

Interview with: ALYSSA GATES

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Lily Jandrisevits

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript: Alyssa Gates

Interviewee: Alyssa Gates

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Summary: Alyssa Gates talks about her early personal life growing up in Windsor, New York before attending Mansfield College and Kutztown University. She then joined Marist in the Center for Student Athlete Enhancement as an intern, before eventually becoming the director. Gates talks about how she has seen the department change and grow while she has been at Marist, as well as honors and awards she has gotten while director. She also discusses her experience going to New York City Pride as a college and being a part of the LGBTQ subdivision of the diversity council.

Gus Nolan ([00:00](#)):

Today is Wednesday, January 10th, and we have the privilege of interviewing Alyssa Gates, who is director of the Marist College Student Advancement Program, as I understand it. Ordinarily, today will be the ordinarily too. We'd like to do kind of a background. Your early years, college, employment at the college, the genesis, how did you come to Marist? That's three parts. And the fourth part your experience at Marist, what happened and what you've done here. When we take too long to go through that, could you just say a few words where you were born? The family, elementary school?

Alyssa Gates ([00:51](#)):

So, yeah, I grew up in a small town outside of Binghamton, New York, called Windsor. I graduated with a class of 120 students, so a really tiny place. I was--.

GN ([01:03](#)):

Graduated at what level?

AG ([01:05](#)):

My high school graduating class was 120.

GN ([01:07](#)):

Did you go to grade school?

AG ([01:08](#)):

Yes, I went to grade school. Yes. I went to elementary school in the town next door, it was called Kirkwood. Another very small town, part of the Windsor Central School District.

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GN ([01:18](#)):

The student part in the class was 20 students.

AG ([01:21](#)):

120.

GN ([01:22](#)):

In the class?

AG ([01:23](#)):

Yep.

GN ([01:24](#)):

Oh, okay. That's interesting because now you're dealing with 600 students. So, I said to myself, there might be a carryover here. Through grade school, particular interests. Did you read? Did you have a hobby? Did you have friends?

AG ([01:41](#)):

Yes. I loved reading. I loved being around my friends. I loved writing. I loved sports. I became interested in sports. Yes.

GN ([01:49](#)):

I see hockey, other things. Did you swim?

AG ([01:54](#)):

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I did not swim. We did not have a pool in my school at the time, they do now, but they didn't then.

GN ([02:00](#)):

Move on to high school. How big is the high school?

AG ([02:06](#)):

The high school was maybe about 500 students. Tiny. Also, so I'm used to being in small places, yeah.

GN ([02:14](#)):

Curriculum. Do you take things like physics, chemistry, foreign language?

AG ([02:21](#)):

Yes.

GN ([02:21](#)):

You did all those things?

AG ([02:23](#)):

Yes, I did the Regents New York State Regent's Diploma. Was what I did, you know, back in the day.

GN ([02:28](#)):

Oh, I'm familiar with that.

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AG ([02:29](#)):

Yes, yes. I did not do physics though, just for the record. I had finished my science credits and I was like, I tried it for one day and I was like, you know what? I think I'm good [laugh]. I think I'm good here.

GN ([02:39](#)):

How about foreign language?

AG ([02:41](#)):

Yes. I did French. Which I wish I did Spanish, because obviously Spanish is much more popular in this country than French.

GN ([02:49](#)):

The elite speak French.

AG ([02:53](#)):

Yes. If I could remember, I'd be great.

GN ([02:58](#)):

Quel age as vous? No, I said all my French. Now just narrowing these four sentences. In high school, well, give me some of the other things you did you like, for instance well, sports, hobbies, travel, summer program. Did you work in the summer? Say something about those things.

AG ([03:20](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

I was obviously very involved in sports, and then I also was in the student government. I was a peer mentor, so I had a mentee, she was a freshman student when I was a senior, so I helped her with the transition. I did drama, I did chorus. I did pretty much everything you could do in high school. And it was, you know, in the day when you weren't really worrying about a resume, didn't know what that was. So it wasn't like just to pad a resume. It was, and I never felt like anybody forced me. My mother wasn't like, you have to do all these things. I just really enjoyed it and it allowed me to be around different types of people.

GN ([03:54](#)):

How about drama on the stage? Did you--.

AG ([03:55](#)):

Oh, I loved being on the stage, believe it or not.

GN ([03:58](#)):

Oh, hard to believe that.

