

Conversation with Michael Purvis and J-nelle Dean on November 16, 2018 at UNC Charlotte.
Mike, graduating with business degree, discusses adult student challenges with J-nell, Social Work major.

- J-nelle Dean: My name is [J-nelle 00:00:00] and I'm here talking to Mike.
- Michael Purvis: Hi, my name is Michael [Purvis 00:00:06].
- J-nelle Dean: So Mike, can you tell us a little bit about yourself like where you're from, what your major is?
- Michael Purvis: Yes. I was born in Goldsboro, North Carolina, right up the road here. We moved here when I was four, so I can basically call myself a native Charlottean, right? Because I don't have any memories before that. I am a Business Major, Management and Information Systems is my concentration. What brought me to UNC Charlotte? I can't speak for anybody else, I will speak for myself, I wouldn't have given this answer if I knew there was a board or something asking, but it's my roots here. It's like the closest proximity school that's got the largest networking ability. They're just the largest presence in this area I think. What about yourself, what's your major and what brought you to UNC Charlotte?
- J-nelle Dean: My major is Social Work with a minor in Urban and Youth Communities. I actually chose UNC Charlotte because other than Winthrop they have the best Social Work program, accredited program anyway. That and also my sister currently graduated from here, so experiencing it from looking for her eyes it was like, yeah I want to do that too.
- Michael Purvis: Yeah.
- J-nelle Dean: I'm originally from St. Louis, Missouri though and I've been moving back and forth from here and home since '96, and this last round in 2016 I just decided I'm gonna stay. So did you happen to attend any other schools before you came here?
- Michael Purvis: I did. I attended right near Winthrop, York Technical College, community college just right down the street. I attended there for ... I got my Associate's Degree, Associates in Arts just a couple years ago. I took about a year break before going there to here. Did you go anywhere else?
- J-nelle Dean: I did, I actually went to Central Piedmont Community College and received my diploma, high school diploma also, but my Associate's Degree in Office Administration.
- Michael Purvis: So let's see here, we didn't leave before graduating, right?
- J-nelle Dean: No, I was gonna finish.

Michael Purvis: Yeah, right, exactly. Me too, I'm not spending this money on nothing.

J-nelle Dean: I put in a lot of work so I'm gonna finish. What's different for you this time coming here?

Michael Purvis: What's different this time, I would say for me is obviously the scale of the school, it's 10 times larger than the one that I went to, I would say that's different. The resources that are available, I think that's really something that you're always discovering, you can probably attest to that. There's things that I just didn't know existed and you find out that they exist and it almost becomes a part of your weekly routine once you find out about them. That and I'm married now. When I was in the community college I wasn't married, now I am, so that makes it a little more ... it's different, but at the same time fortunate because I have a great support system. What makes anything different for you?

J-nelle Dean: I would agree that the scale of the school is totally different. Just walking from one building to another I feel like I get my steps in every day. Also, it's different because I am older than most. Going to community college I ran into more people around my age, it seemed like a closer-knit type of community, even if it were instructors and things like that. I just felt like it was more people close to my age. Here I feel like I'm going to school with my kids, given that I do have a 21 year old. So it's different in that aspect, but at the same time it's so much to explore as compared to a community college, that's it's like I want to do this, I want to do this. But it's only so many hours in a day. It's a very enjoyable experience.

Also, when I was in community college I had both of my parents and my sister and my brother as a support system, along with my kids. This time around I don't have either of my parents and it's just me and my sister now, so it's totally different in that aspect because it's like they saw me do this one college, but they won't see me do this one also. That's kind of different.

Michael Purvis: Yeah.

J-nelle Dean: Sorry.

Michael Purvis: No. What brought you back to college?

J-nelle Dean: Associate's is not enough. An Associate's it used to be enough, it used to be what you could attain that would get you into the door of employment. But now it seems like a Bachelor's, or a Master's, or even a PhD is the basis of anything you do. And I feel like I do tell my kids a lot that in order for you to be able to do something, sometimes you have to have that piece of paper. And I live to

service others, but I need a piece of paper that allows me to do that. Whether it's coming into their homes and counseling and things like that, or even just serving food to the homeless, you have to have a piece of paper. So that and I always tell them you need to go to college and you need to do this, so I feel like I have to lead by example, so I'll continue until I cannot continue anymore.

