

Thomas Rodrigue...: Hello everyone and welcome back to the I Am WT podcast. I'm one of your hosts, Thomas Rodriguez.

Myka Bailey: I'm Myka Bailey, and we're here with Annie Valicek.

Annie Valicek: Yes, ma'am. How are you?

Myka Bailey: Did I butcher that?

Annie Valicek: No, you did it.

Myka Bailey: Okay, cool. Could you go ahead and introduce yourself to us?

Annie Valicek: For sure. So like you said, my name's Annie Valicek and I'm a senior here. I'll graduate in a couple of weeks, actually. And I'm from Houston, Texas, and I went about as far away as you can get and still be in the state of Texas, I have realized, about 10 hours away from home. I'm an agribusiness and economics major here and just super excited to be here.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Sorry, I heard Houston and I was like H-town.

Annie Valicek: Are you from Houston?

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yes, I am.

Annie Valicek: Where at?

Thomas Rodrigue...: I'm from Katy, so outside of Houston, but still.

Annie Valicek: Cool. What high school did you go to?

Thomas Rodrigue...: I went to Taylor High School.

Annie Valicek: Okay, cool.

Thomas Rodrigue...: We weren't really known for anything, but we had a good band program.

Annie Valicek: I was in FFA World. Y'all were good at FFA.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Oh yeah, my sister's in FFA.

Annie Valicek: Oh my gosh.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I always forget. She's about to graduate as well.

Annie Valicek: Yeah, we were always neck and neck with them in competitions, but anyways.

Myka Bailey: Well, if you're from Houston, how did you get to WT?

Annie Valicek: That is a great question. Typically, the first thing that people ask when I tell them I'm from Houston because it's not exactly a common thing around here. And like I said, I'm an agribusiness and economics major, and in high school, I like to say I got the best of both worlds. I obviously grew up in an extremely urban setting, but I was involved in FFA, got lots of family in West Texas. I was exposed to agriculture in that way, so whenever I decided that I wanted to be an agriculture major, I figured I'd better go somewhere where there's lots of it, and that's the Texas panhandle.

And I tell people all the time, you cannot beat our people. There's lots of things that I'll go back and forth with people on, especially just being in the higher education realm. There's lots of things to discuss and compare in schools, but I will stand solid in saying that you can beat the people of the Texas panhandle and that's been really great for me to see. I obviously saw it from the moment I stepped foot on campus whenever I was touring, but it's been exactly the same ever since I got here of just really hospitable people that really care about each other.

Thomas Rodrigue...: That's a way better story than the way I got here. I was just like, "Hmm, only decent grades. This place will accept me." And then I ran with the radio station and never looked back.

Annie Valicek: Fair enough. Yeah, I get a lot of people that ask me, "Okay, so you're at WT, when are you transferring to College Station? What's the plan?" I'm like, "Crazy enough, I chose to be here. I want to be here. I came here for a reason. This is not a stepping stone onto something else." So it's just funny the perception of different people's perspectives of schools.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I've gotten the very same questions. They're like, "Yeah, you plan on moving to A&M?" I'm like, "No, I don't think so. I like it here." A lot of the programs, I think a lot of people fail to realize just because A&M is the bigger school and they have the culture of being an Aggie and everything, but a lot of people fail to realize that WT actually beats A&M at a lot of things. We have the number one ag program in the A&M system. We have the number one media program in the A&M system, and I believe we have the number one nursing and that field as well. So a lot of people are like, "Oh, I want to go to A&M." No, you come to WT. That's where you get the personal experience, I think.

Annie Valicek: Right.

Myka Bailey: Not only personal, but also we're way cheaper. Why would you get a better experience for way less and then go to A&M and you're not getting as great an experience and you're paying twice the price.

Annie Valicek: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm a business economics major and the cost analysis in that, is just you can't beat it

Thomas Rodrigue...: Just watching it and you're like, "How do these people afford to go to this school?" I don't know. WT is big on affordability and everything. There's a lot of things here that help out the dorm situation with the whole you get the one semester free is super convenient. There's student jobs, scholarships, all that kind of stuff. So what are you involved with on campus?

