

**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:**

Thank you. Hello everyone, and welcome to Academically Speaking. I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, Vice Provost and Dean for the College of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Central Florida. And with me today is Emily Padden. I am so excited to have Emily here with us today. Emily graduated in May with a degree in environmental studies, minors in geosciences and anthropology, and a certificate in Geographic Information Systems.

She is also the Founder's Day Award recipient for the College of Undergraduate Studies. Emily has played a key role in UCF's Fair Trade campaign and works as an intern, or has worked as an intern with the Center for Global Economic and Environmental Opportunity. Emily will be working starting in May as a stewardship assistant with Friends of Acadia. She plans to go to graduate school to continue her education in human ecology or in environmental sustainability.

Ultimately, she hopes to forge a career in the conservation research industry or actively contribute to advancing the United Nations' sustainable development goals. Welcome, Emily.

**Emily Padden:**

Thank you. It's great to be here today.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

It is so exciting to have you here today, and we are super excited for all the things that you are about to accomplish. You graduated with a degree in environmental science, environmental studies, rather, with minors in geosciences and anthropology, which is absolutely interesting to me. And a certificate in GIS, which is something that many of our environmental studies students do. So, why did you select this particular course of study? How do these things fit together for you?

**Emily Padden:**

Absolutely. When I first came to UCF, I knew that I wanted to pursue an environmental career or working in the environmental industry. And just from a few experiences I had in high school and stuff, I knew that approaching environmental issues in the field, you couldn't just know about the hard sciences and not the other aspects of it. So, the social aspects, the economic aspects, that kind of stuff.

And so when I saw the environmental studies degree path and how interdisciplinary it was, I knew that that would be a better fit for me rather than something like biology, which was a stricter focus on just the hard sciences. Coming here, starting this degree, taking my classes, we have politics classes, sociology, economics. I really got that

interdisciplinary look. And so when I added the minors, it was really not only just interest, but two minors that I thought could really kind of increase the knowledge I was already getting.

And so geosciences comes in to give me a little bit more of a background in earth sciences, geology, that kind of stuff. And then anthropology, I'm not only really interested in it, but it teaches you a little bit more of how humans directly impact the environment, interact with the environment, and have been doing that for many years, hundreds or thousands of years even. And so then the GIS certificate really came in after I took my first GIS class, and our professor, Dr. Gilbrook, really stressed how important this kind of technology was for the environmental field and really any aspect of it.

And so with real world experience on that, kind of looking at research and how different biologists, ecologists use GIS or even, I volunteer with the Florida Trail Association and our National Scenic Trail. We use that to kind of measure and map different gaps of the trail that need maintenance or different areas that are road walks or reroutes. And so it really is kind of a technology that is all-encompassing for environmental work, so I knew that it would be very valuable to have that experience.

#### **Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

And you are a classic example as to why environmental studies lives in the office of interdisciplinary studies because all of our programs want to take a variety of different kinds of perspectives, whether it's economic, political, social, educational. On a particular topic so that people can see all the ways in which that particular topic influences a lot of different areas.

And so your course of study really sort of speaks to the interdisciplinary nature of the work that we do here in the college. And so moving on to post-graduation, you're taking this new role as a stewardship assistant. Tell me about what a stewardship assistant is and the role that it plays within this organization called the Friends of Acadia.

#### **Emily Padden:**

Absolutely. With the stewardship assistant, the main focus of the role is essentially overseeing and helping to facilitate Friends of Acadia's volunteer programs. So, because the National Park is really small, the organization, FOA or Friends of Acadia, partners with the NPS to do most of the trail work projects, to oversee the maintenance of the carriage roads in the park, or just making sure that there's not a lot of storm damage, that kind of stuff to the trails and trail systems.

And so that basically manifests within the volunteer community. So, they bring tourists or residents of Bar Harbor in the surrounding area in to complete these trail projects. As a stewardship assistant, I'll essentially be helping to train volunteers, assist on these volunteer projects, identify areas of the park or different trails that need maintenance, and just kind of making sure that the park and the trails are accessible to people, upkeep and that kind of stuff. And so it really does play into the role of sustainable conservation.

We want our trails up there to be navigable and well maintained, but we don't want them to be having a large impact on the ecosystem. A really important aspect of trail systems

is maintenance to ensure people stay on the trail. If you have a non-maintained trail, people are going to go around rocks or fallen trees, they're creating social trails, they're impacting the surrounding ecosystems. And so from the title, it may seem just like maybe more of a office gear job of overseeing volunteers, but when you think of the implications of having a trail system, it really does tie into conservation efforts to kind of maintain a healthy relationship between the millions of people that visit Acadia every year and the natural ecosystems there.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

So, you are going to Bar Harbor, Maine, and you've spent some time there before. Talk to me about the ways in which you believe your education prepares you for being in an environment that's so environmentally and geographically different from central Florida.