Michael Purvis: That's actually really inspiring.

J-nelle Dean: Thank you. What do you think?

Michael Purvis: What brought me back to college?

J-nelle Dean: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michael Purvis: I would say it was really the same thing. Well no, it's not the same thing, sorry. Just probably a lot like yourself, you go through the workforce and you're in it for 10 or 15 years, and you see the limits in your ability to progress sometimes. Oftentimes you feel yourself maybe relying on someone else to help you make that next step. I saw going back to college as a way to do this myself, rather than having to rely on someone else to get that position that I really wanted, was to make the efforts myself to go out rather than having to be under the wing of someone else. Which I'm well aware that's probably still gonna be the case, right?

J-nelle Dean: Right.

Michael Purvis: But this time it's just another level of doing that.

J-nelle Dean: It's a continuation.

Michael Purvis: Right.

J-nelle Dean: That is true. What have you enjoyed the most during this time here?

Michael Purvis: I really enjoy learning. That might be sort of a cop-out, but when I was ... I held dead end jobs that just seemed to be like I was never progressing mentally. I would learn them and then it would be done. It was just like you hit the plateau somewhere and it was just over with. I really enjoy that about school in that there's always something else to learn, there's always someone else around that knows more than I do everywhere, so it's been enjoyable for me.

J-nelle Dean: That's a priority.

- Michael Purvis: Exactly, all the time. Did I ask you what have you enjoyed the ... no I haven't. What have you enjoyed the most during your time here?
- J-nelle Dean: Like you said, it's a cop-out, but I've enjoyed learning. It may be a cop-out. It's like when you learn something new, or you learn of something that you didn't know of before, it's like really? That really happened or we can do that? It's just that and to be able to have conversations with people who may or may not have different views than you. Just to be able to have that mental stimulation, per se. I feel like I get that not only in the classroom but just in talking with other students from different backgrounds and things like that. I'm always willing to sit and listen and have a conversation, so I would say that's the most thing I've enjoyed here, the learning and the diversity.
- Michael Purvis: Right, I noticed that too a lot, especially with a group of 2000, maybe 3000 at community college. It's just such a wider range of people here.
- J-nelle Dean: So much, so much.
- Michael Purvis: It really is. It's a way to step foot and be in a different ... it's like going to a different geographic area but you don't have to go too far away from home.
- J-nelle Dean: Right.
- Michael Purvis: That's nice.
- J-nelle Dean: Like a whole new world.
- Michael Purvis: Right, exactly.
- J-nelle Dean: I feel like in the movies when they step out and they just do that pan around thing. You're like, yeah that's nice. What do you think has been your biggest challenge in returning to college and how did you handle that?
- Michael Purvis: The biggest challenge? I think it was giving up income, giving up what I was seeking for such a long time, a promotion opportunity. It's just like, I had a goal and a promotion opportunity came, and all that income that I could have potentially made at the time went away, that was a challenge stepping in. The challenges keep on presenting themselves, so that's not really the biggest challenge, it was the first of the biggest challenges. The challenges are really the small things putting ... and the college has never asked me to do this but I'm doing this, is putting my life on hold for a little bit. It's when stop ... not making plans with my wife because there's a couple years left, or to even the smallest

what are we doing this weekend it's a great weekend. I can't do anything because I've got a paper due.

J-nelle Dean: Paper due, yes.

Michael Purvis: Right? So it's all of those little challenges that I think are gonna work out in the end. I hope.

J-nelle Dean: I totally agree. I would totally agree. I currently work only part-time because I'm a full-time student.

Michael Purvis: Me too, I can't do it.

J-nelle Dean: And I've passed up numerous full-time job offers because it seems like they always call me right after the add/drop date.

Michael Purvis: Right, good timing.

