

Vashti Hoosier: My name is [Vashti 00:00:01] and a little bit about myself, I am from Richmond, Virginia. I served in the Air Force for eight years, I actually just separated in November of last year. My major, I haven't declared yet but I do hope to go into Criminal Justice because I would like to be a juvenile parole officer once I'm done, probation officer. What brought me to UNC Charlotte? I guess it's gonna kind of sound weird, but it was kind of like a feelings type of thing. I felt like I was drawn here. And it seems like a nice school, so I just chose UNC Charlotte.

Zachary Burdick: That's awesome. My name's Zachary [Burdick 00:00:46], I go by Zach, and I was actually enlisted in the Air Force for six years and then transitioned to the reserves for the three years that I've been here at UNC Charlotte. I'm majoring in Communications, so as you can imagine I'm sure, the military experienced helped the communicating, I have a passion for it. My wife is originally from Charlotte, so we had family in the area and they just kind of helped us transition, get our feet on the ground, and keep on going from there.

Vashti Hoosier: Did you attend any other schools before you came to this school?

Zachary Burdick: I had attended online classes and National American University through the Education Office that we had on base. But I had never been to an actual college campus before coming to UNC Charlotte.

Vashti Hoosier: And I would assume that the reason that you left before graduating was because you separated, you transitioned?

Zachary Burdick: Yeah, so it really was I kind of had this realization that in order for me to reach my career goals and education goals, that I had to be able to focus full-time on my pursuits, instead of trying to juggle active duty commitments and going full-time.

Vashti Hoosier: What's different about school now versus then?

Zachary Burdick: I think part of it is that commitment, you get that full focus because you don't have to worry about what you're doing on Monday back at the office. You're pushing to just focus on your goals and what you're wanting.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, that definitely makes sense. I would understand. I couldn't imagine doing this full-time and being active duty, I probably would have went crazy.

Zachary Burdick: Yes, it does happen.

Vashti Hoosier: What have you enjoyed most during your time here?

Zachary Burdick: For me, it's really been the community, specifically the veteran's community here at UNC Charlotte. When I separated, the Veterans' Service Office was the first office I called. And we have a Veterans' Lounge here on campus in Barnard 106, that I was able to connect with other veterans even from different branches. And having just that communication and being able to go in there and let off steam or say, I'm in a class where all of these younger students don't ask questions to the teachers, why aren't they asking questions? And they go, oh yeah I just ask questions anyways. But things like that, I feel like that is what I've enjoyed most, is not losing a sense of community because the veterans' community here on campus is such a great connection.

Vashti Hoosier: All righty. What's been your biggest challenge returning to school or college, and how did you handle it?

Zachary Burdick: For me, I'm married and I have a five year old son. I wouldn't be able to do this and excel the way I am and have without them, that family support structure. But it's also provided a lot of challenges. When you have other students who might work, might not, and they go party on the weekends, you're an adult student and you have to go home and cook dinner and put kids to bed. So that work/life balance is something that always a challenge, and it really doesn't matter what you're doing. For me it's been capitalizing on your down times, that's how I've been able to handle it is when I do have a break in class I'm trying to work on homework. Trying to excel and accomplish those assignments during the week so that my weekends are more free.

Vashti Hoosier: I'm in that area, I'm trying to get there.

Zachary Burdick: It's an adjustment. And even then, I work into my schedule having some time to go into the Veterans' Lounge and de-stress, and not necessarily work on homework. Making that connection so that it's not constantly work. My first semester I was here, that's all I did was I would do an assignment, and then do an assignment, and I would just constantly be working and I wouldn't step back for a second and breathe. You get burnt out really fast that way.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, I can picture that. Okay, so now we're gonna ... I have a couple of questions about your career, which you did state was communications, correct?

Zachary Burdick: Yep.

Vashti Hoosier: All righty. Have you worked while you attended school?

Zachary Burdick: I've not had a job outside of campus. I've found a few opportunities to work on campus as a student, and that has allowed me to work and work around my schedule. I was a peer mentor with theUCAE Office here at UNC Charlotte. And I really enjoyed that because it allowed me to put my mentorship skills I built in the Air Force. It allowed me to step in almost like a supervisor. When you have a lot of younger students who are struggling to accomplish school or to make that proper adjustment, I was able to step in and kind of give them life guidance, how to tackle things, what to do, and how to be successful in this new environment that they're struggling to adjust in. So that was one job I had for two semesters I think.