Annie Valicek: For sure, so I dove in headfirst freshman year. I've done lots of different things on campus. I started primarily in the ag department. My freshman year, we were able to charter the Collegiate Farm Bureau Chapter, which was really just a great way for me to get involved and kick off college was such a high point. I was in the Ag Business Club for a little bit. I became a member of the Chi Omega fraternity my junior year of college, and got there as quick as I could. I never thought I would be a sorority girl and now I'm just throwing Chi Omega everywhere I go, which is just quite ironic for me. And then I'm pretty involved in student government. I got to be a freshman senator, a college of ag senator, and then last year I got to serve as the student body president.

So I really appreciated getting involved in something that was outside of the ag department. I think it's really easy for students, regardless of what college you're in, to get in the silo of whatever building you have most classes in and whatever friends that you are easily around just due to proximity. And so it was really encouraging for me to do something that allowed me to meet people from across campus. That, and a couple of different ministry groups on campus that I've gotten to get involved in have really allowed me to hit that goal throughout college.

Thomas Rodrigue...: You've been pretty much everywhere then.

Annie Valicek: I've never been in this room, so I've missed this building, for sure.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Check it off the list. You got it.

Annie Valicek: I got here as quick as I could. I should have found out about this a long time ago. This is cool.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I think that's advice that I always yap about on this podcast is always saying, "Get involved. Students, just do it." It took me half a year to figure out, "Oh yeah, if I do things, I'll have a more fun time at college." And a lot of things you can do here, they're there for you, you're paying for it, you might as well.

Annie Valicek: Exactly, exactly.

Thomas Rodrigue...: It's super fun. What was it like being in that leadership position in student government and all that?

Annie Valicek: So serving as student body president taught me lots and lots of things. I think I naively went into it thinking, "Okay, I've done leadership positions before. I've led groups, led large groups at that." And it's nothing like anything I had ever done before. It was really challenging in many ways, but also so encouraging to have the opportunity to serve a campus that I love so much, which sounds so cliché, but it's so true. There were lots of long hours, lots of hard decision making and just challenging situations to be in, but in the back of my mind, I got to walk around campus and see all the students that I was serving and it really made it worth it.

So it was really the first time that I saw such a high reward for a service and leadership opportunity that I was able to embark upon because lots of the work that I was doing was behind the scenes. I got to speak a lot and do lots of things, but a lot of the work that I did was on behalf of students that nobody really knew about, which was really fulfilling for me to be able to see the product of my toil in a way that not everybody got to see, if that makes sense.

Myka Bailey: Right. So you have done almost everything, like Thomas said. Was there one that just stood out to you that was your absolute favorite?

Annie Valicek: A leadership position?

Myka Bailey: Just anything you've gotten involved in at WT.

Annie Valicek: Oh, gosh. There's been so many things. They've all just been so unique in their own ways that I've gotten different things from all of them. Chi Omega, I've become a better friend. I've learned how to be in a more personal realm, whereas I joke that I go to Chi Omega meetings on Mondays at 7:00 PM and I just am hyper and bouncing off the walls because most of the time I've been in this very professional, I button up my suit and I go to work and then I get to Chi Omega and it's like, "Okay, I can just be Annie." So that's served in that way for me.

Collegiate Farm Bureau taught me how to take something from an idea to a chartered organization where we're traveling and we're doing things and see something all the way through. Student government taught me how to have really hard conversations and to stand up for what I believe in. So everything taught me something different. So I can't really pick a favorite thing that I've been involved in or experience that I've had because they've just all been so different, which I know doesn't even answer your question, but that's what I've got.

Myka Bailey: It's good because it's really, really good for people to see that you need to be able to do everything. You need to be able to get experience in all the different areas in order to build character and become everything that you have potential to do.

Annie Valicek: Exactly.