AG ([03:59](#)):

I'm not sure. I was very good, but I would love being on the stage, in a supporting role.

GN ([04:06](#)):

Summer program. Did you work during the summer?

AG ([04:09](#)):

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So in the summers I worked, not until like before my senior year of college. I worked at like a summer resort up in the Catskills. And so I did that for a summer. It was mostly just waitressing. But I did things like that. But for the most part, I was supposed to be training for my field hockey season, whether I was doing a good job of that. I don't know.

GN ([04:32](#)):

Tell me about Mansfield University. Where is that?

AG ([04:35](#)):

So, Mansfield University is actually closer to New York State than it is Penn, the big hub of Pennsylvania. So it's, it's about 45 minutes south of Elmira, New York. So being from Binghamton, I was familiar with that part of Pennsylvania. And I ended up going there to play field hockey, and I had a small athletic scholarship. They were a Division II school, so my parents were very excited about having to pay a little less, although I paid it really. And so, I did that. Primarily I went there because I really enjoyed the field hockey coach when I met her on my recruiting visit. And they had a communications program. I was very interested in broadcasting at the time. And they had a really strong communications program. I had a great conversation with an admissions counselor who'd come to my school and high school. And I really enjoyed, you know, the way that they could like tailor the program. When I went to visit the campus and I spoke with some faculty, there was a lot of opportunity for students to get involved in things like the Grammys and the Emmys, and you know, they had a lot of former students working in the field. So, I was like, this seems like a no brainer. This is a place I would love to go.



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GN ([05:40](#)):

Did you do that? Did you get involved in programming?

AG ([05:42](#)):

I did.

GN ([05:43](#)):

Did you announce any game or anything?

AG ([05:45](#)):

I did, yes. I got to be an announcer for a baseball game. I only did it once. I filled in for somebody. I was the color commentator. And then the other guy did play by play. But I also got to work the Grammy Awards. I got to work the International Emmy Awards, and I got to work a Monday night football game because my professors were just super connected with former students who were working in the field. And they needed, you know, the Monday night football staff at ABC sports was on strike one year, and so they needed some scrubs to come and fill in. And so, he sent a bunch of students and we got to go work a Patriots game in Foxborough.

GN ([06:22](#)):

I see.

AG ([06:22](#)):

Yeah. So, I got to be a part of some really cool things as a college student.

GN ([06:25](#)):

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How big is the student body? Bigger than Marist?

AG ([06:28](#)):

No, it's a little smaller. It's about maybe like 4,000, three and a half, 4,000 people. So, it's a smaller institution. I think that's something I've always really kind of been drawn to. I've always been at smaller places where I could kind of get to know the people.

GN ([06:41](#)):

Yeah. What, like 60% women and 40% men.

AG ([06:45](#)):

Yeah.

Jan Stivers ([06:47](#)):

We don't all consider that a negative, Gus [laugh].

GN ([06:52](#)):

No. Except at Marist now all the awards go to women [laugh].

JS ([06:56](#)):

Finally.

GN ([06:57](#)):

Yeah. And, it's interesting. I was talking to a fellow who we hoped to interview and I talked about some former days at Marist we used to have what they call River Day.

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AG (07:08):

Yeah.

GN (07:09):

It was a wild drinking day, you know.

AG (07:10):

Yes.

GN (07:10):

He said that does not do good for drawing women, [laugh] good women to the college. Bad women, yes. But not really good scholars, you know? I said, oh, thank God we got rid of it because the campus was a disaster after that. Did you go to graduate school right after college?

AG (07:30):

No, after college, I went and took my first job. I was a head field hockey coach after college. I just wasn't really-- I felt very out of sorts when my career ended. Many athletes go through this. You kind of identify as an athlete for so long, and then you really don't know what to do with this piece of yourself that doesn't really exist anymore. So, I got into coaching, and it was really to fill a void. So, I moved to Lexington, Kentucky after college. And I took a job at Transylvania University. And I was the head field hockey coach. So, I'm 22 years old and I'm the head field hockey coach, and I'm an assistant athletic director, and I'm helping out with other functions in the athletic department. And I really enjoyed that experience. But I was really not a fan of coaching and being part of the experience of just being on the road all the time and feeling like,

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you know, once you're not playing, you're recruiting. So, I did that for two years and then I went to graduate school.

GN ([08:30](#)):

Is the salary enough to support yourself well in that kind of a job?

