

Bard Transfer Experience Podcast

00:00 Josh: And welcome everybody, to the latest edition of our podcast series. Today we're focusing on the transfer experience, once students arrive on campus. As always, I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission, and actually a former transfer student at Bard myself. I'm here with Mackie Siebens, our director of admission, hey Mackie!

00:22 Mackie: Hello Josh! As Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, I'm the Director of Admission. I graduated from Bard, I was not a transfer student, but I also graduated from Bard in 2012, and today we're joined by two community members, one of whom is a transfer student, and so I'm going to let them introduce themselves as we talk about the transfer experience! We'll start with you, Eric.

00:42 Eric: Yeah, so my name's Eric Doherty, I transferred in 2018, and I'll be graduating this May, of 20, and I'm an anthropology major.

00:55 Timand: My name is Timand Bates, I'm Associate Dean of Students, and part of my job is to oversee the transfer experience on campus, and I'm also an alum, of 2002. I graduated with a degree in Languages & Literature.

01:10 Mackie: Fabulous!

01:11 Josh: Great. So, our first question is what does the experience for transfers arriving on campus for the first time look like? When do they arrive, and what happens in those first few days that they're on campus?

01:23 Timand: Sure, so there's four days of orientation. The last week of August, the first day you arrive is a Tuesday, and there's an open period of time in which to register, from 10am to 2pm, and then the first two days are generally spent getting students acclimated to the campus, meeting people, social events, trying to "find your people", quote unquote. And the last two days, the Thursday and Friday, are more dedicated to academics: meeting with faculty, getting into certain classes, but I'm also curious to hear what Eric has to say, because he's done it most recently.

02:05 Eric: Yeah, right, that orientation week – actually I look back on that pretty fondly, because that's where I made my network, my first network, my first group of friends. A lot of them, I still am in contact with to this day, and yeah, it was great just kind of getting to know all of these different people while also being integrated into Bard from an academic setting as well. So, yeah I mean I guess it's kind of a lot at first, it feels like it's very overwhelming because, you know, not only are you entering this new academic sphere, but you're also, for some people entering a new town, as well, you know you're meeting all these professors, and all these staff and administrators, so in some ways, it can feel a little overwhelming, but I think the benefit of that week is that you're now entering the semester feeling much more prepared, and much more comfortable with jumping into the academics, because you've kind of already had this week to kind of vent some frustrations to your peers, or ask questions, navigate around campus, because I remember, coming in for just the tour, and just thinking, how am I going to navigate my way around this campus? This place is so huge, and you know there's all these walkways and pathways and stuff, so I think what I really appreciated about that orientation week, was this kind of frolic and explore, while also being able to ask these more intimate questions, like what does moderation look like? What does my academic semester look like?

03:52 Mackie: So, on that note, two sort of follow up questions. One is, what did moderation look like for you, and how were you advised to do it? We'll start there, and then I have a couple of other questions about the actual activities that take place during orientation and such.

04:07 Eric: Yeah, so I guess for each transfer student, moderation can be a little different, some students kind of want to moderate right away, I chose to moderate my second semester, which would be, you know, for a traditional Bard student, the second semester of their junior year, which might seem a little bit late, but I think the benefit to that is that you have a semester to really figure out if this is the right program for you, as well as kind of making a network of professors and other students, and particularly the network of professors is helpful because when you choose your moderation board, you know who you're choosing, they're familiar with you, they know your writing style, they can really kind of emphasize, or not emphasize, but offer some really valuable criticism or critiques as to how to make the best out of this moderation experience.

05:02 Mackie: And for those listening, we've mentioned moderation in several other podcasts, but moderation is Bard's version of declaring your major, which is a pretty intensive process where you usually prepare two papers, and present them to a board of faculty members, and have a discussion with them about your academic past and your future, where you might want to go and thinking about senior project, which every student has to complete as well, just for some additional context.

05:27 Josh: And coming in as a transfer, did you find that you changed your mind about what it was that you would want to major in, or were you pretty set that anthropology was what you wanted to moderate into?

05:38 Eric: So, I know a few transfer students who did change their mind. I knew what I wanted to moderate in, from the start, because at a community college I had this really great experience of traveling, and being able to go to this outside community. I was just working with a professor on testing water and soil samples for uranium contamination, and then the professor was like, "well you know, this thing that you're doing actually has a discipline, it's called anthropology, you might want to consider looking into it," and so I was like, "oh, okay, that's cool!" And so, I consider the discipline that chose me, so I came in already knowing what I wanted to do, but the thing is I still didn't know what anthropology was. So, my first semester here I took an intro course, I took a travel and tourism course, and was really getting to know the faculty, because even though I had this kind of experience at my previous school, I still wasn't 100% sure if that experience could be replicated in this school.