Thomas Rodrigue...: And you got a shot at a leadership position, which I think is so awesome. I'm in a pseudo leadership position over here at the radio station because I'm the general manager. So constantly, it's always students come in and they have questions for me and I teach them how to do this and that, and it's really fun to see that and then you see them actually learn how to do that kind of thing. And it's cool. It's cool to, I guess, teach people. I don't want to be a teacher per se, but I think it is fun to teach my students because I get to teach a class with my job and everything, so it is pretty cool.

Annie Valicek: That's awesome.

Thomas Rodrigue...: But you get to be everywhere. That's super awesome.

Annie Valicek: Yeah, but I agree with you. There's a book called The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell that I won't bore you with but recommend it. But the concept in there is there's a moment in any part of society in anything that you look at where there's just something where things tip. And to your point about when students find their passion, really chase after something or reach a goal, et cetera, it's so fun and just I get giddy about seeing students find their tipping point because like you said, you might be a junior in college before you realize what's going on on campus and what all you have at the tips of your fingers. But when you do, there's this light bulb that goes off in students and they just chase whatever their passion is, full steam ahead from then on, which is really exciting.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, it is fun to see that. I have a friend who recently, he made the switch from music education to music tech and he realized music production, that's what he was looking for and he's a lot happier for the switch and everything. So I totally agree. It's super cool to see students make that like, "Oh, this is what I want to do."

Annie Valicek: Exactly, yeah.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, that's super cool.

Myka Bailey: So I was told a really fun fact about you. Last year you were appointed the student regent by Governor Greg Abbott. Is correct?

Annie Valicek: That is correct.

Myka Bailey: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Annie Valicek: For sure. So it's an ambiguous role, so I'm glad you asked because most of the time people just know that Annie's never in Canyon and she's always on an airplane. So I'm glad that I get the opportunity to explain it a little bit more. So like you said, I serve as the student regent, which just for some context on what

that really means, the Texas A&M University system is comprised of 11 universities and 8 state agencies. Most people know about the universities, most people do not know about the agencies, which is a really unique part of our system. We are one of the largest, and obviously in my opinion, the best higher education systems in the nation, and we're really just a beast of a system with everything that we're able to accomplish.

At the top of the governance of that whole system is the Board of Regents. So there's nine regents that serve that are also appointed by the governor for their terms, and then there's one student that sits on that board for the entire system. So that is me for this year. I represent about 160,000 students across the system, which the reason why I give all that context is I continuously tell people it's not important to me as I'm doing all my travels this year that you remember my face or my name. But it's really important to me that students know that this position exists because they need to know that they're being represented at the highest level in our system.

And it's not just a check the box position where they put a student in there and their opinion doesn't matter. The advocacy that I'm doing is not falling on deaf ears by any means, and it's really encouraging to see that the Board of Regents and the system as a whole really, really cares about the wants and needs of our students. And it's not just me fighting tooth and nail for what the students want. All of the other regents, the chancellor, all the vice chancellors, all the university presidents, everybody is on this similar playing field of we all want students and every student at that to be successful. And that's been really encouraging to see this year, that it's really easy to see people from far off and think that they have some high and mighty position and assume things about them. But these gentlemen in these roles are men of high character that are really passionate about the students, which has been nice.

Thomas Rodrigue...: That's super awesome. I'm glad we have a voice out there that's pushing for us. I'm glad to hear that there are voices out there that are pushing for us in the first place. I think that's super cool.

Myka Bailey: Do you have a favorite memory from that experience?

Annie Valicek: So a little bit of context on what this role entails is, like I said, there's 11 universities with students at all of them, obviously. And I have found that in order to do my job well, I have to go meet the people that I'm representing, right? Crazy concept. And so a lot of my job is traveling to the system campuses for campus visits, for groundbreakings, ribbon cuttings, any student event that I'm asked to speak at or just attend, so lots of traveling to see the students. And I'd be remiss if I didn't advocate for WT just a little bit on my journey, even though I do represent all the students in the system. And so while I've had some just incredible experiences and memories that have come out of this year, some of my favorite are whenever the system and WT are able come together and

there's these little sparks of I'm able to share a little bit of WT with whoever I'm speaking with.