AG ([08:36](#)):

Not really. No. And it depends on where you're living. You know, I was in Lexington, Kentucky at the time, a little, you know, cheaper to live than here. But it was still tough. It was tough because the salary is really-- I think I made \$25,000 that first year. You know, which is, you know, more than some people make, but it was tough. You had to really kind of watch yourself.

GN ([08:56](#)):

Yeah. Move onto to the graduate school because I looked on TV, not on TV on my computer, and I saw the stadium. That's a major stadium, at least the pictures I saw on, how do you pronounce this thing? Kaiser town?

AG ([09:16](#)):

Kutztown.

GN ([09:16](#)):

Kurtztown.

AG ([09:17](#)):

Yeah. Kutztown.

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GN ([09:18](#)):

Kutztown University.

AG ([09:19](#)):

Yes.

GN ([09:20](#)):

And it is very much like Marist, it seemed to me in terms of, first it was just a normal school.

And then it became a college and then a university, you know, and grew in the development of, I guess, the programs and the staff and the faculty. But I guess its state supported, is that right?

AG ([09:41](#)):

Yes. It's a state school. It's kind of like a SUNY, but in Pennsylvania. So, and my undergrad was at the same, it was at Mansfield. So same type of school.

GN ([09:50](#)):

Yeah, I check my watch. I have five minutes [laugh]. Tell me about the genesis of Marist. How did you come here?

AG ([10:00](#)):

So, I was doing my master's work at Kutztown in student affairs and higher education. I had kind of decided at that point that I obviously was getting out of coaching. I coached for a little while at Kutztown. It was part of a graduate assistantship, so they would pay for my master's. But I knew ultimately I wanted to get into academic advising because I had a really good academic advisor in college. She worked with all only athletes. And I thought, wow, what a great job. It

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allows me to stay in sports, but now I can be on the academic side. So that I knew was my goal and luckily enough when I was in graduate school, they cut all of the graduate assistant positions in athletics, which sounds horrible at the time, but it forced me to get a different one. And I applied for the one in advising. I wanted to do the advising one, it was just the campus advising office, but I knew if I got some advising experience, maybe I took on a small catchment of student athletes. I could get some, you know, better experience that way. So that's what I did. And so, when I was looking to fulfill my internship requirement for my graduate work, I was living in Newburgh and commuting to Kutztown a couple days a week. So, I really wanted to get something in this area. Marist, I knew had an academic support program specifically for student athletes. So, I stalked the website for a few years until I found that somebody was leaving and I could fill in as the intern. So, I took a ten-month position in the fall of 2004 and worked in the Center for Student Athlete Enhancement as the intern. Assuming that when May came, I would graduate from Kutztown, get my degree, and then start applying for jobs elsewhere. But coming here was really just supposed to be a temporary stop for an internship requirement.

GN ([11:39](#)):

Twenty years later, yeah.

AG ([11:40](#)):

Twenty years later, here we are. Yeah.

JS ([11:41](#)):

I heard that term "stalked" the website.

AG ([11:43](#)):

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I did. I stalked. I was like, when is that girl leaving? I need that job. Yeah.

GN ([11:48](#)):

I see that. I must have been asleep at the wheel, I didn't know anything about this advice. I knew (?) was a good friend we had racquetball and all things, around the sports places a lot and all sort. I never knew that there was this advisement program going on and you know, people were studying and I mean, I always used to wonder how students get on the road and go someplace for overnight and come back and take a test the next two days later because they're not excused.

AG ([12:21](#)):

Right, right.

GN ([12:21](#)):

Because you still had to follow the rules, you know? We do not allow students of Marist when I was here to attend Marist and live in the dormitory, you had to show up for class. They had the three cuts, you were in trouble, you know. So this was-- I didn't realize such a program was in existence. And so now that you got here and, I don't know. Well, you ought to tell Jan about where you stayed because, that's--.

JS ([12:57](#)):

Before we get to that. So first, could you give us an overview of your role as director, let me get the title right, Student Athlete Enhancement?

AG ([13:05](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

Yes. Could I get a longer title? It used to be longer, but anyways, they changed it. So, my main responsibility is to oversee the academic support programs for all 630-40, however many we have, depending on the semester of our student athletes. So, what that entails is we--.

GN ([13:22](#)):

You said senior athletes, or all?

AG ([13:24](#)):

Student athletes. All athletes.

GN ([13:25](#)):

Oh student.

