you in the classroom." When they come to us though, we help them find a pathway that's unique to them. In fact, we've looked at this, no two students in our college take the same list of classes. So, each of them truly is earning a unique degree. So we help them figure out a way to explain that to employers, to graduate

schools, often to their parents who might've thought their children were going to be doctors or engineers, but now they found a more exciting pathway, and they go on to do exciting things.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

In thinking about some of the things that our alums are now doing, and what they're aspiring to do, talk to me about all the many pathways in which an IDS major, or a BIGS major, or environmental studies major might take.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, we try to start that conversation early with them. Many of them come to us from the beginning as first year students, especially environmental studies, but increasingly interdisciplinary studies. A lot of times, they know what they want to do. They want to be sustainability officers, or they want to be entrepreneurs, or they want to go to medical school and they have that path. But for other students, we talk to them about, "What are you interested in? What are you good at? How can we put those things together for a pathway for you?"

We also, through the courses that we offer them, remind them that, "This is not a one-and-done. Your life is ahead of you, and almost everyone changes careers. So if you think initially you're going to be working in a museum, maybe seven years from then, then you'll be working for a local government, and then five or six years after that, you might be working for a historic site. So, the pathways will change." We try to prepare them to be flexible and adaptable so they can really have the ability to control their lives hereafter.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Absolutely. When you think about the future of interdisciplinary studies and the College of Undergraduate Studies, how do you perceive that? What does it look like for you in relationship to that? Let's think about maybe 10 years down the road. How would you perceive or dream that the College of Undergraduate Studies might evolve?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, I think we've really made a strong identity for ourselves in stepping into the gap. So we try to look across the university and see, where are students not succeeding, and what are the reasons for that? Sometimes it's because they honestly don't have the skills for the major they initially hoped to complete. In other cases, it's because their life situation changes, so they're no longer able to complete the degree, not because they don't have the competence, but because they're moving away from campus, and they had planned to complete a degree that could only be done here.

In other cases, they're coming to us from state colleges and the university doesn't quite have the degree that's the best option for them. So the college has a real incredible role to fill here to help students finish, even if it's in a different way than they began. So we'll continue to look for new degrees. We have a proposal that's nearly finished for a leadership degree, which students can complete entirely online.

I think for students who initially think that the College of Business, or the Rosen College of Hospitality, or other degrees on campus are for them, but their life situation changes, or they want a more broad-based degree, we can be a good compliment to them. In most

cases, if students are able to stay on the original pathway, they should do so. If you want to be a doctor, and you're a biology major, and that's working out for you, we would never tell you, "Change to one of our majors." But if your heart's changed, or you face an obstacle you can't surmount, then come talk to us and we can figure out a way to help you graduate.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I think those are two very important ways in which we could certainly continue to serve our student body. But I'm also thinking about the fact that the world has changed so much, and the way in which young people go to college isn't the way in which you or I went to college. I remember getting stacks and stacks of brochures when I was in high school. All these colleges that were interested in me, at least taking an interest in them if not coming to visit them or if not applying.

But now, students are developing their own idea of what they want their life to look like when they finish, and it might not necessarily fit neatly into some particular box anymore. In addition to that, now we have the explosion of artificial intelligence in higher education, and students are using it to their advantage to develop ways in which they can now see the world, and all the things that they can do. How do you think this expansion of development and access to knowledge will change the way the College of Undergraduate Studies functions?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, I know we've heard from some of our admissions folks, that students come really interested from the beginning in finding their own pathway, and they're interested in three or four different things. Rather than picking one major or two majors where they'll be here for five or six years, they're interested from the beginning. So we're really seeing a shift with interdisciplinary studies, BA and BS, students choosing it earlier in their career.

In some cases, figuring out from the very beginning that they don't have a pathway that fits one of the existing majors. So I think we can be there to say, "This is an option for you. You can take courses across multiple colleges, and you can add minors and certificates and still finish in four years, in a way that prepares you for this world that's changing so quickly." Again, we just need students to be aware that, you may have a job in mind that you want to do, but that job may not be here in five years.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Absolutely.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

You may have a graduate program in mind, and that graduate program may not be here in five years. So spend your time developing the skills and the interests that will enable you to be adaptable. Then hopefully, you'll be able to go on and continue to learn throughout the course of your life as the world changes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

We're seeing where, now, even young people are putting things together that we wouldn't even imagine that the two things would fit together neatly. Yet, as they are developing these ideas about... Well, for instance, my niece who is in college is very interested in theater and

drama, but wants to focus more on directing, but is also looking at creative writing, and also looking at African American studies. One might think, "How well did those things fit together?" But the way in which she's envisioning the world, those things have some synergy that will lead her down a path that she wants to go.

