

Opening:

This is Academically Speaking, a podcast hosted by Dr. Theodorea Regina Barry, 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, and I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, Vice Provost and Dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Central Florida, and today I have the privilege of having joining me on this podcast, Luci Blanco. Luci is a highly skilled and accomplished professional with a passion for advocacy, leadership, and creativity. She is currently a student at the University of Central Florida, studying interdisciplinary studies with a focus on public affairs and social behavioral sciences, minoring in pre-law in the humanities. Throughout her education, Luci has demonstrated expertise in public speaking, professionalism, and problem solving. She has a strong background in writing as a published and decorated author. Luci loves sharing her adoration for writing and demonstrating her craft. In addition to her accomplishments, Luci is a lifelong learner, committed to staying at the forefront of industry trends and developments. She actively seeks out new opportunities for growth and improvement, continuously expanding her skillset and knowledge base. With excellent communication and interpersonal skills, Luci excels in collaborating with cross-functional teams, stakeholders, and clients. She has a talent for building strong relationships and fostering a positive environment in the workplace and out. Luci is committed to delivering outstanding results and positively impacting her field. She looks forward to new challenges and opportunities to contribute to her expertise and drive meaningful change. Welcome, Luci.

Luci Blanco:

Oh my goodness, I wish I could have that introduction for everything I do. Thank you so much for having me, Dr. Berry.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Thank you for joining us today. And so, we're really excited to have you here and to be one of our featured students in the College of Undergraduate Studies on this podcast and really want to learn a little bit about you, the things you aspire to, and some of your experiences. And so, my first question for you today is to talk a little bit about your major and why you selected it.

Luci Blanco:

I mean, I love this question. I feel very excited to talk about my major because a lot of times when students or peers or, you know, faculty members are like, "Oh, what's your major?" And I explain like, "I'm an interdisciplinary studies major" and they're like, "What is that?", and I'm like, "Exactly". Like, there's something so special being a part of the College of Undergraduate Studies, specifically here at UCF, I feel like the work that we do is just so innovative and it's very much trailblazing. Like, I talked to a lot of my friends at other institutions and, you know, it's a very different experience. And, you know, I

came from a very unique academic background, like I was in and out of home school, private school. I was in hybrid programs a lot due to my dance background and just wanting, you know, more of an out of an education, and I owe that to my mother. Shout out to my mom. And so, I felt, you know, coming to college, I didn't want to stop that journey there. I loved having a hand in my learning. I loved being able to kind of create my own path. And, you know, that's just so special to me, and it was really inspiring because I owe it to, you know, the amazing faculty members and my Peer Knights coach and my advisors for not letting me be afraid to have so many passions and interests and learned that there is a program for me and it's been a perfect fit. And I just love it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. So, here's the question that oftentimes is asked at the end, but we're going to ask it on the front end--

Luci Blanco:

Okay, Perfect.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

--given your bio, right. So, what's your plan when you graduate? What do you aspire to do?

Luci Blanco:

Okay. So, my minor gives it away a little bit. I do have aspirations to pursue something in the legal field. So immediately after college, immediately or maybe I'll take a gap year. It's kind of hard because I am only 19. Like, it's hard because I feel like you get to college and people are like, "Okay, great, you've made it. Now what are you going to do with your life?" But getting my Juris Doctor and attending law school is for sure in the cards. But what I want to do with that and what I want to contribute in the legal field is still a little bit hazy but because of my major, I'm able to take like some really cool classes. And right now, I'm taking Law and the Legal System and I'm sitting there doing my first ever case briefing and I'm at my desk giggling and kicking my feet so, I know I'm on the right track.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. Excellent. So, when is your anticipated graduation date?

Luci Blanco:

May 2026.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Alright, okay. Excellent. Excellent. So, what activities are you currently participating in outside of the classroom?