AG ([13:26](#)):

Student athletes. Yep. So, my responsibility is advising all of our teams. I have staff, so we kind of all have specific teams that we work with, but I oversee our staff to make sure that they're meeting the needs of our student athletes. We oversee the monitoring of their academic eligibility, so to make sure that they're maintaining all of the requirements that the NCAA has for them to compete. So, we check those throughout the year twice, after each semester. And then we also provide academic support by way of tutoring. We work with the Learning Center here in the library, and then other resources that are available on campus, writing center, some of which we brought to our area in McCann. So, for instance, Elizabeth Clarke comes up twice a week to our center and just has office hours. We have someone from the writing center who comes up once a week and does office hours. So, we try to pull some of the resources on campus to them. And it's just constantly assessing those needs and determining, all right, is this something we



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should continue? Do we need to add another day of this? Do we need to take back a day? Are they using the services? And then it's monitoring their progress throughout the semester. So, checking in with faculty, finding out how they're doing. Do we need to have an intervention? Is there somebody that needs additional support? And then on the other side of that is all of the student athlete development programming. So, the academic support is one piece, but then we're also trying to make sure they develop into good humans, right. So, it's getting out into the community and volunteering. It's helping them get their resumes up to par and up to speed and making sure that they're taking advantage of leadership opportunities, whether it's on campus or off campus.

GN ([15:05](#)):

Hold on just a second there. You got an award, whether you guys got the award for this ministering the good work good deeds work, whatever.

AG ([15:18](#)):

Okay. The Mac Good Works Award. Yeah.

GN ([15:20](#)):

Yeah. And I was wondering, are you tied into the ministry program? Like feeding the lunch hour and all that. That's all part of how you get these guys to be able to do things.

AG ([15:32](#)):

Yeah. Some of our contacts are kind of just within our, our department, but we do work with campus ministry for some things. Absolutely.

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GN ([15:40](#)):

Oh yeah. Okay. Saw that, and I said, I wonder if that's part of, yeah. Because it's impressive the number of hours and you know, we get an award for that. What's 40 Under 40? What is that about?

JS ([15:56](#)):

I'm going to come to that later, Gus. There's a lot of awards, but we're going to get to that towards the end. You were talking about--.

GN ([16:03](#)):

I just wanted to get something out of my own head. Go ahead.

JS ([16:06](#)):

You were talking about how you connect and collaborate with other entities on campus. You mentioned a few. Are there any others you want to mention while we're on that topic?

AG ([16:17](#)):

Oh, absolutely. So obviously, Center for Advising and Academic Service, Center for Multicultural Affairs, the library Academic Learning Center, registrar, a lot with the registrar. You know, a lot of places, accommodations. So, I know I missed first year programs.

JS ([16:32](#)):

Housing?

AG ([16:33](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

Housing to some degree. Not as much. Now that we have a living and learning community for athletes, we do a little bit more with them than we have in the past. But yeah, there's a floor for freshmen, female athletes to try to improve retention and connections. Yeah. So, I couldn't do this without all the wonderful people on this campus. For sure.

JS ([16:52](#)):

You did not mention faculty, and I know that your outreach to faculty is wonderful. And your responsiveness to faculty.

AG ([17:00](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. You know, our-- we want to make sure that, that our athletes have good relationships with faculty, and sometimes we have to, you know, mitigate those, and sometimes we have to initiate them. So, anything we can do to support faculty.

JS ([17:13](#)):

And you monitor.

AG ([17:13](#)):

Yep. Absolutely.

JS ([17:14](#)):

I always felt that was distinctive. What are the most common challenges that Marist student athletes face?

AG ([17:21](#)):

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Their time constraints for sure. You know, they don't have the time that a typical student has to complete all of their work, because again, they're on the road or they've got a lot of, you know, training. There are limitations within the NCAA of how much they can practice per week, but, you know, sometimes they may take extra time to do stuff on their own, whether it's an extra workout, getting in some extra shots on the court, watching some film, meeting with a coach. So, all of those things add up for them. And I think that's one of the biggest challenges is how do you maintain, you know, your good standing and sometimes your great standing. You want to be a really excellent student without sacrificing your time in the classroom. So, I think that's a big part of it.

