

Alex French: Well, I'm Alex French.

Edith Herron: And I'm Edith [Herron 00:00:03].

Alex French: Nice to meet you. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, what's your major, and what brought you here to UNC Charlotte?

Edith Herron: Sure. Absolutely. First of all, I'm a native Charlottean, which is very rare, and I'm excited to be here. Charlotte is truly growing. I'm married. I have two beautiful young daughters, and I say young because they're still my babies, but they actually are in college now. My oldest daughter has just graduated with her Masters in Public Administration. My youngest daughter is working on her Bachelors Degree in sports journalism and with a minor in English. She will be graduating in May.

Alex French: Are they both here at UNC Charlotte?

Edith Herron: They are not. They are at Central, North Carolina Central in Durham.

Alex French: Okay. Nice. What brought you here to UNC Charlotte?

Edith Herron: Well, what happened is, I do have a degree. It's an Associate Degree, however. I started out right out of high school. I was enrolled and got full scholarship to go to Johnson C. Smith. In that turn of events, my mother passed away and then the buses went on strike and I didn't have transportation to go there, and so that transitioned me to enroll at Central Piedmont Community College where I did get an Associate Degree there. As time went on, I got married, had kids, and I just kind of put things on the back burner. My main goal was to get a Bachelors Degree but, of course, Central Piedmont only offers an Associate Degree. After getting married, family, children, doing things there, I put things on the back burner and then just realized that UNCC would be a great fit for me. I ended up applying and was accepted here.

Alex French: When did you apply here?

Edith Herron: I think that was in 2009, 2010. I'm a part time student because I work full time. The type of work that I do now, I'm a property manager for Northwood Ravin, and I've been in that field for more than 30 years actually. When I came to UNCC initially, I thought I'd come to get a degree in business management. I quickly decided ... I guess, well not quickly decided, but after speaking with my advisor, she quickly advised me that, "You've been doing this for all these years. You don't need a degree to do this." I took some kind of aptitude test here at UNCC and realized my skillset and decided to change to public relations.

Alex French: That's awesome.

Edith Herron: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

- Alex French: Yeah. I'm actually from Vermont, so not from here or close to here. Actually, coming down to school was my first time coming to North Carolina. Never visited the school really before. I visited the school the week before attending and just went for it. I'm an undecided major right now but my intended major is mechanical engineering. What brought me here was that I just got out of the military. I spent five years in the air force. I decided that I was going to get out and I was going to go to college and that I wanted to be an engineer and hopefully get into NASCAR. Why not come to Charlotte and try to be an engineer and go down that path, and hopefully one day work for a race team doing what I love, which is working on race cars.
- Edith Herron: Okay, awesome. I don't know if you know it or not, but ... And, I just found this out myself. UNCC basically was started ... Well, not started but in the initial beginning, they were really known for veterans coming here.
- Alex French: Yeah. That was another thing that really brought me here too, was that the veteran population here is huge, and not many people know that there's a lot here, but there really is. They treat their veterans right.
- Edith Herron: That's awesome. What do you think about Charlotte?
- Alex French: From what I've seen, I love it. I've never lived in a city. I've always been in a rural area, so it's never been a thing of mine to live in a city, close to people. I like living on my own, whatever. But, being here, I like it. I like the people. People are nice. It's definitely growing, from what I've seen since I've been here, but it's a beautiful place. It really is.
- Edith Herron: Charlotte is awesome. I'm a native Charlottean so ... I mean, I've visited other places and stayed there. New York, I've lived in, but Charlotte is ... I love calling North Carolina home. That's a little cliché here.
- Alex French: No, it's definitely ... I've fallen in love with North Carolina and Charlotte since I've been here. That's for sure.
- Edith Herron: Yeah. That is great. Well, we're glad to have you. Thank you for coming and thank you for choosing Charlotte.
- Alex French: It's awesome. What other schools did you attend? You said you attended CCCC before attending UNC Charlotte. Did you attend any other schools?
- Edith Herron: Yeah. I probably went into that a little bit further when I was talking initially, but yeah. Right out of high school, I got scholarships to go to John C. Smith University, and that was a well-known, predominantly African American college. It was great. I was doing good there, but the buses went on strike, like I said, and then I ended up at Central Piedmont and later here at UNCC, which I'm very grateful for. UNCC has a lot to offer.
- Alex French: What have you most enjoyed about being here versus ... I mean, granted, CPC only had an Associates Degree, or were able to get an Associates Degree there, but what did you enjoy here more than those other schools?
- Edith Herron: Well, one thing about UNCC that I noticed is that they basically really push you to excel if you want to. Now, there are kids in class that they just come and maybe do and maybe not do, however, I think it's called the University of Academic Excellence. That's the one area that I really used a lot when I first came here, because you get help there, they have tutors there, and you can sign up for tutoring where they will help you. Also, the

Oasis Group is really, really great. A lot of the faculty, they really helped me. Sometimes, I'd be just tired and I just run in there and peek my head in the door and get a little snack and say hi. They'd say, "How are you doing? How are things going? Get a snack. You're good. Come back and see me if you need to."