J-nelle Dean: Yeah, just like I'm sorry but I've made the plan, this is what I want to do. It's a nice job for right now, but in the long run it's not what I'm trying to do. I would rather tell you no than to mess up the future. That and as you said, trying to make plans. I just told a friend I can't watch your kids this weekend because finals are next week.

Michael Purvis: No friends understand, family members they don't understand this time of year, right?

J-nelle Dean: They couldn't understand why I was cooking Thanksgiving dinner and working and doing homework. It's like, just because it's a holiday doesn't mean that I don't have assignments due.

Michael Purvis: Right.

J-nelle Dean: That and early morning classes are the biggest challenges. I accidentally took a class at 8:00 AM and it was a struggle. It was a struggle. It's one thing to get up at 8:00, it's another thing to be somewhere at 8:00.

Michael Purvis: Right, that's it, that's two totally different things.

J-nelle Dean: Totally different things. But luckily, even with all of that, it's nice to have people that understand or at least try to be supportive and like we get it. We know what you're trying to do, stick to what you're trying to do.

Michael Purvis: They're a double edged sword, they need stuff but they also understand at the same time.

J-nelle Dean: Right.

Michael Purvis: I know what you mean.

J-nelle Dean: That balance, it is.

Michael Purvis: This question I'm gonna add a little bit to it, if you don't mind. When did you start back and I'm assuming it was just recently, or is it coming up?

J-nelle Dean: Just recently.

Michael Purvis: Just recently. So how nervous ... what are you most nervous about as you're starting, as you're starting this again? You've already been here for a semester, so you're sort of getting back acclimated to the process, what makes you most nervous about that?

J-nelle Dean: Doing well on assignments is the thing that I'm most nervous about because every instructor is different, so they in turn look for different things. I'll say I've had a few instructors so far, because I started back in the spring, I've had a few instructors so far that have been reel understanding in that I took a year off after getting my Associate's, spent time with my family and things like that. I took a year off after the Associate's and now getting back into it it's like, what am I doing? This is totally different. But with instructors, they look for different things, so trying to accommodate has not necessarily been a struggle, but it's been different.

I guess I'm really just looking forward to just chipping away. Just chipping away at this list of classes and hopefully learning new things. That's pretty much the gist of it. Yeah, that's pretty much it. I'm just excited about every semester because it's like, what's gonna happen this time?

Michael Purvis: What am I gonna like, what am I gonna hate?

J-nelle Dean: What is gonna keep me up late nights and what is gonna make me go to bed on time? That's definitely something. What has kept you motivated to make it through this last semester? This is your last semester, right?

Michael Purvis: Next semester.

J-nelle Dean: Next semester, so you finish in May?

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Michael Purvis: Yep.

J-nelle Dean: Yay.

Michael Purvis: I finish in May. The same things you said. I think a little bit it's the ... what has kept me motivated? A lot to do with my family. I'll be the first four year college graduate when I do graduate. When, not if, right?

J-nelle Dean: Yeah, when.

Michael Purvis: When I do graduate. A lot of it has to do with again going back to what I said about me being the ultimate sayer, I can't think of the right word, arbiter or my own destiny, you know what I mean? That's kept me motivated I think, understanding that there are jobs out there that I don't want to do, that I have done, and I'm ready to be better really, that's kept me motivated. That and money, you know? I never made a lot of money. Never made a lot of money and I'm looking forward to making a little bit more money.

J-nelle Dean: Being a little less stressed, a little less worried.

Michael Purvis: Right.

J-nelle Dean: A little more comfortable.

Michael Purvis: Right.

J-nelle Dean: Totally get that, totally get that. So you did say that you have worked since you've been in school.

Michael Purvis: Yes.

J-nelle Dean: What have you done and has that supported any of your goals as far as attending UNC?

Michael Purvis: Yes and no, because I've had two jobs. One, I'm fortunate enough now. I was given an internship, or earned. Given, I don't know what the right word is. I got an internship here at the University, that's really helped me a lot progress career-wise. I held a part-time job that was really just for the extra income, the needed extra income, but it was sucking the life out of me. It was working overnights Friday nights and Saturday nights, so that didn't really do anything for me. But the internship really has taught me a lot, more so about the business environment, dealing with people. The business environment I was used to was a very heavily customer service oriented, focused environment, so

there's not a lot of time to go over details. It's more about learning how to assist people, which I don't have a problem with, but I'd like to learn the backend side of things too. And that's given me a good understanding, what I'm doing here now.

