

130. Leslie Lofton: Setting the Records Straight

Gavin Kelly 00:17

Hey, everybody you're listening to Beyond 1894 this is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. My name is Gavin Kelly from the Office of University Communications, and our guest for this episode is Leslie Lofton. She works in our registrar's office as the Associate registrar student systems and curriculum. Leslie, thanks for making time for us today. I kind of asked you before we started recording about how busy it's been over the summer. We the summer is an interesting time for the podcast, because a lot of our faculty are nine month faculty, so that kind of cuts some of our guest list down over the course of the summer. But a lot of the staff who work in offices where the students go away for the summer, it doesn't necessarily mean that things slow down during the summer, right? So it's a busy time in the registrar's office, even during the quote, unquote off season, right?

Leslie Lofton 01:02

Yes, the Registrar's Office pretty much stays busy all through the summer. It's when we have orientation and we have a large influx of like transcript records that we have to bring over, and then preparing for all the different orientation sessions, and then preparing grades before the start of the upcoming fall quarter and getting everything situated with the new course sections that are being available. And we've got a few other projects that we're working on at the same time that are trying to go live in the fall. So it's, it's been a lot this summer, yeah, and

Gavin Kelly 01:34

we'll talk about it a little bit later. But also, coming off of last summer during the implementation of Workday student. That was a big push. We'll talk about that. Let's talk about you first how long first of all, have you been here at Tech, specifically in the registrar's office.

Leslie Lofton 01:48

In the registrar's office. I've been there since July of 2022, okay, so this is my third year in there, I want to say, and I really like it. It's been it's been great. I started off in NCAA, assisting with the certifications for our athletes and also loading into the implementation of the workday system. So doing both of those was quite a hassle. I did a lot with the curriculum and putting a lot of the, I don't want to say coding per se, but a lot of that stuff, into the workday system, and trying to navigate both was so fun.

Gavin Kelly 02:31

So let's talk about, kind of, let's work our way up to how you got here, and kind of the career moves and the educational moves that kind of put you where you are. So tell us about where you're from and kind of those early decisions you made as far as your education and where you were going to pursue that sort

Leslie Lofton 02:45

of thing. Well, I'm from Staten Island New York, which is the Forgotten borough, but we are right next to Manhattan, and I went briefly to Hunter College over there right after I graduated high school, but right after high school, I got married to a West Monroe native, so I met him up there when he was about to ask in in New York. I met him in New York. Yeah, he had moved up there to try to pursue a rapping career.

Gavin Kelly 03:15

I mean, if I had a nickel, we've all been there,

Leslie Lofton 03:17

and I was not. Anyway, I don't know what drew me to him, but we hit it off pretty well, and got married right after I graduated from high school. I was 18, married. And then he decided that he wanted us to move back here to Louisiana, his hometown, and I was all for it. I was ready to get away from New York. I liked it, but it's a busy city, and I wanted a little bit of a change, because I'd grown up there, you know, I wanted something different. So moved here. It was a very big change, lots of culture shock, but, um, I kind of eased into it, and from there, we moved to West Monroe, and I put him through school, and that probably wasn't the best idea, but we were pursuing, you know, a marriage and a family together, of course, and we had a couple of kids together after he had graduated from college, and then I had started to pursue my undergrad or continue my undergrad degree. After he finished his college degree, I was studying business management, and that is what I got my my undergrad in at U L M over there in the Monroe area, and it was just convenient. It was right there. And with the kids, I needed something kind of close so that I could do school and work and children, which was a lot. Did you have

Gavin Kelly 04:53

a plan for what you wanted to do with that degree? Did it just kind of make the most sense with your interests and skill set? What was kind of the idea

Leslie Lofton 04:59

there? I. Actually not at all. I'm more of a English literature kind of person, but business just kind of stuck with me. I understood the concepts really well. I was, I hate to say this. I was better with money than most of my family, and I managed all my finances and my marriage and handling all the scheduling, and it just came naturally. So pursuing that in my undergrad courses just spoke to me, and they kind of fit in with the management curriculum. And I I pursued that, and was very successful at it. So I'm still pursuing business and going for my MBA here at Tech.