So, little things like that really calmed me down because, to be quite honest with you, when I first came here ... This is crazy but it's the truth. I came in in one of the classes ... Now, keep in mind, I'm an older student, okay? Things are changing, and so they had these desks that kind of swivel. I came in and I sat down. I sat the wrong way and the desk part was over here and I'm sitting this way. I'm thinking, "Uh, this is crazy." I realized that I was sitting wrong and I thought, "Oh my God, this is crazy," so I got up to use the bathroom. When I came back I sat properly. But, I'm just saying all that to say that when I first came it was different. The kids using phones and stuff like that, we didn't do that. We didn't have phones, cell phones. I really have enjoyed my run here at UNCC.

Alex French: Yeah, I know, it's definitely, even just being out of school for five years, it's really opened my eyes, and to some of the things that I've seen. Like, one of the first days here there were three girls sitting in front of me that were on the same Google Docs taking notes, together. I'd never really had much experience with Google Docs and I was blown away. I was like, "This is next level. These guys are awesome." I need to get on this. I, since then, started using Google Docs, and it's been a help. That's one thing that has really helped me.

Edith Herron: Technology is truly amazing and different, and of course I use technology at work, but like you said, Google Docs and different platforms like that was just very different. Even, at that time I think we had Moodle, wasn't ... Canvas. It's Canvas now. You use Canvas, right?

Alex French: Yeah, I use Canvas now. I had Blackboard before at the other school I went to.

Edith Herron: Yeah.

Alex French: It was weird.

Edith Herron: Okay, yeah. When I first started using Moodle, I didn't know what to do. I was trying to send my work to my instructor, the professor, and it would be everywhere. One of the guys in class said, "Oh, you're Edith Herron. Why do I have your information?" And, he showed me ... He said, "After class I'll show you." We sat outside and he instructed me, helped me how to maneuver through.

Getting back to this then, how many different schools did you attend before-

Alex French: I attended, technically, two but one on my own. I attended the Community College of the Air Force by taking classes while in the Air Force. And then, I attended classes through American Military University online while just being in the military. So, I took a couple English classes and stuff like that just to fill in, to hopefully, once I transition to an actual brick and mortar school I could bring those credits and it would help me, which it did. I transferred, I want to say it's 40 credits in.

Edith Herron: Oh, awesome.

Alex French: So, it helps.

Edith Herron: Yeah.

Alex French: Not many apply to my major, but I transferred 40 in.

Edith Herron: That's okay. That's 40.

Alex French: I got somewhere.

Edith Herron: Let me ask you this, then. What have you enjoyed most during your time here at UNCC?

Alex French: Meeting people, meeting a lot of people that are very helpful. Everybody helps everybody, pretty much. I made friends that have known a lot more than me that will take me under their wing, per se, and help me out there. There's a lot of other resources that I need to take advantage of, but the ones that I have taken advantage of, I've really enjoyed, like Oasis and the veterans section has been very helpful with getting stuff on track and stuff like that.

Edith Herron: So, on the other end of the spectrum then, what has been your biggest challenge?

Alex French: Getting back into the swing of school. I hadn't sat in a classroom for five years and actually with a teacher and everything. It was difficult and I've never been in a lecture hall with 150, 200 students, so I wasn't really sure how to take notes and what I should do. That's probably one of my biggest challenges right now, trying to determine what I should take notes on, what I shouldn't take notes or whatever. Do I write down what's on the board? Do I listen to the teacher speak? Stuff like that. That's one of my bigger issues, that and not using resources the way I should. I constantly get the same feedback from my teachers on homework assignments. "Hey, you should go use the writing standard. You should go do this." And I just haven't. Maybe it's just me not wanting to ask for help. I don't know what it is but-

Edith Herron: Well, you should though. I'm telling you, the writing center is amazing. When I first came to UNCC, the first time I used the writing center, it really blew me away. It really helped me tremendously. Honestly, I ended up getting an A in that class, and it was mainly because I used the resources and I asked questions and I went back and forth, back and forth saying, "Hey, what about this? What do you think about this?" They gave me tips on how to do and what to do and how not to. The resources here are just ... I just look at it like this. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought.

Alex French: Right.

Edith Herron: So, just go. Use the resources and you will see. I promise you, in the end you will be grateful for it.

Alex French: Okay. What have you seen most challenging since you've been here or in the years that you've spent here.