**Emily Padden:**

Absolutely. Well, fortunately, through this degree path, I've gotten a lot of opportunity to take different biology courses, focusing on different ecosystems, invasive species in different ecosystems, and how we kind of look at all these different places and how climate impacts or different environmental impacts are affecting all of them. And so fortunately, the degree focuses on this broader view of the environment rather than just specifically what's here with us. But I think more importantly is kind of how I've learned how to navigate environmental issues in the environmental world socially.

And so when you're dealing with an ecosystem like Acadia, it's on an island. If they get hurricanes or changes in winter temperatures, whether it's significantly colder or warmer due to environmental fluctuations, that's really going to impact the species living there, and it's going to impact the communities because they'll either have less or more tourists each year. Obviously, economic impacts, gains or losses.

And so really it's an accumulation of everything I've learned in this degree to not only help me to better react to this new environment, new diverse environment, but also the social and economic aspects that come from that environment. And so I'm really excited to work with the volunteers and kind of help teach people that may not have a lot of outdoor experience, how to interact with these spaces, why they're important, why we need to conserve them, and why understanding environmental issues is so important.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay, excellent. Coming back to UCF, you did a lot of things as a student here, and I want to talk a little bit about your involvement with Fair Trade UCF and that particular initiative. Why did you get involved and what kinds of things did you do in relationship to your involvement with this particular group?

**Emily Padden:**

Yeah, so I actually got involved through my first, I guess it was core requirement class for the major, the Foundations of Environmental Studies course taught by Dr. Plate. It's a service learning course. And so he offered working on the Fair Trade Campaign as an opportunity to get those service hours. It was something that was started by Capstone

students back in 2018, and then they graduated and we had the pandemic and it kind of dwindled, and he wanted to restart it in early 2021.

And so I chose to work on it because I felt it would be a really great experience working in that kind of interdisciplinary space. A brief background, Fair Trade is essentially an international organization that works to help prevent exploitation and promote sustainability within the production world. And so they partner primarily with small scalar individual farmers, mostly in the chocolate, coffee or banana industries. The farmers are able to sell their products through Fair Trade rather than directly to a large company. And Fair Trade basically guarantees them at least a fair minimum market price for their good and wage.

Unfortunately, exploitation is really common for these people because they're individuals selling into huge companies and the companies basically rip them off. And so with that partnership, Fair Trade is guaranteeing those prices. They then provide resources to the farmers and require them to follow new sustainable agricultural practices. Low water usage, low land usage, that kind of stuff, and they're provided the materials to learn that. And then finally, the farmers are given what's called a Fair Trade premium. It's a certain sum of money every year to put back to their community in any way they want. And so if a product comes through Fair Trade from one of those farmers, it's Fair Trade Certified.

The Fair Trade campaign is trying to bring those products to UCF and essentially say to our student body and faculty like, "Hey, here are sustainably produced products that you can buy here on campus, easily accessible. They are pretty much the same price as the other products you're going to find on campus store shelves." And it just makes sustainability more accessible to people. You don't have to drive all the way across town to the grocery stores that are a bit more high-end. And I say that in air quotes, that usually have those products versus your Walmart might not have that.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Right.

**Emily Padden:**

And so we really want to open that accessibility for people. So, back to my involvement, when I started realizing that, that first semester I worked on the campaign, I got really interested in it. It was something I really wanted to pursue. And now I guess it's three years, three and a half years later, we're still working on the campaign. We have partnered with dining services and Aramark to bring Fair Trade products to campus. So, you can now find them in all of our campus stores and we're working on expanding that. We have grown a really large student audience. We've become a registered student organization.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Excellent.

**Emily Padden:**

We host meetings, we partner with student government for catering on their different events. And so it's become a really big movement on campus, at least within our network of people that are really tuned into sustainability on campus. But fortunately, it's one of those things that I know will last because it has connections to everybody. Everybody goes to the grocery store, everybody wants to look usually for a better product when they're shopping. And so as long as we're able to continue our messaging about the importance of sustainability and production and consumption, it's something that will last and it's something that can really help to bring our students together.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

So, if you had to have an opportunity where you could encourage more students on campus to purchase Fair Trade products, what would be your message to them?

**Emily Padden:**

I guess I would really say to kind of think about everything in our community societies as a connected web. So, you can't really go to the store and buy something without that purchase, having a lot of impacts on other people on either side of the supply chain. Going down to the people selling that product and making money, and also the people producing that product. So, when we think about sustainability and making better decisions, we want to think about all the impacts.