Gavin Kelly 05:46

How deep into that? Or are you just thinking about

Leslie Lofton 05:50

her? You got some progress there? I'm halfway through. So I've got four classes left, and I'm hoping to graduate in the spring, in 2026 okay, we won't

Gavin Kelly 05:59

talk about it, because we won't jinx it. But no Jinx. I think you'll be I think you'll be fine. Okay, so with that degree, what came after that? Was there a career move that kind of made the most sense? Did things kind of just fall into place? Like, what was your first career move after you had a degree? Oh, after

Leslie Lofton 06:16

my degree, I became an office manager at a very small computer information company. So they did tech support, pretty much, installing the networking and getting smaller businesses up and running with their internet access, pretty much. So it was a one person business, and he was trying to expand, so he hired me on as his office manager to create all the different policies for any new employees that he wanted to hire on. And I had worked at an attorney firm for about 11 years prior, so I had a lot of experience with different document building, reviewing lots of documents and preparing documents for filing in foreclosure, bankruptcy and title, and that led pretty smoothly into an office management position, which is odd, but I think with my my training at the management level through school, I was able to get a lot of use, a lot of both, to incorporate that, but I was only at that position for about three months or so. And then I saw, I think, on LinkedIn, an ad for the job here at Louisiana Tech in HR. And I jumped on that. Got an interview. It was absolutely wonderful. And I really clicked with the ladies in HR. They were I still love them, and I still see them every day, because I bring coffee down. And they hired me on as the Training and Development Manager, and I started to produce job aids and do some training, which really synced with me.

Gavin Kelly 08:04

Yeah, it's not just figuring about your sort of career history. It sounds like details, organizations, systems. It sounds like that's kind of where you thrive. Yeah, has it always been that way? Or was that something you realize about yourself later on?

Leslie Lofton 08:16

It was something that I noticed about myself later. But it does make sense, because I did handle all the like micromanaging in my day to day life, in my family and even in my high school career, I was very detail oriented and kind of a strictler for grades and making sure that things were met on time. Although I do tend to procrastinate, I'm not gonna lie, but some of that pressure kind of helps me drive things out.

Gavin Kelly 08:43

I agree. I can relate somewhat, too. I think there are procrastinators who procrastinate with no intent of doing the work. But then there are some who like pressure makes diamonds. You know, it's like they say. So I get that moving from HR to the registrar's office that I'm guessing that was the move after HR, so was that a big transition for you, or was that one that just made sense? Did they is, was HR, sad that you got poached? Or how did that go down?

Leslie Lofton 09:11

I think they were a little upset to see me leave, able to say they did. They did understand it was a kind of a step forward, or towards a new career line that I hadn't explored yet, and it helped me learn the student side of the Louisiana Tech University system. So I was more familiar with HR and how those policies were working, but I was very curious about how student side worked, and the registrar's office

is a perfect place to learn all the different policies in place, on the on the on campus, and to create those connections and networking with multiple people. Not that I didn't have that in the in the HR system, but it just expanded it to to. Both sides of it,

Gavin Kelly 10:02

and HR, you know, they had their own big push with Workday, because workday was a thing for faculty staff before it was

Leslie Lofton 10:09

a thing for students here. So I came in on the tail end of that, and started with the job aids for workday on the HR side, and it has transitioned to that on the student side with my new role in the registrar's

Gavin Kelly 10:22

office. So let's talk about your role. Let's talk about the registrar's office, kind of in general. It's kind of a catch all for a lot of things that students need. It's, you know, on paper, it's their record keeping office. But I don't think that does it justice, right? So talk about the functions of the registrar's office, and maybe a little bit about the particulars of your job too.

Leslie Lofton 10:42

So there are quite a bunch of different functionalities within the registrar's office. We do NCAA athletic certifications. We handle the VA certifications. We do graduation and program completion. We handle transcripts, making sure those are going out, official and unofficial, and we handle transcripts coming in and those transfer credits. We also answer questions regarding workday because we were very big in the implementation of it, and how to navigate the system and where to find information,

Gavin Kelly 11:19

because it brought everything in, yes, all these different systems for grading, for registering, for applying, even like all those processes kind of came under workday student,

Leslie Lofton 11:28

right? And then it's also the curriculum that we build to in the catalog, and it's even expanding more into like events and the calendar and how that ties in with the academic portion, and putting it all with the events and making sure they syncopate pretty, pretty fluidly. So it's it's a lot of information, it's a lot that we're trying to push out there within a very small office. And it's not just us. There are several different areas on campus that have been influential in the workday project trying to bring all that information under one wheelhouse so we talk with all the other different areas as best we can, to incorporate everything since it's all connected. So that has expanded even the registrar's knowledge to house other areas that we may not have been so integrated with in the past.

Gavin Kelly 12:29

So it's one of those things. I mean, I remember I was at a small part in the workday student process last I mean, it feels like it was forever ago now, but I guess just last year, the big push leading up to the launch. But part of it, part of the the challenge was the new students coming in. They're kind of getting a little bit of they, they kind of have something to see and look at, to know what they're getting into. But

it was the students that were already here, that were used to the boss system, yes, those old things. And it was trying to get everyone to know, like, this is a big change is coming, and you have to be, you have to do these things are like, something serious could have you could your grades might not show up, right? Not be in our school system, technically. So, I mean, talk a little bit about what that experience was like in trying to get everybody on board

Gavin Kelly 13:18

for new students. Trauma.