06:38 Josh: I think it's probably important to note for you listeners out there, depending on if you've come in as a junior, which I believe you mentioned that you had, students do have up to three years to complete their time here at Bard, and financial aid packages will last that long, so you do have a little bit of time to get ready for that moderation process, and if you do want to change your mind, you can, but you can also dive right into it. I know as a student, I dove right into it as well, and moderated in my second semester here, so great!

07:12 Mackie: So Timand, would you mind talking a little bit about not only some more specific ways of how transfer students are welcomed to the community, but also what the advising looks like, that you've seen across a variety of different students that are feeling perhaps differently than Josh and Eric did, who are maybe just coming to this place because it feels better for them, but they don't necessarily come in knowing that they want to be in anthropology or in music, in Josh's case.

07:39 Timand: Sure. So, the answer to the first part is that it's part of the job that I love the most, because I get to create opportunities for students to get together all around the Hudson Valley. It's not just getting to know the paths on campus, although that's part of it, it's also getting to know the new home. And so, we've done – and it changes every year – but we've done lots of fun stuff outdoors, we've gone on a 3 mile hike, I remember you very well, you were kind of asking all kinds of questions on the hike, where we hike all the way from campus to Tivoli through the woods along the river, we've also done, we've gotten canoes from the department of environmental conservation and gone out on the river itself, we've done a backstage tour of the Frank Gehry building on campus, the performing arts center, we've done apple, I guess peach picking, at that time of year, at a local farm, we've gone on a hike in the Catskills actually, over to the falls, and students get to choose. It's like choose your own adventure, you sort of pick which of these off-campus adventures you want to go on. And each of them ends in a dinner at a local Hudson Valley eatery, that we want students to know of, so they can go and get either a burger or a burrito or some barbecue. And then as far as the advising is concerned, students come to campus, and they have already set an adviser in the field that they wish to study in. They get to meet with that faculty member on I think the Thursday before classes begin, and just sort of go over what their trajectory would look like. We encourage students to do it either way, if they are set and they know they want to moderate, that's something we'll support – they know they want to moderate right away. There is another sort of kind of student that wants to experiment and take a variety of classes, and they would work with myself and their faculty adviser to make sure that that plan makes sense for them. Depending on what they would like their end date to be, but we like to try to give them the opportunity to have the liberal arts experience, and to really dabble before they commit. And so, I've seen – I don't advise this for every student – but I've seen a student who's landed here with two years to go, and has had three majors, moderates twice, and the second moderation was actually in the September of senior year. And then they started senior project in October. We want to be as flexible as possible, so that the students can have the experience they're looking for, and protect the fact that they are going to graduate in the time that they want to.

10:30 Mackie: Can we talk a little bit too about living on campus, and what the opportunities are for transfer students who are coming in, and may or may not want to live on campus itself? Do you want to start?

10:42 Eric: Sure, yeah. Because I think that this is definitely a really important area to consider, and I remember when I got my acceptance letter from Bard, that was the first thing I was thinking, is “how am I going to make this work?” I was in contact with Resident Housing, and just trying to navigate, do I even want to live on campus, because sometimes the financial aid package covers that, which is always a nice little plus, but I think navigating that was a little bit difficult for me, because room housing usually gets chosen the semester before, and so that offers very little space for, Bard accepts a lot of transfer students, not everybody gets a chance to live on campus. So, with that being said though, the people at ResLife connected me with other transfer students who were looking for housing, and so that's how I connected with my first roommate, because he was coming all the way from San Diego, and he was like, “I'm not even in your time zone, I don't know anything about this area, can we figure out a way to work this out?” I was like, “totally,” so I remember coming up here with my dad, and we were exploring the campus, and we were kind of exploring the outside communities, we were going to Tivoli and Red Hook, and trying to find a place that's affordable, but also safe and comfortable, and kind of acquires all these amenities. I would also say one of the benefits that I had than not many other transfer students have is that I have my own vehicle, something I would recommend, but if you are in an area where the shuttle is accessible, it's not necessary, but you know, just a little thing I would recommend.

12:31 Timand: It's nicer.

12:32 Eric: Yeah, right exactly, because then you know, there's so much going on, just outside of Red Hook and Tivoli too, Rhinebeck has these really great historical places, and really great places to eat, and then Kingston is just chock-full of really good stuff, and there's some music venues in the area too, so you really want to be able to explore all of that. But I mean, Bard offers things like ride shares, there are options. But kind of getting back to the housing, you know, I would definitely suggest, if a transfer student feels like they might not be living on campus, or maybe doesn't want to live on campus, find a roommate, or find some way to kind of accommodate that, but also start doing research early, because I kind of had to find a space within a month, and that can be kind of stressful at times. I'm super comfortable with the place I'm living at now, luckily it worked out, but I can't say it's the same for each student, as well.

13:35 Timand: I want to pick up on one thing Eric said, which is that you touched base with ResLife and they were helpful, even though you weren't living on campus.

13:42 Eric: Totally.