I think another piece for them is, you know, trying to manage all of the different entities that they have to have relationships with. So, whether it's a coach, faculty member, an advisor, you know, someone else in the athletic department, a sports medicine staff. You know, recognizing that those relationships are all very valuable, not skipping any steps and knowing that those are all going to be very different types of relationships. So, understanding that they're important. You know, there's a thing we ask them all the time, you know, if you're-- if we find they've been late to class, the first thing I say is, would you be late to practice? You know, would you be late to a game? No, of course not. You wouldn't want to disappoint your coach. Well, think of your faculty member in the same way. They're putting in a lot of time and effort to prepare for your training, your academic training. And so, if you're missing that time with them, it sends a message that it's not as valuable or not as important. So, I think that's another challenge for them. It's seeing how valuable these relationships are. And this isn't just someone that may write you a letter of recommendation down the road. This is someone who is influencing every single day of your life here, because you are learning from them. And it's not just so you can get

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a good grade in the class. It's so you can learn something and go out of here with more knowledge.

JS ([19:16](#)):

Every single one of them on campus needs to know there's not just the athletes.

AG ([19:19](#)):

I know, it's very true. Yes. I teach a class, and I definitely feel that.

GN ([19:23](#)):

One question on this. Is there any finance involved in this? In other words, do you have to pay particular people to do the services? Because they're on campus, there are specialists who you have a budget to kind of--.

AG ([19:40](#)):

Yes.

GN ([19:40](#)):

Take care of some of these extra activity. I don't know, just aware, but I just suspect with all the interaction, time is always an important factor. And if all the time is involved, you know, it's not free, you know?

AG ([19:58](#)):

Yes. No, it's not free, for sure.

JS ([20:00](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

I want to talk a little bit more about the program.

AG ([20:02](#)):

Okay.

JS ([20:03](#)):

Can you-- are there any parts of your program that you are particularly proud of? Anything that's sort of a different approach, innovative, that you want to tell us about?

AG ([20:12](#)):

Yeah, I think our student groups are really what I'm most proud of, because it allows me to do the things I'm really passionate about. And that's helping them develop into good humans and good people. And so, when I first got here, I really was only focused on academic advising. You know, we didn't have the staff to really expand much beyond that. But as my staff has grown, and, you know, I've become more knowledgeable and more connected, I really have tried to expand us into the student athlete development realm, which on many campuses, it is its own department. So, there's academics and then there's student athlete development. And there are two separate departments on a lot of campuses. They're all the same. And we all wear many hats. And, and I always try to sell that to my, you know, possible candidates. You're going get to do so many things. It's not as exciting as it used to be for people. But I think our student groups, we have a female leadership groups, so they're just a group of student athletes who are female leaders. They're called LEAP. And that group was started over ten years ago. And, you know, once you're starting a new group, it's sometimes hard because people don't know what the purpose is and what are you buying into and what is the commitment. But over the years, that

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group has really grown, and they do all different types of events. And you allow student athletes to really step up and say, all right, I want do this. How do we execute? How do we get from point A to point B? And how can we assist you without taking it over? Right. I can easily call, you know, someone on campus and book you a room. I can easily, easily, you know, have like, you know, a grocery store run and get you some snacks for your event or catering for your event. But how can we help you learn how to put together an event and develop a leadership role. We have the Black Student Athlete Alliance, which is a newer group that started in 2020. And I think one of the proudest things I've done with that group is we went to the Black Student Athlete Summit in May in LA, we took twelve student athletes to the summit, me and five coaches. And it was just an amazing experience for them, an amazing experience for me, for them to walk into a space where they saw so many people that look like them.

JS ([22:14](#)):

Men and women?

AG ([22:15](#)):

Yes. They've never had that before. You know, a lot of them, you know, they're at a PWI, they're looking around seeing, you know, predominantly white students. And so, to walk into this space and see these PhDs and these scholars and these mental health professionals and other students and coaches and people who have had a lot of success in their given field who are also black, really had an impact on them. And it certainly had an impact on me to watch them experience that. And they got to make a lot of contacts. They had people look at their resume, they go through kind of this little mini job fair. And so, we're planning to do that again this year. And it's just been such a rewarding experience. We have a peer mentor group, so we have upperclassmen,

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junior and senior athletes who mentor an incoming freshmen. The coolest thing about that program is when you watch a freshman become a mentor, because they got so much out of the program when they were first here, and they're like, I want to give back now. Our service programs, our student athletes who've gone out into, you know, the community and given back and really been rewarded by that experience in ways they didn't really expect. So, I think those are the things that I'm really most proud of. The opportunities to have our students step up to a challenge and take something head on. Even if they don't have a specific leadership role or title, just knowing that they have the ability to make great change on our campus and in our world.