Just like when we're working in the environmental field, you have to think about the impacts that, let's say climate change has on people, our bank accounts, really, and the environment as well. So, developing that mindset to think about, like I said, that web of impacts on everything you do because we're such a connected global society, I think that would be my biggest push. And once you learn how to shop Fair Trade, we provide a lot of resources, shopping guides, that kind of stuff to find those products. It's really not that hard. And I say that as somebody who, yes, I have a few years of practice, but it is manageable for students. It's not one of those things where you're never going to be able to find the product. You have to drive 30 minutes to find the product or something like that, but yeah.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Excellent. Tell us a little bit more about the internship that you've done with the Center for Global and Economic Environmental Opportunity. What were you learning at the time and how did it prepare you to achieve the goal that you've now accomplished in working in Bar Harbor?

**Emily Padden:**

Absolutely. Going forward, I'll refer to it as GEO because that's way shorter and that's what we call it around the office. But I got that opportunity actually from my experience with Fair Trade, Dr. Plate put my name in as a recommendation for an outreach position back when they were hiring. And I guess that was my second year here, and I've worked with them up until graduation. And so as an outreach fellow, when I was hired, there was three of us in total, and we kind of switched between international, regional, and local roles.

I first worked in international outreach and together with our founder, Professor James Backus, sat in on a lot of meetings he had with different international universities or institutions talking about sustainable development..why it was important, how we're either on or off track to meet the UN sustainable development goals for the 2030 deadline. And it was more of just an observation and learning kind of role. And then I would talk to him about what was going on and kind of gain that understanding.

Now, our other fellows have graduated, and I work more in our local outreach, primarily trying to increase the student body awareness that GEO exists. I've always thought it's a great center, a great resource to learn, less about sustainability from an individual economic role or something like that, to what are the SDGs, the sustainable development goals, how are they being implemented here? And then obviously through those goals, we get a much broader look at sustainability.

So, the goals cover things like health, education, gender equality, environmental issues, economic issues, development, it's everything. And so now I'm working to essentially create educational materials for our student body, work with different groups on campus to either promote the work they're doing or provide kind of a support or partnership, and then just educate students in general.

The biggest thing in this whole industry is making everyone understand that they're connected to it. You don't have to be a biology major or an environmental studies major to have connections to the environment. Every degree here is connected to sustainability and environmental protection in some way. And so that has really been the biggest factor. I met recently with the Office of Institutional Equity to talk about their work and kind of sustainability through the lens of social justice, gender equality, and that kind of stuff.

I've worked with student government on their sustainability initiatives, recycling, low energy usage, that kind of stuff. And so really now the position is just, I get a lot of freedom to work with different entities on campus and just promote these ideas and make a good basis and a good resource for students to come onto our social pages, read about sustainability, figure out how they might connect to it, and then take that and run with it on campus.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

That sounds great. All right, so now we are going to transition what I like to call our lightning rod round. It is an opportunity for our viewers and our listeners to learn a little bit about you personally. So, here we go. First question, favorite color?

**Emily Padden:**

It has to be green. I feel like that's so typical for environmental studies, but I don't know, there's something about green.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. Favorite song?

**Emily Padden:**

Lavender Girl by the band Camp.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. Favorite movie?

**Emily Padden:**

Has to be The Hobbit.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Oh, okay. Favorite book.

**Emily Padden:**

I actually read it recently. It is Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Oh, yeah.

**Emily Padden:**

It's a heart wrencher, but it's very good.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

It is very good. Okay. Favorite singer?

**Emily Padden:**

Taylor Meier from the band Camp.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Of course, right? Favorite actor.

**Emily Padden:**

Ooh, that's a good one. I'm really a big fan of Emma Watson currently.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. Favorite author?

**Emily Padden:**

That has to be a tie between either Sarah J. Maas or JR Tolkien.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. Favorite course you took at UCF?

**Emily Padden:**

Probably my research methods for environmental studies course. It was my first time ever designing a research project and writing the report up to the actual data collection portion. We weren't required to collect data, but we designed the project, everything like that. And I did mullet population monitoring in the Indian River Lagoon. So, it was fun. It was cool to kind of learn how to design that kind of project.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. Excellent. Favorite activity at UCF?

**Emily Padden:**

I am a big fan of attending our student government's green assemblies. They're, depending on the semester, either monthly or biweekly and we talk about different environmental issues on campus, different initiatives on campus, have guest speakers, and I've always really enjoyed attending those.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

I actually enjoy attending those too, and I'm really thankful that I've been invited on at least a couple of occasions to attend those meetings. Okay. Favorite UCF tradition?

**Emily Padden:**

I know it's a classic, but probably the Spirit Splash. I've never run into the reflection pond, but I do like to watch from a distance.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

I haven't done that either.