And honestly, one of the times that I was able to see this most was in the devastating experiences that we had with the wildfires last month, which was obviously extremely detrimental to our surrounding communities and to the agriculture industry and to lives within our communities. But to my point earlier about the eight state agencies that people rarely realize, when the Texas panhandle and when WT needed help, those agencies were the ones that came and fought the fires and set up shop to really be of service to the people of the panhandle, which was just incredible for me to be able to show the people that I love in the panhandle and the culture that I love here and share that with the men and women that are involved in the system that we're working on behalf of Texas Department of Emergency Management, Texas Forestry Services, Texas AgriLife Extension, and all these people that were coming together, along with WT students that were all hands on deck for the betterment of the people of the panhandle.

It was just really special for me to see these people that all year, I get to see them a lot, but most of the time in separate capacities. And so to be able to humanize, for lack of a better term, those agencies, like I said, they're really easy to just see as an entity and to not see as the people and for the people of WT and for the people of the panhandle to see the faces and the smiles of the people that are really passionate about the work that they're doing in those agencies was probably one of my favorite memories to bridge those two things that I'm really passionate about.

Myka Bailey: I was proud of WT during all that wildfire stuff. I knew people who were literally skipping classes, which never skip classes, but anyways, they were skipping classes to go help, to put hands wherever they needed to put their hands. And then after, there was a program where, I don't know if that's the right word, where if your family needed help, then we had somewhere and we had things to help you.

Annie Valicek: During all of that, Governor Abbott came up and he, in a press release, made a comment about Texans helping Texans, and that's how Texans are. That's the mindset that we have. And I would take that a step further of it's buffaloes helping buffaloes, whether you're in a life-changing situation of a wildfire or you have a flat tire on the side of the road, I have absolutely no doubt in the world that I could pick up the phone or wave somebody down with a WT sticker on their car and they would be there to help me out, and I would do the same for anybody else, which is just second to none as far as culture in my opinion.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, I remember during that whole experience, the day that it started that I had my show. It was a later in the night show, I went outside because they were like, "Yeah, it smells like smoke outside." And I was like, "What's going on?" So we went out, we checked it out, we came back and I went on air and I was like,

"All right, y'all we're going to keep doing our show, but you remember, stay safe. Keep yourself updated on this situation as it unfolds. If we get any news, we'll be sure to tell you that kind of stuff." I was just kind like, "We have to be the voice here because we were broadcasting to people."

Annie Valicek: Exactly. Yeah, I didn't even think about that in the perspective of y'all's jobs. You have to share the news, the good and the bad. So that happened on a Tuesday, I believe, all the fires broke out in a bigger way, at least, even if they started the day before. And Wednesday, I was at a campus visit in San Antonio at the A&M campus there, and nobody had any idea. I was talking about the system, telling them about the agencies, and I was like, "For example, these agencies are up here fighting the wildfires." And they said, "What wildfires?" I said, "Good Lord, let me tell you."

We recognize physically how large our state is, but I think a lot of times we don't realize the disconnect that comes with how large and how vast the locations in our system and in our state are because there's such a disconnect that comes from that. So like I said, little things like that, that it's just like, "Okay, I can educate you a little bit on the panhandle. I can share this a little bit about agriculture," when that's not necessarily my primary goal or agenda in this position. But like I said, I'd be remiss if I didn't share my passions just a little bit because it's me in this role. I'm not a robot, I'm a human.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Yeah, I see that disconnect because I remember people in Houston, they had no idea. They barely know Amarillo is a city. So when I tell them, "Yeah, there's a bunch of wildfires going on up here." They're like, "What's going on?" I'm like, "Oh, it's in these areas and these areas." And they're like, "I've never heard of any of these town names before." Which to be fair, I hadn't either until I came up here. I don't think a lot of people learn anything about up here until they come up here, but that's my experience with it, at least.

Annie Valicek: I agree.

Myka Bailey: So what inspired you to get so involved?