And then I am also a veterans' work study here, connected with the Veterans' Service Office. And that allows me as well to work with my work schedule and gives me a lot of contact with the veteran population here on campus, which I love to death. That is a passion for me, is engaging with people, help making sure that they're doing good, what can we do to help you, education benefits. Answering those types of questions and stuff has allowed me to earn some income on the side and still be able to keep a focus on school.

Vashti Hoosier: And how has that supported your career goals?

Zachary Burdick: Overall, that's built skills. It's let other skills not die. The communications skills, but also it's kind of broadened my career goals because I've found I have a passion for veterans' issues, and veterans' benefits, and the veteran community. So that's something I've added to also keep into my career after everything else.

Vashti Hoosier: And that's ... I feel like there's nothing better. That's a good thing to have through life experience, to hone in your skill and be able to know which direction you want to put it. That's exciting. Since you are getting ready to graduate, what are your thoughts on career and work after college?

Zachary Burdick: So for me, after six years in the Air Force I wasn't happy with exactly the job I was doing. I realized I was leaving work maybe angry or upset about the day or stressed about the day, and I wasn't happy going into work. So I decided I wanted to become an officer, which was my main push and passion for coming to UNC Charlotte, is because they have the Air Force ROTC program here. So I have been, while being in the reserves, while being a VA work study, connected with the veterans, I've also been in the Air Force ROTC program here and pursuing a commission. After I graduate I'll be commissioning back into the Air Force on active duty, but on the officer side.

For me and my family, that has been this big, scary, seemingly impossible goal at times. You slowly chip away until you see the light at the end of the tunnel, so we're there now. Next semester is our last semester, and then we'll be graduating and commissioning into the Air Force, and then going from there.

Vashti Hoosier: Congratulations on your commissioning.

Zachary Burdick: Thank you.

Vashti Hoosier: That's a whole different spectrum.

Zachary Burdick: It is.

Vashti Hoosier: But it's an exciting one. I definitely, before I separated, I think it would have been interesting to see what it would have been like to be an officer. They live totally different lives.

Zachary Burdick: They do, and for me it was I wanted to see things differently, so that was an initial big push for me doing that. It's been one of those things that through it all, at the time of me going, okay my son is one years old, he just turned one, I was just starting to fit into a position within work, falling into a niche of I could really do this and I'm good at this. It's a now or never thing for us. It was a both feet out, just jump into the pool, jump into the deep end. And I found that having a passion, and it might sound kind of cheesy, but having a vision for where you want your life to go and then just pouring yourself into trying to get there, has helped me be successful here in this environment because I was motivated, because I knew this was what we wanted to do and this is why I was doing something.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, that definitely makes sense. How has your career focused changed from when you started college to where you are now? Or has it even changed at all?

Zachary Burdick: You know, it has. As far as commissioning into the Air Force, I consider that my job, and that is a career focus for me. But me discovering my passion for the veteran community and veterans' benefits and education benefits as a whole, I feel has shifted what I want my career to look like. It's more than just, okay I have a job and I'm an officer in the Air Force now. I want it to be an, I'm involved, because I felt when I separated I wasn't as prepared and I didn't know the details about how my education benefit worked. I had to discover things out the hard way, as I'm sure you've had to run into some of those speed bumps. So I have a passion and a career focus now when I get active duty, is to get

involved, to be involved and encourage airmen to use their education benefits because it's important.

Vashti Hoosier: Most definitely.

Zachary Burdick: And I didn't believe it was important until I got out and needed it, you know?

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, I barely took classes while I was in. I was like, I'm never gonna need it.

Zachary Burdick: Yeah, you're never gonna escape it, you're never gonna escape college. You're gonna have to eventually.

Vashti Hoosier: How do you feel about entering back into the work world?

Zachary Burdick: I'm excited. I'm pretty sure my wife has more senioritis than I do at this point. She's ready for us to be back in the work world, and getting a full-time paycheck, and having her at home, and doing all that other stuff. We are also a multi-generational household right now, so we're living with my in-laws. For three and a half years that's been the situation, so going back to challenge faced in college, for us it really has been a blessing, my in-laws stepping in and doing that. But we are ready, and I feel very prepared. I think UNK Charlotte's prepared me a lot for tackling that.

And even if plans did change and we had to step into the civilian workforce, all the skills I've developed through my higher education career so far, there's always opportunities. And for a veteran, there are millions of opportunities to step into the workforce. Employers in UNC Charlotte and the Veterans' Service Office, always make those opportunities for veterans available. We have recruiters coming out, we have other people coming out trying to get our veterans onto their jobs and into their businesses.