13:43 Timand: And I think that speaks to the ethos of the office, those folks really do want to make it possible for each student, what they are after. We've seen – so our modus operandi around transfer students is to get them integrated into the community, so that they don't feel as if they – there is no transfer dorm, for that purpose, right. So, what you can do, is call the Office of Residence Life and ask a little bit about – I would really recommend that for everyone, ask a little bit about where different places on campus would work for your situation. There are a lot of options. There's usually space in all sectors of the campus available. So, if you want to roll right out of bed and be right there next to classes and the cafeteria, there's usually something in Stone Row. If you want to be up in Manor, where there's a beautiful view of the Catskills out the back, and sort of private, up there, that can work too. And for those who are moving off campus, there is no central resource, so really just to call Residence Life, or call myself, and get advice. It's a big enough of a college, where there's lots of opportunity, I mean just outside of housing, just lots of opportunity. But it's small enough of a college where we can take calls and help individuals. So, I would advise everyone to do that. And one of the recent developments that we've pursued is a housing app, called Housing Review, that's only available so far on Apple devices, sorry google fans. But you can download Housing Review, and there are landlord reviews, about 85 of them, that go back to 2017, so you can start to find out, who are the – which Bard students, which places Bard students would advise you to live in. So, there's some resources on that side too.

15:44 Eric: Yeah, and if I could just add quickly to that, I think that's super important, because that's one of the first places that I looked at was really run down, unfortunately, it really wasn't in great of a condition, and the landlord was charging just as much there as they are at the place I'm currently staying at, which is a huge leap in condition. So, I think having these reviews accessible, is super helpful. So, thank you for that!

16:11 Josh: And I think this is an important thing for the subset of listeners who may be part of our Return to College Program, for students who are transfers who are over the age of 24, and actually are required to live off campus, this can be a great resource if you're not already in the local area.

16:27 Mackie: Yeah! So, I guess before we close out, any words of advice, any additional things you want to share for someone that's maybe considering transferring? Any thoughts?

16:41 Timand: I would say that you will – and it is my view – and I think it’s shared by most people who come to the college, that you will land in a good place. To know that we consider students like family, I mean I’ve had transfer events, and I should say too, the transfer events don’t just end at the end of orientation, we do fall meets spring events, so that people can meet each other, I’ve had transfer students over to my home, we sit in the living room, we have a fireplace, we roast marshmallows on the hearth, and talk about moderation. So, that’s the kind of school you’re going to. And yet, even though it’s sort of, you know, hanging around with a dean in his living room sounds informal, it’s still an extremely serious place. You can realize – this is going to sound corny – but you can realize your dreams in academics at a place like Bard, because you have access to world class faculty, who want to work with students, in the undergraduate world. So that’s my belief.

17:48 Eric: Yeah, I would say just kind of on top of that, which I think is super great and it speaks to, the moderation but also building relationships with your professors and your peers, just to be as transparent, open, and honest as possible, especially with advisers, because often they’re seeing a lot of students, and one of the first things I said is “hey I’m a transfer student, I’m totally new to this whole thing, and my adviser, I’m going to plug his name, Duff, he’s 100% fantastic, I would recommend anybody just even visiting him for open office hours, to talk about it, he’s great. He’s like, “okay, so what we’re going to do is just have a very brief meeting, and then I want you to come back, and we’ll spend an hour, or more, just kind of, he laid out my whole schedule for me, he made an Excel document, he’s like “when do you want to graduate?”, I was like, “two years”, and he goes “okay, let’s make it happen,” he color-coded the thing, even, and laid this whole thing out. And you know, I followed that plan, and it totally worked out. So, I think being open to your advisers and saying, this is what I want to do, this is what I’m not sure of, here I am. They take these situations seriously, because I do think that the professors have the students’ best interests in their mind, and for students that might be coming in, and not too sure what they want to do, I would make another plug for the ELAS classes, which stand for Engaged Liberal Arts and Sciences, it’s a way of taking classroom theory and integrating it into the community, and exploring this interdisciplinary approach of taking – say you want to fulfill a distribution requirement for a lab science, there’s an ELAS class that’s on cider making, or fermentation, where you get to make cider, or beer, or cheese, and you get to go across the river and visit these cideries, or Montgomery Place, and see where the apples are coming from, there’s another class where you get an internship at Family of Woodstock, or Ferncliff Nursing Home. It’s a way of being able to still play with this quote unquote free time that you may have, while also exploring your own interests, and figuring out, how do I kill two birds with one stone, how do I fulfill this requirement, while also trying to figure out more about what I want to do for senior year. And I think sometimes those also turn into senior projects, or they turn into internships, or jobs even, so those classes have legs to them.

20:28 Mackie: Great.

20:28 Josh: Excellent.

20:29 Mackie: Well thank you both for joining us, it’s been a pleasure! And for those listening, as always, if you have questions, please reach out to us at admission@bard.edu, and take a listen to some of our other podcasts, we’re making more and more every week!

20:46 Josh: We look forward to next time!