We're finding that in talking to a lot of young people... I had a wonderful conversation with one of our IDS students, Lucy Blanco, who did essentially the same thing. She put together some pieces of things that she thinks are going to help her build the skills toward getting into law school. The world has changed so much in relationship to how students are conceptualizing the knowledge and skills they need in order to move forward. So I want to talk a little bit more about your experiences, and do a bit of a shift in this conversation. You've retired from the Army Reserve. How many years did you do?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

30 years.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

30 years. Wow. Well, thank you for your service.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Thank you for paying my salary all those years.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Not a problem. I might be looking for it in retirement, by the way. But anyway, you got to the rank of Colonel, which is a huge deal. Not a lot of people get to that rank. How did that experience influence your leadership style?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

The army, along with all the military services, is an incredible place to work with people of different backgrounds. It was the first place where I really experienced diversity in a comprehensive way. We would go on missions, and there are people from every state across the country, and every background. So, that was really important developmental experience for me. I also saw all kinds of leaders, terrible ones and wonderful ones, ones who I would follow, as they say, to the gates of Hell, and others that it would be like going to Hell if I was with them. Sorry, for my language.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It's okay.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

I had leaders who were the most extreme micromanagers to those who were the most extreme delegators, who would give me one word of guidance and then I wouldn't see them for three months. So, it really helped me to become adaptable. But also, throughout those 30 years, I always felt like I was part of a team. We all wore the same uniform. Regardless of rank or background, the single-minded focus on fulfilling the mission, whatever it was, was something that has really helped me in higher education.

Because universities are full of people who are highly skilled in their fields and experts in their disciplines, but it can be a challenge for them to come together for a common goal. So, I think the military background was really helpful in preparing me for that. Also, to realize that commanders in the military or supervisors in higher education might make decisions I disagree with, but it's still my obligation to fulfill them, and to understand that sometimes those above me know things I don't. So that knowledge has really helped me to move outside of myself and realize, I have to work for the better of the institution and for the people we serve. So, those 30 years were certainly positive in that regard.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

There is a lot of truth to that. It's also really helpful to know that there are a group of people that you get to work with who trust that, regardless as to what the situation might be, that you have their interest at heart. Working in that environment, and particularly here in higher ed, where we all have this one mission of serving our students, and ensuring that they are successful. How we get there, everybody has sort of their own idea about that. But at the end of the day, we follow the person in charge, and hope that they have everyone's best interest at heart. I think there's a lot to be learned from that experience, so kudos. Let's talk a little bit about your scholarship. You do work primarily connected to Spain, but have done some work around the Middle East. Talk to me about how you chose Spain and the Middle East as your research focus.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, I got into graduate school and was headed to Northwestern, expecting to work on Germany and Yugoslavia in World War II. I thought it was a very interesting period of time, and German history was more my initial area of interest. Then I got to graduate school, and took courses, and realized there were a lot of people working on German history. Every department, it seemed, had a German historian. It was a very competitive field. So much work was done in it, I felt like I would disappear in this big field.

Spanish history, on the other hand, especially modern Spanish history, was relatively few people working on it. So I thought to myself, and talked to my advisor, and we realized that there was still a lot of stories to be told in Spanish history. Then totally selfishly, the food was better, the weather is better in Spain. Thinking about my skills, my Spanish was much better. Growing up in Southern California, taking several years of Spanish, I struggled to learn German. So, I thought-

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

You're breaking my heart.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

I thought the Franco regime is an intriguing dictatorship. There's a lot of connections there with German history, the initial area of my interest, so modern Spain proved to be a perfect choice for me. I was able to write books that, really, there would not have been room for in German history. So, it's been great. Then the connection to the Mediterranean in the Middle East was a natural one. Spain's long-term connections to the region, just across the strait to Gibraltar. Then with the military sending me to the Middle East, I was able to pick that up as well. So, it's been a nice complimentary field.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Well, I could certainly see your fascination with it. But for the sake of our audience, I spent six and a half years in Germany, didn't learn any, very little, German outside of a handful of arias as a music major, because most of the arias we studied as a voice major were in Italian and Latin. So, very little German. And, learned the language very quickly, being immersed in it every day. So my Spanish, not so great. I have tried to pick it up probably about three or four times. I can read it well, I can somewhat understand it, but please don't ask me to speak it, because it does not go well. But, it's interesting that there was such interest in studying Germany when you were in graduate school, and that, for all the spaces where there was little to no really in-depth study, Spain, I found that interesting. So, talk to me about the most interesting thing you learned in relationship to your scholarship about Spain.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, over the decades I've been working on it, it's been interesting because when I started, again, thinking about German history, I was thinking about superpowers. Germany, for much of the 20th century, was a superpower, the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom. Spain hasn't really been a superpower for quite some time. We could say maybe 1648 was the end of that period. But nonetheless, the countries in the middle, mid-range states, have influence, have opportunities, have challenges.

So Spain has always been in the mix, and as part of the discussion, even if it's not been able to drive events in the same way that the United States or the UK have been. In that sense, it's been more of a challenge for their leaders and for their populations to respond to world events. So, I find those stories much more intriguing. Also, Spain's been much more involved than maybe people expect. I wrote a book about Spain's involvement in the American Civil War that, at various points, Spain almost got into the conflict.