Leslie Lofton 13:21

It's yeah, it's a doozy. But it was easier with the newer students, because they didn't have the previous background of boss and the mainframe system. So having them just go into duo download this so that you can get into this system was pretty simple, because they didn't have anything to compare it to it was students that had been here that were familiar with our old systems, that were learning a new system. And it wasn't just workday that was going live we switch from Moodle to Canvas too. So it was multiple systems that faculty, staff and students were having to navigate. So they would ask their advisors, for instance, and the advisors weren't even familiar with how to navigate the system. So it was frustrating all around. And I completely understand that, and I agree it was, it was difficult time, but we are here a year later, and we we have been successful. Yes,

Gavin Kelly 14:18

A necessary evil. I mean, like it's the evil part. Is just the change part. Yeah, you know, like It unsettles. It's human nature to be unsettled by something that you're familiar with

Leslie Lofton 14:28

going away somewhere high, for sure, but it has smoothed out. People are becoming more familiar with the system. People are helping each other out with the system, which has been really phenomenal for me, because I, I field a lot of those emails and phone calls and discussion questions, and everyone in the Registrar's Office fields a lot of questions for that. So it was, it's toned back quite a bit from the influx that we were having early on. People know how to. Review the system and how to search for things, whereas before, it was brand new and completely different from the systems that we had previously in a way that they were not familiar with. So it's just a familiarity thing, pretty much.

Gavin Kelly 15:17

And I think too, I mean, we can say this here, I guess the Tech has had a little bit of catching up to do in some areas. Yeah. I mean, I remember, until everyone had gotten sent home for covid, we were still filling out timesheets on like a scan Tron. Oh, wow. So, yeah. So that was not that long ago. That was before I got here, that was not that long ago. And so a lot of times like these new systems, you know, it's a big change, and it feels like a big change, and it feels like a big push for everybody, but it's necessary to kind of get caught up and get everybody on board, because the boss system was something people gotten used to, but the experience of what I can remember about using it, and remember about people who had to work on the back end of it, very old school. It was very outdated by the time it was on its way out. It did

Leslie Lofton 16:11

have its usefulness, like there are some things that I do wish we had the functionality for in Workday that boss had something, something simple, such as emailing all of your advisees with a click of a button. Workday doesn't allow for that, or doesn't have that currently, but I would say the good thing about workday is we do have the ability to provide feedback to them for things that we would like to see in the future. Now it's not for us to say what they will or will not implement in future releases, but they are constantly doing releases. So whereas our old systems were outdated and could not be updated to keep in line with the times, the new system can be and will continue to stay relevant, which I think is necessary for our university to even stay relevant and in in the running with with other high universities out there.

Gavin Kelly 17:08

Yeah, and that, that work day change, the work day student change came side by side with some other universities. Yeah. So again, we're not the only ones that have some catching up to do. But you look, you can look back at, I think the last, we'll say, five years, and the push for, I guess you can call it modernization in our systems and the way we do things. I know since Dr Henderson has been here, he's been trying to cut back on paperwork, yeah, as much as possible. Like, I like the green initiative, yes, digitizing things and when we can so, but even something like that, there's going to be a subset of people who are unsettled by that type of change, because they're just used to it.

Leslie Lofton 17:47

Well, we also like a paper trail. It's comfortable when you have something tangible in hand. Because I hate to say it, but systems go down, the power can go out, and sometimes it's better to have a piece of paper than to be like, I can't access that because the internet is down, or our power went out, or whatever the case may be. So having both, I think, is necessary, at least for a certain set of time. I mean, even taxes have to be held for seven years. You got,

Gavin Kelly 18:19

you got to pick and choose, I think. And you know, you mentioned what you said about the systems down the internet's out. Can't do this. Can't do that. It made me think about, I bet there are certain times in the registrar's office that are always hectic, yes, during registration, registration period, emails, yeah. So what's it like trying to manage the sudden burst of issues that the students come to the registrar's office with during a time like

Leslie Lofton 18:45

that. Well, I do know that we are, since we're on a calendar that is rolling, we know when those periods will be approaching, and we prepare for them in advance. So we're coming up on graduation, and for us, that is a very busy time in the registrar's office, because we have to make sure we're printing out those degrees and getting all the information on who's going to be attending, and getting the list of graduates to this area and

Gavin Kelly 19:11

stuff go to the registrar's office to make sure

Leslie Lofton 19:14

we're sending out those announcements, to make sure that they're getting what they need to us so that we can post the grades. It's it's a lot, but we know it's coming. So everyone is on board. I will say the the team in the registrar's office is very tight knit. We support each other almost like a family, and we, we know each other very well. We, we have each other's backs, so to speak. And I really appreciate that. I've noticed that I've noticed that on different areas across campus like those, each department or group is very tight knit and likes to help each other, and that's a difference from some other jobs that I've had in the past. You

Gavin Kelly 19:55

talked about having a small team and that that's not just a registrar thing, and it's not it's. Campus wide. And I've talked to somebody on the podcast about this recently. In fact, the I've heard people say, you know, just part of the Louisiana Tech way, sometimes we have to do more with less. But I think that's kind of a damaging mentality in a way. But when you can frame it as well, we might be a little understaffed. You might have a smaller, smaller team with a big scale need, but because, like you said, our team is so close knit. We work really well together. We can prepare for certain things in certain times of the year, for sure, that helps too.