Edith Herron: You know, my challenge was a little bit different because I'm an older student, so I work full time. I have a family. I have girls that's in college. Just taking time to study, organizing my time to read and to study and write papers. A lot of times I would have to be up late at night, after everything is done and everybody is in their bed, my quiet time was really writing and reading late at night. And then, of course, I have to go to work in the morning, and sometimes go to school in the afternoon or sometimes school in the morning. That was my biggest challenge.

Alex French: What drove you to keep motivated like that, so you say you stayed up late at night and everything. What drove you to your success?

Edith Herron: Well, if I ... I looked at it like this. If I quit, I'm going to be in the same situation. I still don't have my degree. I've gone all these years, or maybe a year or two years. Still, I don't have my degree, so I'm still going to be trying to push forward to get that. That motivated me to continue. And, besides that, everybody else in my house, they've got a degree. I have an Associate Degree, but I still wanted my Bachelors, and I may end up doing a Masters. I'm not sure right now. But, that's what motivated me. And, my family. "No, Mom, go ahead, you can do it." I'm still the smartest in my house anyway.

Alex French: Mom always is.

Edith Herron: That's right.

Alex French: Did your career focus change at all when you came back to school, after you ... I know you said you talked to your advisor and she told you to go a different route. Did you think that maybe you should get out of the property management and go into something else?

Edith Herron: Well, I've never thought about getting totally out of property management. I'm thinking what I'm doing now can help enhance where I am now, because I've always used that skillset without me even realizing. You know, the public relation aspect of it. Like I said earlier on, the reason why I changed was because I have been doing this for such a long time and why would I want to get a degree to be a property manager when I'm doing that and have done it successfully for almost 30 years. It did change, but it changed to public relations, but I'm still using that, even now while I'm working at this point, on my job.

Alex French: Right. What made you want to go back? Did you feel as if you weren't as competitive, as in applying for jobs or you weren't up to par as other people in the career field? What made you drive to get your Bachelors, even though you had the job you're doing now and you were doing good at your job and there was no complaints with your Associates Degree? What made you come back and try to get your Bachelors Degree?

Edith Herron: I think it was twofold. First, this was something that I wanted to accomplish. And then, secondly, there were times when I felt that I needed some more experience, some more education, in terms of writing, sending out letters to residents or responding back to maybe even the president of the company, based on whatever the situation is. Coming back to UNCC, like we talked earlier, the writing lab, the writing center really helped a lot. I'm confident now, not that I'm the very best, but I'm confident in writing. I feel good about it.

- Alex French: Do you think you would have been able to, maybe just taking one online course and become confident like that or was coming to UNCC a defining like, "Hey, I wouldn't be the person who I am if I didn't come here."
- Edith Herron: I don't think the online course would have done it for me. Maybe somebody else, but not for me, because I'm a hands on person. Like I mentioned earlier, when I went to the writing center, I was back and forth. "Hey, what about this? Look at this. I need help with this. Do you think ...?" You know. I asked questions and I need people there to take a look and see, and I can see what they're telling me.
- Alex French: Right.
- Edith Herron: But, that's what I needed to do was just to come back for that reason. Like I said, it was twofold.
- Alex French: Yeah, definitely. It makes sense in seeing that. I'm the same way. I'm a hands on person. I'd rather be here trying to learn. I'd rather sit in a math class and see it on the board and have it taught to me instead of looking at a computer screen. All right, next slide. And so on. I agree and I hear you 100% with that.
- Edith Herron: What about you, now? What are you most nervous about, with your start in college?
- Alex French: Things being too hard and me not being able to get it. No, I don't think ... I think that, yeah, it's going to be tough. There's no doubt about it at all, but it's just my ... I've got to keep focused. I've got to not go off on tangents in my mind and just stay focused and not procrastinate a lot, like I have been.
- Edith Herron: And use your resources.
- Alex French: I have to do that as well.
- Edith Herron: Use your resources. I'm telling you, that is the best thing you can do. And, please know, when I started too, I felt inadequate. I felt like, "Oh, man. I'm not going to measure up." All the technology and all this stuff. It was scary, but just know that you're not alone and there are resources here to help you if you want the help.
- Alex French: Is that something you know now that you would've known then, or is there anything else that you know now that you wish you knew at the point when you started school back in 2009?
- Edith Herron: I'm going to be honest with you, and probably because I'm older, I took hold of the resources early on. I had to because I was sitting in the seats wrong. I really did. I took hold of the resources and used them wisely. I think what I know now, that I wish I had known early on, is that I would have financially applied for more scholarships or more grants or something like that. I'm okay, but it helps.
- Alex French: Extra money helps.
- Edith Herron: Yeah, absolutely. I would do that and I would encourage you to do that, to seek out financial help, grants, and scholarships that's available for you.