J-nelle Dean: That makes sense. So since you're getting ready to graduate, what are your thoughts on your career and work after you graduate?

Michael Purvis: What are my thoughts on my career? I'm still one of those people that I don't know exactly what it is that I want to do. I have a better understanding of what I like from the major that I'm in, so I'm really hoping that I can find a place that is large enough to show me different career paths from one starting point, hopefully. I felt like that was a two parter here, I want to make sure that I answer everything.

J-nelle Dean: No, it's your thoughts on your career and work after you graduate. I mean, it sounds good that you want to be with a company that is not only going to show you different aspects of your career, but also one where you will be able to grow.

Michael Purvis: Right, yeah. I'm one of these people that I'm not doing what I would be doing if I had ... you know that saying, pick something that if you didn't need any money what would you do? I'm not doing that. I would probably ... I don't know what I would be doing, probably philosophy or something like that. But I took what I like about the things that I like, like logic, and structure, and things like that, and I'm taking that to the business area so I can incorporate that there also. I've got family in this various parts of this part of the business world, so they're sort of pushing me in that direction too. And I see what they do and it looks fun, little things that I've done before I've enjoyed. Programming, I think that's very interesting.

Let me ask you a question, it feels like I haven't asked you a question in a long time. What is your plan for dealing with the obstacles that may come in your way?

J-nelle Dean: Deal with them like I do any other obstacle.

Michael Purvis: Same old day.

J-nelle Dean: I just take it one thing at a time, one day at a time. It sounds cliché, but that's pretty much all you can do because some weeks are like, I can't wait until Friday. And then some weeks you're just like, this was great. But just one thing at a time, one day at a time. I can only do what I can do. I try not to push too

much pressure on myself. I am very critical of myself, but I try not to. That and try to make sure that I make time to take care of self, even if I've got to pencil it in. That is pretty much how I handle anything that comes my way, is just stick to the plan.

Michael Purvis: Yeah, I agree, that's exactly what I did. You just handle it one thing at a time, that's all you can do. I think that's excellent. Do you plan to work while you're in school? I know you said that you do, part-time?

J-nelle Dean: Yes, I do work. I actually work at Central Piedmont Community College and I work in the College and Career Readiness Department, which services adult high school and GED and ESL students. So I'm working in a department where we service dropouts and things like that, so they're starting on a journey. I'm one of the first people they meet. And this is actually a department and program that I went through myself, so I'm kind of the marker.

Michael Purvis: And that sort of correlates with what you want to do right, social work?

J-nelle Dean: Yes, which I've come full circle. Not only does it help me as a person, it helps me as far as my career as well, because given that I've been in their shoes, it kind of helps me to help them. And I'm pretty sure from what some of them have said, it's nice to see someone who really understand, not just because they've been working there but because they've been through. It definitely helps and I've never expected to be in this position. I actually started out in Financial Aid, but I was actually recommended for the position. It would be nice to stay with them in some aspect, but my supervisor actually understands what I'm trying to do so she's very supportive as well. I have a great support system personally and professionally.

Michael Purvis: So that relates to your career goals you would say, this work that you're doing now?

J-nelle Dean: Very much so.

Michael Purvis: Very much so, yeah. I would say so too, I didn't want to put words in your mouth.

J-nelle Dean: No, you're fine, very much so because given that they've been dropouts and whatever circumstances led them to do that, I would be a person that they would more than likely come in contact with as a social worker to address those obstacles. So yeah, it's great because of course different people different circumstances, so I run into all kinds of things all the time. It's nice to be able to ... I feel like I'm kind of ahead a little bit because working with them gives me

the opportunity to find resources that may have not been available before.
Yeah, I work with a lot of people. I work with a lot of people, not only that but I volunteer so it's ... yeah.

Michael Purvis: Busy, you're a busy woman.