JS ([23:38](#)):

The development part that you're talking about that's separate from--.

AG ([23:40](#)):

Yep. Absolutely.

GN ([23:42](#)):

You dropped word in there, MAC, which is the ten schools, twelve schools. How many in that-- are they all the same league as it were you all participate in the same, or you don't do much with it at all?

AG ([23:58](#)):

No, they don't do as much because honestly, their staffs are often smaller. We have more people here, but because we have football, so the other schools in the MAC don't have football. So usually there's one or two people doing my job at those schools, and they really have to focus mostly on the academic things. They may have some service component, or they may have some,



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you know, outreach things. But to my knowledge, most of the staff at the schools in the MAC don't do as much as we do, because when we do talk to them, it's, yeah. They're kind of spread very thin.

GN ([24:31](#)):

Are all the MAC schools pretty equal? Iona, Marist, Fairfield, Rider (?). I mean--.

AG ([24:37](#)):

Equal in what way?

GN ([24:40](#)):

Whatever equality is.

AG ([24:41](#)):

I mean, yeah. I mean--.

GN ([24:43](#)):

Number of students, we're Division I, right?

AG ([24:46](#)):

Yep. We're Division I.

GN ([24:47](#)):

So right away to do that, you have to have a population of a certain number to be able to qualify.

And so, that's part of it. And then the number of sports. Do we have hockey here?

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AG ([25:03](#)):

We don't have varsity hockey. We have a club hockey team, but yeah, we don't have varsity hockey. Like Quinnipiac has a varsity hockey team. They're division I hockey team, but we don't have that here.

GN ([25:11](#)):

Yeah. We used to have football only as a club thing too, you know. And that took--.

AG ([25:15](#)):

Eventually things come to varsity. Yeah.

GN ([25:17](#)):

Okay. Yeah. I just wanted to clarify that. Yeah. My idea, all those schools, they're not all in the same league in the same way. Volleyball, swimming, diving, not all of them are varsity sports, I guess.

AG ([25:33](#)):

Right. Exactly.

JS ([25:35](#)):

How does your program support, or what do you have in place to support their ability to succeed after college?

AG ([25:46](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

So that's partnerships again, and I've neglected to mention Center for Career Services another, you know, office that we partner with. So, it's an opportunity for us to put them in front of professionals who do this for a living. I can look at a resume. I've seen a million of them, but I would rather somebody in that office do that because they're going to understand, hey, if you're going into accounting, you need to focus on these things. If you're going into finance, focus on this, if your education. So, I feel that those are better resources for them. So, you know, we encourage them to make, you know, appointments with those folks on Handshake now instead of Fox Quest, what it used to be, and taking advantage of those opportunities, workshops, career fairs, those sorts of things.

JS ([26:26](#)):

I see you also bring in your own graduates.

AG ([26:29](#)):

Yes. I was going to get to that. Yes. So our alumni are tremendously giving any-- I have never had an alumni say, no, thank you. I'm not interested in helping out. I've had them say, no, I can't get there that time of year, or I have a previous engagement. But aside from travel restrictions and calendar, you know, conflicts, they come and I'm very, very, very grateful to them because they really are the best spokespeople for our programs and this college to say, look what I've been able to accomplish after I've left here. You can also have this opportunity. So, our alumni are a huge part of our program. I'm really just so lucky to have such a group of wonderful individuals who have remained connected. You know, I've been very fortunate to be able to go to, much to my wife's dismay, a lot of weddings, [laugh] a lot of weddings. And I've been, you know, there to hold their new babies. And I've been at their homes to have dinner with them and

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their families. And I've been to their funerals when their families have passed or their parents have passed. And so our alumni are really a huge part of this success, and they're a huge part of the reason that I am who I am, honestly.

GN ([27:46](#)):

You said that sad word, funeral. Joan Gambeski, you knew her.

AG ([27:53](#)):

Yes.

New Speaker ([27:54](#)):

I mean, when you talked about alumni coming to things. I can just think of her work and getting so many--.