Annie Valicek: On campus in general?

Myka Bailey: Mm-hmm.

Annie Valicek: This is cheesy, but I'm going to be honest with you. Every morning before I went to school, my dad would make me say, "I can do anything," before I left the house, which for much of my life, I just hated it. And I was like, "Okay, again, dad? We said this every day. Can we just go to school? I'm going to be late." And now I realize how grateful I am for him instilling that mindset in me of this why not attitude. If I want to start a club or I want to chase after a goal or a dream or whatever you want to call it, why not? There is absolutely nothing in this world,

especially when you come to an institution like WT that gives you all of these resources. There is no reason why you cannot be successful.

And so it was partially that mindset of wanting to see and do as much as I could, also coupled with, I've always had this mindset of I want to be holistic and just as a person, like we were talking about earlier, sometimes that's as simple as having a conversation with somebody across campus that I don't know anything about or somebody that has a drastically different viewpoint than me, things like that. And I wanted to make sure that whatever I was getting involved in was going to develop me as a holistic person while also allowing me to serve the people around me.

I think a lot of people, I don't know if y'all felt like this, but in high school I was student council, FFA, volleyball, did all these things, and I was just going 100 miles an hour as most people typically do in high school. And I got to college and dad told me, "You got to keep the ball rolling. If you don't keep the ball rolling, body of motion stays in motion. If you stop, it's really hard to get back started again." So I knew that I had to do something to continue that mindset of service, and thankfully WT gave me every single opportunity to do just that.

And on the conversation of bigger schools or going to A&M or something, coming in, a lot of people were like, "Why would you not go to a D1 university, somewhere with more opportunities, somewhere where there's more options of things to do? Do you want to be a big fish in a small pond or a small fish in a big pond," is literally what somebody told me. And I was like, "What a strange way to put that, okay." And I was like, "Okay, you know what? If I max out my opportunities, I can transfer. It's not the end of the world." And I graduate in about three weeks and I have not done everything yet. So I think that's a true testament to the opportunities that are available at WT, that I never once felt like my potential was hindered by being here, which is something that I'm really grateful for.

Thomas Rodrigue...: You were talking about having a saying in your mind, and I think while it's cheesy, it works. I overthink things way too often and I get in my head about these things and I have this saying that I remind myself is things are always worse in your head than they are in the real world. And it lets you ground yourself and be like, "Yeah, I can handle this. This isn't that bad." And I think that just having a saying, it's just good. You should have something. You should have something to say or something to do that just takes the stress off. I relate to that a lot. We're going to come back in just a little bit with more of the I Am WT podcast. Stay tuned.

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Thomas Rodrigue...: Welcome back to the I Am WT podcast. I'm Thomas Rodriguez.

Myka Bailey: I'm Myka Bailey.

Thomas Rodrigue...: And we are joined here once again by Annie Valicek. Now, you've been here for a while. How has WT impacted your life so far?

Annie Valicek: So many ways. So this is my fourth year here and I'm so grateful that I didn't take more dual credit classes because I got my full four. And WT has really served as a springboard for me is how I look at it. Like we were talking about earlier, WT as a whole has that why not attitude. There's no reason why students can't be successful. There's no reason why our campus can't grow or be the best at X, Y, Z, any program you want to call it. There's no reason why our sports teams can't be the best. That why not attitude from the campus has instilled that upon me. And when I say springboard, I feel like everything that I've been able to participate in, whether it's student regent or various different internships that I've done, in some way there's this golden thread back to WT had a large part in this opportunity being available to me.

A good friend of mine always says, if you have the opportunity to serve, you have the responsibility to serve. And WT has 100% given me that opportunity time and time again in different capacities. And every time when I think, "Well, this is going to be it. This was fun, and next year, who knows? I guess it will all go downhill from here," that has yet to happen because WT builds upon itself and the opportunities that it offers students and that it's offered me, and a lot of the things that I've been able to do, like I said, are a direct correlation to the opportunities that I've had at WT. I think about it specifically on the internship side of things. I've done, gosh, maybe four or five internships. And when I say springboard, I literally think of, "Okay, I learned this in class, or I had this type of conversation in an org, or my advisor told me this, and now I'm in Washington DC on the Hill listening to our congressmen and women argue about things that are going to literally change the lives of Americans."