Leslie Lofton 20:34

It is good to also recognize the amount of effort each team member is putting in, because you have such a smaller group, so you you're more aware of what they're bringing forth, and while it may not be seen outside of your area, so to speak, there are talents that are being developed within your group that may not necessarily flourish because they're not under that pressure elsewhere. So I've seen myself, just myself grow exponentially because of the workload that I've had. You work under pressure, and you may be working several hours, but you figure things out and you discuss things with other people that may not have thought about it in that manner either, but it brings you to a different solution, a work around, so to speak, until a final solution can be placed, which helps everybody grow. It may not be the best work around for the time being, but it is a learning curve and and it is pressure, yeah, but there is growth under that too, and I think it will help anybody going forward, as in, at least in their tech career, for sure, if they decided to move forward or up or sideways, however they want to go, Well, it

Gavin Kelly 22:01

sounds like you're in the right place and where you need where you need to be, but things happen the way they're supposed to. Right. One last question before we let you go. A lot of people we talked to on the podcast, a lot of our guests, not only have been here for a while, but maybe we're also here. Students, much like me, maybe haven't left. But as someone from quite a ways away, yeah, coming from Staten Island, and you've been at Tech long enough, I think, to have these, these opinions, but what has becoming a part of the campus here been like for you? Like, what are your favorite spots on campus? What are your favorite spots, maybe even in rust and like, what, what does the New York girl have to say about Louisiana Tech?

Leslie Lofton 22:43

Well, Louisiana Tech is a beautiful campus. I love the atmosphere of it. I love the people and the students too. My favorite spot is the gym, nice and not even the gym at the lamb right? So I have a

close knit of people that I work out with, specifically that I've become very close to. And it's, we meet up at noon and we, we pump iron, and we, that was

Gavin Kelly 23:15

intense, by the way, that thunder clap. So just when you're talking about pumping iron, we get a little clap a thunder. It's good

Leslie Lofton 23:21

see we got that support there, but we just, we just have a good time, and we push each other, much like we do in our jobs, but it's become a way to alleviate some of that pressure on campus here, because we are able to sweat it out, so to speak, without the pressures of the work around us, even though we are still here on campus with the pressure surrounding us. But yeah, the gym, the gym is my my spot, and those are my people, and it's pretty much away from everybody else. I don't know what that says about me. No, that's,

Gavin Kelly 23:59

I don't think it says anything good or bad. I think it just, you know, everybody needs, needs some version of that. It looks different for different people, but everything,

Leslie Lofton 24:09

everybody needs it. And we don't always do the same thing, like, we don't have to, but we're there supporting each other. And I think that's the best part of it,

Gavin Kelly 24:16

yeah. And I think that speaks to the way things work around here at large and like, I know you came from, quote, unquote, the big city, but I think

Leslie Lofton 24:24

Staten Island is not the city.

Gavin Kelly 24:26

Hey, you call it The Forgotten borough. You don't let it be forgotten. You're gonna,

Leslie Lofton 24:30

well, I don't know if it'll ever be remembered for for good things, but it is close Manhattan

Gavin Kelly 24:36

Still got family up there?. How Often you get to go back to New York.

Leslie Lofton 24:40

I'm trying for once a year, since I've got the kids, I want them to know their grandparents and stuff. But the majority of my family is still in South America, on my mom's side, so I've got family everywhere.

Gavin Kelly 24:56

Sounds like it you're in Ruston, and that's reason to travel. There's something to be said for small town charm, yeah, but I think to talking to people on this podcast from all over the world, not just the country, Tech has a way of winning you over. Thanks for making time for us. We appreciate it busy summer for everybody, and good luck going into the new school year.

Leslie Lofton 25:31

Thanks. We need it.

Gavin Kelly 25:33

And like you said, we got at the time of recording. Graduation is next weekend, next weekend, so that'll be here before we know it, too, and then right into the new year. And that always brings all sorts of challenges, but also all sorts of opportunities to overcome those challenges. So lots of fun coming. We'll do this all together. Thank you, Leslie, for being with us here.

Leslie Lofton 25:50

Thank you.

Gavin Kelly 25:55

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