AG ([28:03](#)):

Oh, yes. It's a great example. She was a great example. Yeah. Absolutely. So, yeah, our alumni are really just, I mean-- and they're also the ones I call when I'm frustrated. A lot of times I call them and I'm like, remember how annoying you were your sophomore year? I have your twin. Your twin is here. You know, so, and you know, they, they oftentimes will call me and say, Hey, I just want to say thank you. I was a real pain in the neck, wasn't I? And I'm like, [affirmative]. But we're good now. All good. You graduated.

JS ([28:34](#)):

Relationships, that's what keeps us going, isn't it?

AG ([28:36](#)):

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Yes. They are. They are a huge part of my family. They're-- I don't have children of my own. And when I first started out, I was probably more like a big sister in age in terms of our age difference. And now of course, I'm more like their mother. But they're really like my family. And, you know, to be able to celebrate their successes and all of the, you know, the life changes that they experience and all of those wonderful, you know, things that they go through is really special.

JS ([29:03](#)):

I'm going to move a little bit. To just the whole student enhancement field. How has the landscape changed in the years that you've been in the field?

AG ([29:14](#)):

It's changed dramatically. I think we have kind of gotten sucked in a little to the big business of college athletics. When I first started in this field, it was pretty popular. And it's continued to grow. It was very competitive for a very long time. It was hard to get a job in this field. and I've noticed that over the last couple years, post COVID, you know, the job market is pretty saturated, so we are not getting people with as much experience. We're getting folks who maybe are just looking for employment. And a lot of times you hear people who are, you know, this is the word athletic is in here, or student athlete is in the title for a job posting. So, they're like, oh, I like sports. This sounds like a good job for me.

And what's happened with some of the bigger schools is they've kind of had to shift gears. For instance, the NIL, which is the name image and likeness legislation that was just passed now allows athletes to be compensated or seek endorsement deals. And we're not quite at that level. We have some athletes that are doing very small things, but at big schools, they've

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hired staff just to manage that. And that has fallen on a lot of my colleagues in this field because you're dealing with athletes in that capacity and trying to advise them to do the right thing and, you know, not to sign anything. And so, my convention, our national convention, the topics have changed. There's a lot more of that sort of stuff. And there's a lot more conversations about mental health than ever before, which we need to have. There's a lot more conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, which we needed to have. There's some tracks that they've developed to try to give people some direction, alright, if you want to do this track or that track, there's always a DEI track now there's always a mental health track, and now there's going to be all this other stuff to help us navigate some of the changing landscape of college athletics. But it's complicated and it takes away from some things sometimes because you don't have the ability to just kind of do the regular day-to-day things because now these athletes have just another level of distraction.

The transfer portal has also changed the landscape. So, athletes can now go into what is an online portal, if they want to transfer, they used to have to get permission and go through a lot more of a process. But it's easy now. And with the way that we've kind of become in our society, there's this expectation that I'm going to get what I want to get, and if I'm not getting it, I'll find it elsewhere. And so, a lot of athletes prematurely go into this transfer portal looking for their next best place. And nobody's interested, at least that's happening here. So now they're stuck without a school, because once you go in the transfer portal, you technically can't come out. Now we have an appeal process for our student athletes. So, if they go in the transfer portal and they're not picked up by anybody else, they don't get a better opportunity. We can-- they can appeal to come back. And for the most part, we grant those appeals if the coach is willing to take the student back. But that's also hard. It's hard to look at your teammates and say, hey, I thought I was going

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to go here, and I thought I was better than you all, so I was going to split town, but now I don't have any offers, so I guess I have to come crawling back. It's a difficult situation and I think--.

JS ([32:34](#)):

For the teammates too.

AG ([32:35](#)):

Yes, absolutely. But it's changed the way we do our jobs. You know, and fortunately here, we're not in an institution like, you know, a Michigan. But there's, you know, there's definitely some pressures that those schools feel when it comes to this stuff. There's probably coaches that are like, hey, an academic person, you've got to do whatever you can to keep Johnny here. I can't have him go in the transfer portal. I don't want to lose him. So, you've got to make sure he's going to class doing his work and there can't be any issues. And so, there's a lot more pressure on folks in the field than there ever has been before.

JS ([33:07](#)):

Wow. I'm glad you brought up all those different aspects.

GN ([33:11](#)):

I was just going to ask about that. You mentioned Michigan. And, you know, the \$30,000 pay that the school was giving them, you know, and this is going to get very complicated.

AG ([33:24](#)):

It's very complicated.

GN ([33:25](#)):

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It's going to change college sports on that level entirely, you know? It's just, it's pro, it's trading school for professionals, you know?