Luci Blanco:

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I can't go without saying my involvement in student government is definitely at the forefront. It's changed my collegiate experience wholeheartedly, and I cannot, you know, express my gratitude for that. I started out in the Student Government Leadership Council program, the Executive Leadership Council, and now I'm able to say I'm a member of the Executive Cabinet. I serve as the Academic Affairs Coordinator, so I do a lot of work with different offices and faculty members, as you know, just trying to better the experience for students and be that student voice. As well as in student government, I serve as the Chair of the Scholarship Committee, which has been a huge privilege and an honor. We get to allocate, myself and the committee, around \$260,000 of scholarships for students, which has been incredible. A part of our on campus Greek life. So, in my sorority, I just got installed as our Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. So, I get to kind of, you know, lead my chapter in a really special way, so I'm very excited about that. I'm also an Undergraduate Admissions Ambassador. So, giving tours on campus, doing our open houses. We just recently had our Merit Scholars Open House, so I got to show around a bunch of really cool kids about what makes our campus so special. So, if there's a theme that goes through all those things, it's trying to share my passion and my love for this school and the people that made it so special for me and giving that back.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. Excellent. So, what advice would you give to fellow students about why they should participate in student organizations and to include some high impact experiences like service learning and study away? What kinds of things would you tell a student about the significance of doing those things?

Luci Blanco:

Thousand percent. I love this question as well. I think maybe it was just my personality or my nature, but when I found out I was going to University of Central Florida, the first thing on my mind was, "Okay, how am I going to leave my mark here?" Now, I don't mean like names on buildings and like those, you know, instant gratification type accomplishments. It was more so, how can I change the lives of the community around me? So, my biggest advice to students is find what you're passionate in and really dig deep within that. You might get lucky on the first try. With student government, I was very lucky. It was one of the first things I did on this campus and it was a home run. But, sometimes you might have to, you know, find that grit within yourself and really fight to find what you're passionate about. But, once you find that and you really just sit in that, sit in that love and some in that passion, I think that that's where you're able to make the most impactful change. And I'm happy to say that there's so many ways to do that on this campus, you know, through your learning and through your extracurriculars, and I'm excited to study abroad this summer. I'm hopefully going to go to Barcelona. So, and that's something I was always passionate about, you know, when coming to this institution was our study abroad program, and so now being able to be a part of that and share my love for that too. So, just stick with what you love and don't be afraid to have many passions, and that always goes back to my major and why I love it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So, imagine that a student new to the university might not be absolutely sure about what their passion is, what might be some ways that they might discover that?

Luci Blanco:

You know, I think as a freshman, it can be a little daunting, right? You come to a university and you're faced with new environments and new friends and just, you have to completely reroute your way of life. I always have a saying, it's, "Do it afraid." Right. So, the best thing you can do for yourself when you're trying to find out what you're passionate in is show up to the meeting, to the club that you're interested in. It may not be a perfect fit, but at least you can say you tried. You know, go to those panels. You know, the university, we have so many different agencies that put on programming for students for this exact reason. Just show up. You know, you'd be surprised what could happen when you show up for yourself and show up for others. For example, you know, in more of an academic crowd, I am the biggest cheerleader for our KMETC program, which is Knights Majors Exploration and Transition Center, it's a mouthful. That's how I found my major, and there's so many amazing people in that program that can help you find yours. Really tap into our Peer Knights coaching program. I think that is such an invaluable tool. It's students who have been in your shoes who know a wealth about this campus that are going to help you, you know, dissect what you love and what you might want to love and find the perfect home for you. So, just tap into your resources and just go out on this campus and explore things like, you'd be surprised what can happen.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. Excellent. So now we are about to go into our lightning round, and the lightning round is just a series of very simple questions that allows our audience to get to know a little bit more about you on a personal level. And so, the purpose of this is just to answer the question based on the thing that first comes to top of mind. Okay? All right, so here we go. What's your favorite color?

Luci Blanco:

Red, right now.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yay. We have that in common. What's your favorite song?

Luci Blanco:

I've been loving *1989 Taylor's Version*. Person of the Year might I add. So, I'm going to say, *Is It Over Now?* from the vault, *1989 Taylor's Version*.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay, excellent. Favorite movie?

Luci Blanco:

This is like asking me to pick my favorite brother, I can't do this. I'm a big cinephile, if you know what that is. But right now, I'm just going to go with my gut and say *10 Things I Hate About You*.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite musician or singer?

Luci Blanco:

Okay. I already shouted out Taylor Swift, so I'm going to have to go with my favorite band, which has got to be The 1975.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite actor?