Vashti Hoosier: Okay, well that's really good. What makes you think you need a degree to reach your career goals?

Zachary Burdick: With the way the Air Force works, you have to have a degree to become a commissioned officer. And for me, that is a big career goal. You don't necessarily need a degree to reach your career goals, but a degree always helps bolster and support your career goals, it is never a bad thing, it's important.

Vashti Hoosier: What will it mean to you to have your degree?

Zachary Burdick: I am actually a first generation college student. I'll be the first one to actually have a college degree in my family. My dad was in the Air Force as well, he did 21 years, and his last day in the Air Force he still needed one class to get his CCAF. And I tease him about it to this day. CCAF is that Community College in the Air Force Associate's Degree that you're able to get while you're active duty. For me, it is an accomplishment, it is something that I said right out of high school I wanted to go do, and I had to take a really long path to get here. It's just a really big checkbox in life for me.

Vashti Hoosier: Okay. What are some of the reasons why you have chosen to pursue your current career goal?

Zachary Burdick: I didn't think it was possible. I had enlisted with the idea about wanting to go to college but that, as I'm sure you're well aware, those goals kind of wane after you get active duty and you're like okay I need a job, or I'm doing my job but I want to be good at my job. And it wasn't until talking with my wife one night and I was like, I'm not happy at work. I've always had this goal of being an officer, always wanted to be that, and really it wasn't until my wife said let's do it, that support in the family and that family support structure with my wife saying let's go, we can do this. Then it was like, you know what, I can. Almost having that permission to allow yourself to reach your potential and be your best was what I needed.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, because it's not just you in this change, it's her too.

Zachary Burdick: Yeah.

Vashti Hoosier: What is something that you know now that you wish you knew when you started out?

Zachary Burdick: College is all about managing and juggling. You're never gonna feel 100% studied and ready for every single test, and you're never gonna be able to read every single page that they assign you. And if you are, please come call me because I need to know how you did it. For the first few semesters, I felt like I was just failing at life because I didn't really all of that chapter. I knew what the chapter was talking about, and I understand how to relay the information. Sitting back and realizing what kind of study strategies you need aren't gonna be the same for everybody else.

For me, it's okay to hold yourself accountable and set aside time. Budget time for each activity. Every semester I have written out a schedule of, okay this is

when my class is on Monday, this is when this class is on Tuesday, this is my study hour for this class, this is my study hour for that class. Budgeting it out and then sticking to it, especially until you get into the swing of things and you understand how to be a good student, that was the biggest thing I wish I would have known the very first semester, because I didn't. And there were some adjustments.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, I feel like I'm definitely kind of in that stage of trying to just balance everything out.

Zachary Burdick: And it passes, you'll get it. Just don't be disappointed and don't be afraid to ask for help. There's those resources on campus that if I hadn't used, I wouldn't have been able to excel later on when I was like, okay it's crunch time, I know how to excel in this environment because I had reached out on how to do that. Resources like theUCAE, or even just venting to other friends and veterans, like man I don't know what to do, it helps.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, well I mean it was a pleasure to get to know you and ask these questions about your college career.

Zachary Burdick: I think it's my turn to ask you questions now.

Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, we can just transition.

Zachary Burdick: Let's switch it over.

Vashti Hoosier: All right.

Zachary Burdick: So we're gonna flip script here. So you said UNC Charlotte, you just kind of felt like this is where you belonged and it was a great campus. Did you attend any other schools before coming here?

Vashti Hoosier: Yes, I was in the Air Force, I did go to a couple of college classes. It wasn't my main focus. But I went to the University of Mount Olive, because I was stationed in Goldsboro which is three and a half hours I believe east of here maybe. So I did classes on base, I never went to the campus to do any classes. They were different. It was kind of like this setting but it was a lot smaller and the teachers were ... not to say more understanding, but they kind of knew that college was our focus but it wasn't our only focus, if that makes sense. So yeah, I just went to UNCC, and that was it for me.

Zachary Burdick: It's like going from Division II to Division I football. It's kind of like you hit a wall, like wow this is different. It's not bad, but there's some things that are intense. Why did you leave before graduating? Why didn't you pursue Mount Olive, a college degree?