Alex French: Definitely. Yeah, that's one thing that I've been taught, that I should definitely go get those extra dollars that are out there because ... Like the Pell Grant and other resources out there that ... Well, it's just free money sitting there. You've just got to apply yourself to go do it. That's why, I heard some statistic. I don't know the number, but a certain percentage of scholarships don't even get used because nobody applies for them. If somebody just applied that hour or two of work, then that's just free money sitting there waiting.

Edith Herron: Absolutely. Well, let me ask you, then, why do you think you need a degree?

Alex French: Because everybody in the field that I want to go into has a degree, Bachelors if not a Masters, so it's one of those things that to be competitive, and to just be in the field, you've got to have the degree. And plus, you can learn a lot from on the job training and stuff like that, but being taught in an institution, such as UNCC, it'll help greatly down the road when I'm trying to understand things, which was my main reason to go back to school, is for that reason.

Edith Herron: So then, what about your plan for dealing with obstacles that may come your way, because you know they will.

Alex French: Yeah. I'm definitely going to try to stay focused and definitely try to, like you said, use the resources that are there and ask questions when I need to. I started asking questions and it's helping. My grades definitely show it's helping, but I need to keep asking questions and ask more questions to different people to maybe get a different perspective. Because, that's one of the things I've learned since I've been here is that a bunch of people have a bunch of different perspectives and ways they view the world. The way I view the world may not be the same as you, for just how I was brought up or you were brought up or our age difference.

Edith Herron: That's right. Absolutely.

Alex French: And, our experiences in life. It's crazy.

Edith Herron: I remember thinking, "Hey, I'm a student. I'm not the teacher. I don't know all this stuff, so that's why the teacher is here. The professor is here and I'm the student." And so, ask questions. Now, with that being said, my daughters would sometimes tell me, "Mom, don't be like the old lady in the class asking all the questions and keeping the class in there, keeping everybody there."

Alex French: But, the thing with that, 95% of those students in there, they want to ask those questions but they also want to get out of there. If somebody asked them questions then everybody's going to be like, "All right, well. I'm glad somebody asked that question, because if nobody asked the question, I wasn't going to know it."

Edith Herron: Right.

Alex French: I understand. You don't want to be that person, but there's more than one person that's got that question in class, 95% of the time.

Edith Herron: Sometimes I do think about that though. I want to ask a question. I think, "Oh, my daughter told me don't be the old lady." But, I do. I ask because I have to, because I need to know. So, that's-

Alex French: If it benefits you, why not?

Edith Herron: Absolutely. So then, what are some of your reasons why you've chosen to pursue your career goals and plans?

Alex French: The reason why I chose my career of mechanical engineering was because I've grown up working on race cars and that's what I want to do, since I was 14. I've been tinkering on race cars, helping family out, and come to be now where that's all I want to do and why not do something that I enjoy and wake up every morning enjoying life not, "Oh, man, I've gotta go to work today," type thing. So, that's one of my driving factors is doing something that I love doing and having fun.

Edith Herron: So, do you think is there anything that would possibly keep you from achieving that goal?

Alex French: No. I am determined and 95% of the time, when I'm determined, I achieve what I'm set out to do. Granted, yeah, it's going to take a lot of hard work, a lot of effort, and I'm going to definitely need some reminders why I'm here, why I'm doing what I'm doing. Once I hit that realization like, "All right. I'm here. It's time to get down to business and get my stuff done." Do the best I can, get the best grades, because you can get a degree with a 2.5 but I'm not trying to graduate with a 2.5 or whatever. Not saying a 2.5 is bad at all, I'm better off trying to get a 4.0 versus a 2.5. It looks better on the person, I guess.

Edith Herron: Absolutely.

Alex French: But in the end, the piece of paper is there.

Edith Herron: Absolutely.

Alex French: The degree is there.

Edith Herron: Well, it was really, really nice talking with you, Alex French. I enjoyed this conversation and I hope that ... Well, I know you'll be successful, especially if you use your resources. There'll be times when you're here and you feel like, "Oh my God, when is this going to finish?" Or it'll be sometimes like I'm feeling now, "Wow, when this is all over, I'm at home at night and I ain't got nothing to study. I ain't got nothing to read." Well, I can't wait until that happens, but sometimes I do feel that way. So, just keep your head up and remember, use your resources wisely and you'll do fine. You'll do well.

Alex French: I'm going to try as hard as I can to use those resources that I need to and get it done. But, I appreciate your advice and I agree, it was very nice talking to you and listening to what you have to say. Hopefully, I can use some of the stuff that you said and focus on the future with that.

Edith Herron: You'll do well, and just remember, you can be the old man in the class asking questions.

Alex French: I feel like the old man in class, even though I'm not that old. I go sit in class with a bunch of 18 year olds. I'm like, "Man, I'm old."

Conversation with Edith Herron and Alex French on November 6, 2018 at UNC Charlotte.
Edith, close to graduation discusses life, career, and the role of family with new student, Alex.