Luci Blanco:

This is terrible. I'm going to go with – oh my goodness! I'm going to go with a classic, Robert De Niro.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, he's a classic.

Luci Blanco:

That's a classic one. That's a classic. I love his work.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, I saw, what was it on Netflix? "About My Dad." That was hilarious.

Luci Blanco:

So funny. He can really do anything like that's many hats, let me tell you.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Yeah, absolutely. Favorite book?

Luci Blanco:

Okay, I'm going to go--I'll give you my current favorite, and like a cult classic favorite. A cult classic favorite, I will say it every time, George Orwell, 1984. My favorite novel. Read in middle school, changed my life. Current favorite though in terms of like, contemporary, I love anything Emily Henry does, and she has a new book coming out. But my favorite of hers that she's done was Happy Place.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay.

Luci Blanco:

I like that one.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. Favorite thing to do on a cloudy, rainy day?

Luci Blanco:

Favorite thing to do on a cloudy, rainy day? I'm going to have to say...I love cooking. So, maybe like invite a few friends over, you know, maybe like, share a meal, watch a movie, you know.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Favorite dish to prepare?

Luci Blanco:

Anything, I love cooking steak, learned that from my dad. I know I can make a good steak, but I think my favorite dish right now is anything pasta related. So, I make like, a really good pasta alla vodka. Okay, that one's pretty good. I have a couple good recipes from that one. Gigi Hadid is my favorite, by the way. Didn't know she'd have a good pasta recipe, but it's really good.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite dish to eat?

Luci Blanco:

That's also really hard. But right now, I'm in a sushi kick, so I'm going to say, like, some good ole sushi. Maybe like a little spicy tuna roll.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Favorite ice cream flavor?

Luci Blanco:

Got to be coffee, or chocolate, or bonus--if you've ever had one, it's like coffee with like, a little like chocolate covered coffee beans. They have that in an ice cream shop back home in Naples, and that's my favorite. So it's like espresso chip, chocolate chip something.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Oh, that's fabulous.

Luci Blanco:

I love it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I'm a Ben and Jerry's, Everything but the Kitchen Sink.

Luci Blanco:

Have you ever had Half Baked? That one is my favorite Ben and Jerry's one.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I haven't. I haven't had that one.

Luci Blanco:

That one's really good. Well, we'll swap. I'll try your favorite, you'll try mine.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. That sounds like a plan. Alright, and one last question that is something that was inspired by a show hosted by Laverne Cox. She has a show entitled—oh, why is it escaping my mind now? I can't think of the name of the show but it comes on Max. And she typically interviews, it's a one-on-one interview of an up-and-coming star or celebrity in any particular field, and what she does at the end of her interviews is always ask her guest, "Is there something that I didn't ask that I should have asked?" So, my question to you is, is there something that I didn't ask that I should have asked?

Luci Blanco:

For all my students or prospective students or anyone really who's listening, I always get the question, "How do you do it all?" Right? And I never want to set an unrealistic, you know, precedent for students thinking that you have to come on this campus and do a bazillion things. That's what makes me feel fulfilled and happy, and I love doing that. I love being busy. I'm literally like such a worker bee like, if my hands are not doing something or my brain isn't occupied, like I go crazy. But you know, there are days where I also have to take a break and remind myself that it's okay to take a break.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Self-care is a revolutionary act.

Luci Blanco:

It is. It 1,000% is, and there is time you need to take for yourself. And so, if you see others on campus or in your life accomplishing big things and you feel less than, don't. Everyone's on their own journey, you're on your own pace, and just trust that you're on your path and you're making positive impacts every day on someone's life. It may not be a whole campus wide that I feel lucky doing what with doing with student government, but just know that you got it, and we're proud of you. We trust you. We love our students. I think I feel proud to be, you know, in this college and at the University of Central Florida, but just know that even the ones who are doing the most are also probably deep down also struggling and also need time for a break. So, we're all in the same boat.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. Well, Luci, it has been a pleasure to have you on Academically Speaking. Really enjoyed engaging in this conversation with you and thoroughly enjoy having you as one of our students in the College of Undergraduate Studies. And to our audience, thank you for watching. Thank you for listening. Thank you for tuning in to Academically Speaking. I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Barry and have a great day.