Vashti Hoosier: Towards the end I was kind of in the same situation you were. I wasn't excited with my job. I worked logistics, which is not bad, they make nice money on the outside. But that's not where I was driven to and the Air Force doesn't offer the opportunity to do what my passion is. I decided to wait until my higher tenure, separate, and go to school full-time. But at the time, I'm still with him, but my boyfriend transferred here from Kentucky, so it was either Charlotte or Greensboro for his job. And I was like, well you know I kind of want to go to Charlotte, I'm kind of leaning that way. I had never been to Charlotte, I think I came once before we moved here. I mean, I was getting out, I wasn't staying in Goldsboro, so couldn't stay at the school.

Zachary Burdick: Prime opportunity, I got you, I got you. What brought you back to school then? You said you had taken a few classes but what gave you that passion to come back?

Vashti Hoosier: It was a totally different motivation back then. I took those classes to honestly have it on my EPR, but once I separated I realized that I do want to be a juvenile probation officer. I just feel like a degree would help me get there because it's stepping out of one career field and going to something totally different that's not related in the slightest. So I mean, I kind of feel like what better way to know if this is what I want than college.

Zachary Burdick: Perfect. Do you feel there's things that are different this time as you tackle getting your degree instead of just taking college classes?

Vashti Hoosier: Most definitely, school was so ... I don't want to say easy, because I only took like five classes, but it was different in the Air Force. Like I said, they knew that you wanted school but it wasn't your main focus, and they gave you a lot of opportunities to obtain classes, like taking a clip or [inaudible 00:22:26] where you didn't have to sit in the classroom, you just had to know the knowledge. Or the classrooms were however you picked it, one day a week or five days a week, but they knew you had other things that were a priority. Versus here it's like, oh no ma'am. You're paying for this, you've gotta do this, you have to focus on this. So it's definitely different here.

Zachary Burdick: Totally, I totally get that. What are you most nervous about as you start college or start college again?

- Vashti Hoosier: Things that you talked about, staying focused and finding time to budget everything and get everything done. Because that's my biggest challenge right now, is trying to get it all in there and realize that you have to pace yourself, you have to stick to it, because procrastination is the worst thing you could possibly do. I just actually quit my job to be on school full-time and this has all of my attention.
- Zachary Burdick: Awesome.
- Vashti Hoosier: What makes me nervous is I guess the unseen, not knowing what's to come.
- Zachary Burdick: That's okay to be nervous about. Totally okay to be nervous about that, I think I was in the same boat. And you're gonna be, you'll get familiar with it and then it's just, I'm expecting to be nervous about this because I don't know what this class is gonna be like. What is your plan for dealing with obstacles that may come your way?
- Vashti Hoosier: I guess the same way I've done all my life, you take it head-on. If you can fix it, you try to fix it. And if you can't, you find a way to deal with it. My boyfriend, he will most definitely help me with any obstacle that may be when the time comes. But I mean, I feel like you can't really have a plan for an obstacle, you deal with it when you get there.
- Zachary Burdick: I know for me, communication is the number one thing. And it seems so simple because in our experience, you respond back to an email. If there's a problem, you send somebody an email. But you'd be surprised that a lot of traditional college students don't have that mindset of I need to tell my professor something and it's okay for me to email them about this situation. And I found that tackling obstacles was way easier when you just emailed somebody instead of trying to do it all on your own and then expect people to understand. Do you plan to work while you're in school?
- Vashti Hoosier: Maybe towards my sophomore ... not my sophomore, my senior year, depending on how I can get my head wrapped around things. I would definitely like to work when we have down time in between classes and stuff like that, but I don't want to really get caught up in work because I become focused on that. Once I have a job and I'm learning it over, I want to be able to do my job to the best of my abilities. So I know my time will be split between doing school to the best of my abilities and then trying to perfect a craft of whatever it may be. So I probably won't work until the last year, unless it's necessary of course. But no, if I can hopefully make it, it will be the last year.