J-nelle Dean: Very much. I said I try to take time for myself even if I've got to pencil it in. Social work is one of those professions where it kind of chooses you, you don't choose it.

Michael Purvis: Yeah, I would say so. You've got to be a really empathic sort of person to take on that. It takes a lot, sure.

J-nelle Dean: It does. It's worth it. Has your career focus changed since you started here? Since you started and where you are now, has your career focus changed?

Michael Purvis: So change in that it has been narrowed down, yes. Not changed as in I took a detour anywhere. I found myself ... I didn't find myself but I found my path through here. So yeah, it has changed, but like I said it wasn't a detour change it was just a more narrowed change, which I needed. I needed that.

J-nelle Dean: Totally get it, more focused, centered.

Michael Purvis: Right, exactly.

J-nelle Dean: Awesome. Do you feel prepared to enter the workforce?

Michael Purvis: Absolutely. I came from the workforce and we know what that's like, we've been out there.

J-nelle Dean: Yes.

Michael Purvis: Only this time around, I think I'm a little more confident because I've done this, I've taken on this challenge and I've overcome it. It's helped me a lot with not just the major, but with every type of skill I think required to be successful, time management, working on multiple projects at once, speaking with diverse groups of people, being led at some points when that has to be the case, taking ownership and being a leader. That's always something that I never liked to do, but now when I have to do it it's because it needs to be done. It has prepared me I think, I do feel more ... I do feel like I've got whatever the question was, whatever you said.

J-nelle Dean: You have the feeling that you're ready, yeah.

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- Michael Purvis: Yeah, the feeling that I'm ready, yeah. I've got the feeling that I'm ready.
- J-nelle Dean: You sound good to me. Yeah, you're all right. I'm like, those are all the key points that they look for. Can you do the work and can you do the work well, those cover all the key points. Awesome. Sorry, I asked you a couple questions.
- Michael Purvis: I'll go back to here. Did I ask you do you have career goals that motivated you to come back to college or to start college? You've already answered this question, yeah. I mean, I don't know if you want to hit that dead horse anymore.
- J-nelle Dean: Yeah, I have career goals.
- Michael Purvis: Yep, rewind the tape, go find out.
- J-nelle Dean: I do have career goals and I am working my way towards them.
- Michael Purvis: Maybe this is a good one here. Why do you think you need a degree?
- J-nelle Dean: Pretty much because the law states that I have to have one, I can't practice without one. But I think also because it's good to learn the foundation of something. Yes, I know what social work is, but I'm not knowledgeable in what it is and necessarily why it was begun. I definitely want to get background and I definitely want to be able to learn as much as I can learn in order to better service whoever I'm servicing. So yeah, I need that degree in order to be able to do what I feel like I was meant to do, so here I am.
- Michael Purvis: Since you started at UNC Charlotte, what are your thoughts on career and work?
- J-nelle Dean: I think I was lucky enough to be able to have a job that's similar to my degree. But I feel like it would be harder if I didn't. I feel like without being able to see the things that I'm learning in the actual reality setting, it would be kind of hard to piece it together. If I was in the same degree program and I was working in a warehouse or something like that, I wouldn't see what we're talking about. I think it would be harder to put it together. I think it worked out for me, I would hope it would. I would implore people to do kind of what you do, apply for internships in their career field just so they can become more confident and comfortable with doing it.
- Michael Purvis: I agree completely. It really helps solidify the whole process if you've got it always going on at work and at school so you can solidify everything. You're right, if you're boxing shipments in a warehouse the best you can do is think

about the things that you're learning at school rather than actually apply them. I think we're both really lucky in that regard.

J-nelle Dean: I think we have already talked about what made you think you needed a degree to reach your goals, your career goals, unless you want to hit that again.

Michael Purvis: No, I'm good.

J-nelle Dean: We've kind of covered what it will mean to you to have a degree, unless you want to elaborate on that a little bit.

Michael Purvis: Yeah, no. I think I would just be saying the same things over and over, so I think I hit it.

J-nelle Dean: Yeah, I think this next one is around the same, some of the reasons why you've chosen to pursue your current career goals.

Michael Purvis: Yeah.