And my ears perk up because I hear something that I learned about in class, or I'm like, "Oh, I could say this because I have the experience from WT that molded me into having this perspective." And it's been things like that that I'm like, "Whoa, this isn't just a place where you can come get a degree and walk across the stage and be done with it." It really has served as a springboard to me to go take what I learned here and share it in various capacities across the country.

Myka Bailey: That's great. So whenever you do leave and graduate, how are you going to stay involved or are you going to stay involved?

Annie Valicek: 100% will stay involved. How that looks, I haven't quite figured that out yet. I've tried to start having those conversations with the things that I'm involved in saying, "How can I be an asset to your organization, your program, whatever that may be?" And I consistently think about, I don't know if it's a quote or if it's just a saying of if you don't have time, you probably have money. If you don't

have money, you probably have time. There's some times in our lives when neither of those things are true in college. But I would suspect that at most points in my life, I will have something to give, whether it's wisdom and mentoring to students, which is something that I'm really passionate about, or hopefully someday I've got somebody to give. Right now that's not the case.

But I think that'll look differently with where I'm at in life and what WT needs. And I'm hoping that in some creative way we can pair those two. And with the expertise that I hopefully have one day and whatever role that I serve in, I just think that it'll be like a case by case basis of literally every year I'm probably going to have a different experience or something that I can share, and it's just going to be a consistent mindset of whatever I have to share, I share it, period, whether it's just getting on the phone with some students or helping Dr. Wendler in some capacity or helping y'all find guests for the podcast. Whatever I can do, I think it'll be in the small minute things that I give back until hopefully one day I can do something more than that.

Thomas Rodrigue...: So you graduate in a few weeks?

Annie Valicek: I do.

Thomas Rodrigue...: What are your plans after college?

Annie Valicek: That is a great question. I'll tell you my plans, although I know better than to think that this is exactly where my life is going to take me because who knows? But I do know for a fact that I'm attending Texas A&M University School of Law in August, so I'll be there for three years in Fort Worth, and that's my next step is to get my JD.

And the plan after that is to practice and to litigate in the realm of environmental and natural resources law, as you've got to learn a little bit about my upbringing in Houston and in agriculture has consistently allowed me to be surrounded by land, water, and oil and some in various capacities. And so that's been a consistent theme throughout my life of something that piques my interest and it would allow me to serve those that I love and that I'm passionate about and people of agriculture, people that I'm passionate about and the stewards of our land are people that I'm passionate about. And so having a career in something that I can be of service to others while consistently challenging myself just seems like the best thing ever to me.

Thomas Rodrigue...: So you're planning on heading back to Houston then after you're done with your law degree and everything?

Annie Valicek: I don't know. That's a great question. Hopefully I'll find a husband someday, and you don't have to put that on the podcast, but that will be a telltale sign maybe. Right now, I really like the DFW area, hence why I'm going to school there. Definitely not opposed to Houston. I don't have any bitter feelings about it. Love

Amarillo, so maybe we'll end up somewhere in between all of those three, which is literally the whole state.

Thomas Rodrigue...: My thoughts are always after graduation, I got to go where the jobs are, and that's the Dallas-Fort Worth area, that's the Houston area. And there's a bit of jobs up here in Amarillo, but I'm thinking after I'm done with WT, I definitely got to go back to where I'm from and search for something there, I think, because the jobs are where the most people are at, and Houston is the fourth-biggest city in the United States.

Myka Bailey: As long as you stay in Texas, right?

Annie Valicek: Yeah, yeah. Never say never, but I think I'll be here.

Thomas Rodrigue...: No plans to leave Texas anytime soon. This place is awesome.