- Zachary Burdick: With that, pushing work towards your senior year, do you feel like you'd want that work to be related to your career goals to try and build that experience?
- Vashti Hoosier: Most definitely. Before I was in school and I thought I could handle the world, I applied to be a corrections officer, a detention officer. And I was like, oh it's gonna be easy, I'm gonna work this full-time and go to school full-time, the hours will just match up. But now that I'm in school, that's not realistic, for the side note. But I would definitely like to know what it would be like, an example of what doors that could open for me. Like I said, I've never been into corrections or probation or anything like that because I came from logistics. So I definitely would like my job in the future to be a stepping stone on that path.
- Zachary Burdick: Sure. And we've kind of touched bases on this one several times, but do you have career goals that motivated you to come back to college or start college again?
- Vashti Hoosier: Just wanting to take a leap of faith in a new direction. It was hard, because in the Air Force you make decent money, you get comfortable. You may not like your job but-
- Zachary Burdick: There's no blatant reason to leave, ever.
- Vashti Hoosier: Yeah, there's not. So I'm not gonna say that I wasn't happy, but I wasn't satisfied at all. There was no desire to progress in the career field that I was. And trust me, if I could have gotten juvenile probation officer and still been in the Air Force, I'd have picked it. I would have never left. But it wasn't there, so once I got out in this day and age you don't get too far without a degree. That's kind of what had driven me to go back to school to get to where I want to be.
- Zachary Burdick: And that leads right into the next question, do you think you need a degree?
- Vashti Hoosier: Yes. Yes, you do, in this day and age.
- Zachary Burdick: Since you've started coming to UNC Charlotte, what are your thoughts on your career and your work? Have they changed at all?
- Vashti Hoosier: No, they haven't changed but they have presented themselves where I feel like you have to stay focused. You can't lose it. You can get so lost in this. I see how people get carried away and stuff like that. And granted, I don't go out or anything, but it's just procrastinating, or I can wait to do this and this. And then you realize that your assignments are piling up and stuff like that. You have to

stay focused if you want this career and the work that you have to put in to get there, it's not easy.

Zachary Burdick: Totally. What are some reasons why you chose to pursue those specific current career goals?

Vashti Hoosier: Well the biggest reason why I feel like I chose a juvenile probation officer is because I feel like with probation you are in a transition. You've done something to be put in a situation where it's not the best, but now you're at a point in your life where you can either fix the situation and stay on the straight and narrow path, or you can end back up where you were at. You already know what it's like to be in a detention center or a jail or a prison, and now you have the opportunity to change that course. I kind of just want to be that person that helps them or guides them along that path to stay straight, to be a productive citizen honestly.

That's kind of where I'm at with it. I don't want to really be a counselor, because I feel like counseling, granted you can get counseling after. It's like a kid, you tell them the stove is hot, but they're not gonna stop trying to touch it until they realize themselves that it's hot. So I want to be there for when they touch it and they realize it's hot. Where do we go from here? What do we do different now.

Zachary Burdick: That's awesome.

Vashti Hoosier: That's why I picked my job.

Zachary Burdick: What are you doing to reach that goal then?

Vashti Hoosier: Currently just school.

Zachary Burdick: It's not a little thing to say currently just school.

Vashti Hoosier: I feel like there's more that I haven't ... there's so much more into being something like that than just an idea. And being in school, I just started so I haven't really jumped into any of the classes that would lead me there. I feel like it's such a bigger picture and school is just ... I just feel like there's more that I could be doing but I'm in school.

Zachary Burdick: Totally, that's an okay feeling to have. I know for me when I ran into the same thing, motivation, just kind of building that inward motivation. I know I want to be this, and wanting to be that helped me get through these classes where it's

like I know that calculus is not going to be something I care about in a few years, right?

Vashti Hoosier: Yes.

Zachary Burdick: That's awesome. Is there anything that would keep you from achieving your goal?

Vashti Hoosier: I don't want to say it like it's not reality, but reality. Things happen in life if where I did have to go back to work full-time, it wouldn't stop me from achieving my goal it would just prolong it. But as of right now there's nothing that I can think of that would stop me from achieving it. Even if reality did set in or change I would definitely try to still achieve it through whatever obstacles have presented themselves at that time, so no there's not.

Zachary Burdick: That's awesome. What does it mean to you to have a degree, get this degree?

Vashti Hoosier: What would it mean to me? I mean, in a way it would be a sense of pride because I feel like everybody should be proud of degree that they have. It took you and only ... well, not only you, but mostly you to obtain this, your time and your dedication into a career field that you've chosen. So to me it would be a little badge of honor that I finished this, I went through this. It would be a means to a bigger picture for me.

Zachary Burdick: Yeah, that's awesome. Well Vashti, I really appreciate you talking with me, I had a lot of fun and I wish you good luck.

Vashti Hoosier: Oh, thank you.

Zachary Burdick: And I'm sure you will do phenomenally.

Vashti Hoosier: Well thank you. It was night to meet you as well, Zach. You kind of got me over here missing the Air Force just a little bit. And I know that you'll be well. Just sitting here with you this side of the table, I can tell that you are an officer that the Air Force will need and that they should be lucky to have you once you do commission back in.

Zachary Burdick: Thank you.