**Emily Padden:**

I'm a little afraid of getting trampled but watching from a distance is fun.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Yes, I watch from my office window. It's lovely.

**Emily Padden:**

Very nice.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

And it's hilarious. Okay. Favorite thing to do on a rainy day?

**Emily Padden:**

Oh, I definitely will be on my apartment balcony with a book or a podcast or something like that. Just kind of chilling, watching the rain. I'm very lucky to have a balcony at my apartment so you can get outside without getting poured on, and that's always been nice.



**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

All right, so we're going to close out this conversation with a question that I like to ask that I sort of borrowed from a television show that appeared on Max hosted by Laverne Cox. And the name of the show is entitled If We're Being Honest. And she likes to talk to up and coming artists and actors, activists about the kinds of things that they do. And at the end of her interviews, she always ask, "Was there anything that she should have asked that she didn't ask?" So, I'm asking you, is there anything that I should have asked that I didn't ask?

**Emily Padden:**

I guess I've done a lot with UCF, but I also feel like I've had a lot of opportunity to work with the Orlando community. And so kind of looking at that work, I feel like that represents a larger part of my maybe professional portfolio than my UCF work does entirely. I've gotten the opportunity to work with a lot of community members. And so I feel like maybe a bigger question if we're speaking about my professional experience is just what have I done with the Orlando community as a whole?

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

So, what have you done with the Orlando community as a whole?

**Emily Padden:**

My biggest experience, and probably one of the most valuable is my work with the Florida Trail Association. So, for those that don't know, Florida has a national scenic trail. It's 1500 miles. It runs from right around Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

And where is Big Cypress located?

**Emily Padden:**

That is, it's right above or next to the Everglades. It's all in that big swampy area.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Okay. I'm still learning Florida.

**Emily Padden:**

Yeah, it's down south. And so with Florida Trail Association, I am part of what they call the Next Generation Coalition. And so the Florida Trail exists because of its volunteers doing trail maintenance. They don't have a huge trail staff, so we rely on volunteers. One issue with that, or not necessarily issue, but situation we're trying to work towards overcoming is that the majority of our volunteers are 65-plus and white, and that's not representative of Florida as a whole.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

That's very true.

**Emily Padden:**

So, the Next Generation Coalition comes in to encourage more community involvement, especially youth involvement in the trail. There's 18 of us ages 19 to 30, and we work together on different kind of projects. I'm on the trail maintenance crew, so we put together trail work parties. We bring youth from around Florida out to different parts of the trail to get their hands dirty, work on trail maintenance, camp out. And last month we were camped out in a swamp. It's really fun. It's a great way to get involved.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

I can't imagine camping out in a swamp.

**Emily Padden:**

There's a lot of mosquitoes, but we had a good time.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

And they would have me for lunch and dinner.

**Emily Padden:**

Yeah, it's like you bring out all the bug sprays, the mosquito nets, that kind of stuff. But I've really learned a lot about the people that live here, especially in the Orlando area, their personal connections to the Florida Trail and our natural spaces. I was even able to go up to DC as a representative for the Florida Trail in February.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Oh, wonderful.

**Emily Padden:**

Yeah, it was great talking to senate committees and house committees on natural resources, talking to our Florida representatives, asking for support and land protection to preserve not only the Florida Trail, but our wildlife corridors and that kind of stuff. And so that's really kind of opened my eyes to what's going on for the environment and outdoor recreation in Florida, and then how we can bring our communities into those spaces. So, it's been a great time. I love it. Absolutely love it. It's really one of the big reasons I'm involved in kind of trail communities and trail maintenance, and so it's been a great experience.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

What do you think you're going to miss most about being in Orlando?

**Emily Padden:**

Honestly, looking past the friendships I've made, the community spaces I've made here, probably our outdoor spaces. I spend countless hours out on the Florida Trail every

weekend. My brother and I hike, and we will do day hike Saturday and Sunday. And it's really become kind of the special place for me. If I'm overwhelmed with school, I know that I have something to look forward to getting out on the trail. I spend a lot of time bird watching out there, and you see a lot of cool things when you're out there for a long time. And so I will really miss that trail, but fortunately, there's lots of trails in Maine.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Oh, yes. Absolutely.

**Emily Padden:**

Yeah. So, it'll just be about kind of developing that new community, finding those new spaces. It'll be formative, but it'll be good.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

Well, Emily, it has been a pleasure to be able to talk to you today and to learn more about the work that you've done at UCF, the current work that you're about to embark upon, and all of the wonderful experiences that you've had here at UCF and in Orlando.

**Emily Padden:**

Thank you.

**Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:**

So, thank you so much for joining me today, and thank you to our audience, our viewers, and our listeners for attending Academically Speaking. I'm Dr. Theodorea Berry and have a great day.