Myka Bailey: Hey, I'm surprised you're saying that.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Why? Everywhere is too expensive. I don't want to go. I know that California's where Hollywood is and that's where all the big movies are produced. But come on, I don't want to live in California. No, thank you.

Annie Valicek: I like to travel a lot, but I like to come right back home.

Thomas Rodrigue...: The school, they sent me and Veronica off to New York and I got to be there in New York for a radio convention and everything. And New York is cool. It's very busy. The lifestyle, I think, would be fun. I don't want to live in New York.

Myka Bailey: I lived in New York. You don't want to do it.

Annie Valicek: Whenever you were growing up?

Myka Bailey: It was for just a year.

Annie Valicek: Wow. So you got your fix.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, I'm done.

Thomas Rodrigue...: There's too many people. There's too many people. All the videos and the pictures and everything you see of New York doesn't properly describe just how big the city is.

Annie Valicek: I do like going, like I said, for a few days, going to Broadway, doing all my touristy things and I have no shame about it, and I come right back home.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Cool. I got to see Wicked. All right, I'm done with the city.

Annie Valicek: Basically.

Myka Bailey: That's funny.

Thomas Rodrigue...: You go first. Go ahead.

Myka Bailey: Okay, so transitioning back to WT, do you have advice that you would give students as you leave?

Annie Valicek: I think general advice to anybody, but especially a freshman coming into something completely new, is another little saying that consistently comes up in my mind is if you live some of your life how most people won't, you can live the rest of your life how most people can't, which seems very simple and it is, and you can take it any different direction, but to me in college, that means wake up early, do the hard things, get out of your comfort zone, meet somebody that you've never met before, do something that you've never done before, try something that you're really, really bad at. All of those things that will probably push you out of your comfort zone, do that and you'll be grateful for it later. WT students are extremely hardworking and are just good people all around, as I've mentioned.

And I think a lot of us will see that delayed gratification later on down the road when we realize in college when it's really easy to be lazy or not try your hardest or just do the bare minimum to get through classes or whatever that may be. If you go above and beyond and you really care about what you're doing, it will pay extreme dividends for you. And it has for me already, so I can only imagine in 10 years if you ask me the same question of what WT means to me, I think it will just be magnified even more. And I think that Dr. Wendler talks about college in general as a learning lab, and I completely agree with that's what we're trying to do here.

Like I said, you try different things. I've done several things that I didn't know I was bad at, but I am really bad at when you try it once and you get better or you try it once and you realize you don't like it and you move on. But if you go through college and you walk across the stage and you graduate and you say, "I don't really know if I learned that much and I wish I would've done more," that is literally my biggest fear for students. Say yes and figure it out later. If you don't like something, quit it, that's fine. But if you never tried it, that's not really a good enough excuse for me. And I think that's just diving all in and trying everything that you can, even if you don't like it and you move on, is really the best thing that we can do or the best thing that I've found to do. We've only got four years if you're lucky, some people get less if you're really smart, not like me. And so just taking advantage of every single opportunity.

Myka Bailey: Sometimes it's scary for people, though, that fear and there's got to be some way we can help push those people to get over that fear because you're right, if you don't get involved, you're not going to figure it out. And so you really just

have to remember that even though that fear is there, that shouldn't stop you from doing it.

Annie Valicek: Exactly.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I totally agree with the whole getting involved aspect and doing something that you're not comfortable with or you're afraid of. My second semester here, I saw the radio practicum class. I was like, "This seems like fun. I might take this." And then I immediately realized, "Oh, that's right. I hate public speaking and I'm terrified of this." So my first few weeks on air was the roughest time that I had on air, but slowly I got into it. And as the semesters progressed, I had more fun. I got more involved with the radio station, then I started working here. And now semester six, I am the general manager of the station and it's super cool. This program and WT changes your life. I think that while some people may think that's an overstatement, I don't think so. I think it's totally fair to say WT gives you the opportunity to change how you are as a person for the better.