You can imagine, with its control over Cuba and Puerto Rico, how that might've shifted things in the favor of the Confederacy. Same thing during the Second World War, Spain was on the verge of intervening on the side of the Axis, and you can imagine how vulnerable that would've made the British losing Gibraltar, potentially the other conflicts. So bringing Spain back into the story of modern European history has been the cause of my career, because I think it legitimately should be part of the discussion, even if it's never been the decisive power.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

But it's interesting because I remember my grandmother repeating something that a lot of people used to say all the time, but you don't really hear it anymore, that the sun never set on the British Empire. Yet there's still a lot of Spanish influence around the world, and particularly on this side of the world. How do you think that plays into modern Spanish history?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, it's interesting that Spain's legacy goes back even farther. In fact, one of the titles that the King of Spain, Philip VI, holds is King of Jerusalem.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

No way.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

It's a long list of titles, if you look, and many of it over territories that Spain no longer controls. But, Spain was deeply involved in the crusading effort. The idea was though, that Spain would follow the Spanish road, not heading toward the Middle East directly, but to conquer North Africa as a pathway to liberate Jerusalem from Islam in the 13th and 14th centuries. Spain continues to be of global significance. Obviously, Spanish is spoken very widely throughout the world, not just in the Americas, but in the Philippines and parts of Africa. So it's, in some senses, more globally significant than people maybe might immediately think. So it's an intriguing country, and there's still stories to tell, and I least got one or two more books about Spanish history.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Well, all right. We're looking forward to the books. We are now going to go into what I like to call my lightning round. This is an opportunity for our listeners and viewers to learn a little bit about you, just some basic information. Answer the questions with the first thing that pops up on the top of your mind. So, here we go. What's your favorite color?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Blue.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Ta-da.

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Which I'm wearing, yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yes. Favorite song?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Sounds of Silence by Disturbed, not the original by Simon & Garfunkel.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. I'm a Simon & Garfunkel fan. Okay. Favorite movie?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Gladiator.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

All right. Favorite book?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

It's actually three books, but The Lord of the Rings series by Tolkien.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite actor?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Favorite actor. That's a hard one. I guess I would say, going back to Gladiator, maybe Russell Crowe. He's continuing to have interesting roles, so we'll go with that.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite author?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, if I can't say Tolkien again, then I would say HP Lovecraft, horror. Now, some of his stuff is challenging and problematic, but I think no one writes like him.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite actress?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Emily Blunt.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite singer?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, it depends on my mood. Sometimes I'm listening to harder stuff like Metallic or Avenged Sevenfold. When I'm trying to calm down, maybe Adele. It just really depends on what I'm looking for.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite thing to do on a Sunday afternoon?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, I do like going to the movies with my wife. Occasionally, I like to play war games with friends. Hanging out at home with the kids.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, that sounds good. All right. Last but not least, favorite television show?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, again, it depends on my mood. I'd say, right now, What We Do in the Shadows is a pretty fun series to watch. I like science fiction, so I'm waiting for the next season of Andor on Disney+, which I think Andor is the best Star Wars, by far, movies or series included.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. All right. I have two final questions for you. The first one is, what advice would you give current college students?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

It may sound like a strange thing to say, hold onto your dreams, but don't live in them. In other words, focus on the thing that you have to do today to keep making progress. It's wonderful to dream about the days 5 or 10 years from now when you have your vision. But, what assignment do you have to do today? Who do you need to talk to? What project do you have to get finished? How can you do something toward that today?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

All right. My last question is connected to a series I saw probably almost now a year ago. Laverne Cox likes to interview up-and-coming stars, artists. The name of her show was called If We're Being Honest. At the end of her show she often asked her guest, "Was there anything that she should have asked that she didn't ask?" So I'm going to ask you, was there anything that I should have asked that I didn't ask?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

Well, you could ask me if I miss teaching. I haven't taught classes since I came to UCF.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Oh, so do you miss teaching?

Dr. Wayne H. Bowen:

I do. I miss some things about it. I miss seeing the light come on in a student's eyes when they grasp something for the first time, or they see a connection. I really enjoy seeing students over the course of two or three classes, having them start often as a freshman. By the time those seniors, they really matured intellectually and emotionally. I miss those things. I certainly don't miss dealing with plagiarism. The joys of teaching are wonderful, but I like to think that in my current role, I can have a broader impact and help students in every class, or certainly in many classes. I do like still giving guest lectures and visiting classes, so at least having that connection with students in some way. But yeah, I do. So, it's a yes and a no.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, I get it. I so get it. I do miss teaching as well. But those things, never fun. Alrighty. Well, Dr. Bowen, it has been a pleasure to talk with you on Academically Speaking, and really enjoyed our conversation. To our audience, thank you for viewing and for listening. This is Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, and you have a great day.