J-nelle Dean: We kind of hit that one as well. But this is a good one, what is something that you know now but wish you had known when you started your college journey?

Michael Purvis: The biggest one is I wish that I would have started keeping a flash drive of all the things, materials, papers, stuff that professors gave me, so I could keep it and save it for later because I always thought there was so much interesting things that sometimes six months from now or six months later I go back and I'm like, what was that article that professor shared about the ... it was an economics class, economics, whatever you want to call it. Just good stuff. Philosophy papers back when I was in my first year at York Tech. Little things like that I wish I would have kept track of the whole progress, that way I could just look back at stuff, stuff that I found interesting or stuff that I needed to brush up on. I wish I would have done that. I'm starting now, it's never too late, but I wish that was something that I would have started in the very beginning, definitely.

J-nelle Dean: It makes sense, I would agree. I would agree, it's definitely different. Yeah, that's a good idea, that is a really good idea. I may do that myself.

Michael Purvis: Just start right now. Go out and get-

J-nelle Dean: I might implement that myself.

Michael Purvis: Yeah, Barnes and Noble probably sells them.

- J-nelle Dean: Yeah, Barnes and Noble. Awesome, so thank you for that, for your answers. I'm really excited for your graduation and I hope you receive and you do everything that you set your mind to.
- Michael Purvis: I appreciate it.
- J-nelle Dean: No problem.
- Michael Purvis: I've still got a couple on here. Let me just list them off just to make sure we hit them. But if it sounds like you've already hit this, then we'll just skip, okay?
- J-nelle Dean: Okay.
- Michael Purvis: What are some of the reasons why you've chosen to pursue your current career goals?
- J-nelle Dean: I think I feel like I can give defined answer. I've answered it, but I can give a more defined answer. Social work is where I'm starting with my Bachelor's, and I fully intent to receive my Master's. And that is because I want to become an LSAW ... well, and LCSW, Licensed Clinical Social Work, because given the current state of our society I just feel like mental health is being so ignored that I feel like that is where I need to be in order to be of the best service that I can be. So it is a streamline to get to where I want to be and where I feel like I need to be. And I feel like the more I actually tell people about it, the more people may be willing to talk to other people about it, and maybe we can eventually start chipping away at it because-
- Michael Purvis: You're right, there's a stigma behind that stuff.
- J-nelle Dean: Yeah, and I don't understand why. I don't fully understand, but I'm starting to. At the same time it's like, my main thing is I feel like we have to help these kids because these are the people who are gonna lead eventually. So it's like, I want to live in a world where I'm okay.
- Michael Purvis: Me too.
- J-nelle Dean: Let me go ahead and help now. But yeah, definitely that is the main reason why I want to be what I want to be.
- Michael Purvis: And I assume that I know the answer to this but I'll ask for posterity's sake, what are you doing to reach that goal? Isn't it obvious?
- J-nelle Dean: Right, that's true. I believe attending class.

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Michael Purvis: Yeah you are.

J-nelle Dean: Attending classes, just registered for spring, good 13 credits.

Michael Purvis: Do you think there is anything that would keep you from reaching that goal?

J-nelle Dean: That's a good question, no.

Michael Purvis: Good for you.

J-nelle Dean: No, I can't not do it. Yeah, I can't not do it.

Michael Purvis: I agree completely.

J-nelle Dean: I don't feel like there's an option not to at this point, no.

Michael Purvis: And then what will it mean to you to have a degree?

J-nelle Dean: Everything. Everything, it means so much to me to show that it can be done regardless of when you start. It can be done, all you have to do is start.

Michael Purvis: That was the hardest part for me, starting.

J-nelle Dean: Yeah, you just have to start. There is a difference between one day and day one.

Michael Purvis: Right.

J-nelle Dean: Yeah, it will mean a lot. It will mean not only did I set a goal and complete it, but I am well on my way.

Michael Purvis: Absolutely. Well, if you don't have anything else I will say thank you.

J-nelle Dean: You're so welcome.

Michael Purvis: It was a pleasure meeting you J-nelle, really.

J-nelle Dean: You too, thank you.