Annie Valicek: Right. It's been interesting to see that same mindset across the system. Like I said, I got to see it on a micro level here at WT, but traveling across the system this year, it's been, like I said, just magnified of that same mantra of get involved, get involved. It's a social science of getting people to come to events and getting people to feel like they belong. And it's a consistent challenge across the system. Any student body president or university president that I talk to, they're like, "This is our biggest challenge. We have got to get students to come to events. If you want to blame it on COVID, whatever it is, we don't know what the cause is. We just know that we have to fix it." And then you meet the students that have hit that tipping point like we were talking about, and you can just literally see their eyes light up.

I tell people all the time, "I don't care what you care about, just care about something." And when you find it, go after it 110%. And students like you have done exactly that and it's paid dividends, but until you find it, it's really hard to want to show up and want to work hard and want to really care about what you're doing. But man, when you do... And it's so fun to meet people that I have no similar passions to you probably. I'm sure we could find something, but students that are going to be great educators someday, and I have a roommate that's going to be an incredible teacher, and to hear her talk about the way that she cares about her students and her profession, that's the beauty of college and of WT specifically is we have such a medley. I've got a friend that's a dancer. Lord knows I can't dance, but she can. That's what she loves to do. And it's really fun to go across the system and to see these students that come from such different backgrounds, but find commonality in chasing a dream, whatever that may be.

Thomas Rodrigue...: Well, Myka, I think it's time.

Myka Bailey: I think it is time.

Thomas Rodrigue...: We have to ask you the big question. Do you want to do it or do you want me to ask it?

Myka Bailey: Go for it.

Thomas Rodrigue...: All right. We have to ask you the big question. We love to hype this question up because it's fun to see.

Annie Valicek: I'm scared. It's like, "Wait, I forgot what question was."

Thomas Rodrigue...: It's fun to see y'all's reactions to this question, but we always get interesting answers and unique answers for this question. So here it is. What does WT mean to you?

Annie Valicek: WT, to me, really means home. Coming from Houston and being so far away from a family that I'm extremely close with, I didn't come to college to get away from my family, that's for sure. And being so far away from the people that have always been home and the things that always have always been home, it was really a leap of faith for me. And I was confident in my decision, but I'd be lying if I said that there wasn't this little voice in the back of my head that was ringing with fear, just being petrified of moving to a whole new place with new people. And if I take the time to really reflect in the last four years and all of the people that I've gotten to meet and all of the things that I've gotten to do and places that I've gotten to go, WT has been and always will be a home to me.

And I think that's because of the people that make up this great university, from the professors that I've had, to the advisors that I've had, to the org advisors that I've had, the community members that I've gotten to be involved with, the church parishioners that I've been able to get to know, everybody in this community really cares about each other and really cares about WT. And it's really important to me that people that grew up in the panhandle and got to be blessed with the opportunity to see this their whole life, don't take it for granted because this is not like anywhere else and we shouldn't take it for granted because we're really blessed to be where we are.

And I'm really blessed to have gotten this perspective to see that because, like I said, I'll probably not come back here after law school, but don't hold me to it because who knows? I'm confident that wherever I go, I'll always be able to be an advocate for WT and for the panhandle in general, because I had this opportunity to see it firsthand. People in College Station talk about A&M by saying, "From the outside looking in, you can't understand it. And from the inside out, you can't explain it." And I think that sums up exactly how I feel about WT because we've got something really, really special here.

Myka Bailey: Yeah, we do.

Thomas Rodrigue...: I totally agree with that personal experience of taking that leap of faith because, especially for someone who is coming here from a big city just miles and miles away, it is a leap of faith. But if you take that leap of faith, you end up where we've ended up, where you've been the student president and you're the student regent right now, and we are here as podcast hosts on this super awesome opportunity that you wouldn't get if you don't take that leap of faith. So I totally agree with that stance.

Myka Bailey: Thank you so much for joining us today. We definitely appreciated it. I don't think WT is going to be the same after you leave us.

Annie Valicek: Oh gosh, that is not true.

Myka Bailey: If you want to listen to more, go to www.wtamu/podcasts. Thank you for listening. And as always, Go Buffs.