AG ([33:35](#)):

It's very complicated. I'm glad I'm in a place like this, to be honest [laugh].

JS ([33:38](#)):

Under your leadership, the Student Athlete Enhancement Programs received program certification N4A the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics. So, this sounds to me similar to what the academic side of the house goes through with accreditation. And that is quite a process. So, I have two parts to this question. One is, what are the metrics that you are required to provide to achieve that distinction? And what's your takeaway from the process?

AG ([34:10](#)):

So, we did the process over ten years ago. I would love to do it again. And it was a voluntary process. It was not a requirement. So, CAS standards does not have an assessment for our kind of area. So, there's no-- when you're doing a CAS assessment, you know, they have kind of a standard template pretty much for every college department. So, there's one for your accommodations folks. There's one for first year programs, there's one for your multicultural office services.

JS ([34:39](#)):

So, CAS is?

AG ([34:41](#)):



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CAS is the College Assessment Standards.

JS ([34:44](#)):

Is it within athletics? Because we would talk about middle state standards.

AG ([34:47](#)):

Right. So, CAS is a higher education assessment system. So, they have kind of developed these questions and these assessment survey questions for all different departments, but there doesn't, there's not one in existence for academic support for student athletes. So, we kind had to make up our own when we did our CAS assessment. But this particular one allowed us to kind of get some more specificity from an industry professional. So, the consultants that come in are people that do what I do at other schools. And so, the process is just like doing any other type of accreditation. You have to provide a lot of paper, a lot of reports. Yes. Essentially that's what it is. And what came out of it was that we were operating in a really good space. We had a lot of good programs and like everybody else, they recommended more space, a bigger facility and more staff, which is typically what you hear. And nobody really like, gives you that. They're like, well, that was nice of them to do that, but we're not getting that right now. So, for me, it was good for me to be able to say, okay, we're meeting specific benchmarks when it comes to providing the right support, monitoring, eligibility, you know, keeping track of, you know, documents and things that are, you know, student central. So, hearing from a professional in our field who was kind of an outsider stepping in was a really good thing. And it was really helpful for us. And you know, the recommendations they gave us, aside from facilities and staffing, were also really helpful. Hey, tweak this form, or maybe this process could be streamlined a little bit

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better. Or here's my recommendation. So, it was-- there were no requirements. We didn't have to act on anything. It was all recommendations, but it was really helpful. Yeah.

JS ([36:30](#)):

I always found the same thing about academic accreditation. A lot of work. But if you didn't resist it--

AG ([36:38](#)):

Yes.

JS ([36:39](#)):

You really could get a lot out of it.

AG ([36:40](#)):

Well, and I think too, it allows you to remind yourself of places where you need, you know, when you're pulling all these documents together, oh my God, our policy and procedure manual hasn't been updated in ten years. So, it forces you to do some things that you've been putting off because you're like, that's not priority right now, but when someone else is asking for it, you want it to look nice and have all the right information. So, it forces you to kind of fix some things too. Yeah.

JS ([37:03](#)):

I'm going to move to the honors question. So, it was really so great to read that in each of your years at Marist, the Red Foxes have led the MAC Academic honor role. Congratulations.

AG ([37:14](#)):

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Thank you, I take no credit for that.

JS ([37:18](#)):

Well, you certainly have a role in it, but not only your program, but you personally have been recognized for Excellence. Dutchess County 40 under 40 and the N4A's Professional Excellence Award. Can you talk to us about what those awards mean to you?

AG ([37:33](#)):

Yeah. The 40 under 40 was really a surprise and a shock. And I think it really stemmed from John Ritschdorff. I know that there's typically someone on the Dutchess County Chamber of Commerce who connects with somebody at Marist, or there's somebody at Marist on the Dutchess County Chamber of Commerce Committee. And so, they typically look to Marist to nominate some folks. We have nominees from Marist every year. And so, I really think John Ritschdorff was behind that sneaky move, but it was wonderful.

JS ([38:01](#)):

It sounds like a John Ritschdorff gift.

AG ([38:03](#)):

Yeah, totally. It was, I'll be honest with you, it was super uncomfortable for me to have to write something about myself that wasn't just about Marist and my bio on the website. I felt awkward, to be honest with you. And what they did for the awards show was they had kind of like a runway. They wanted you to walk down and they were wanting you to have fun and, you know, blow kisses or dance to this audience. And I couldn't have been stiffer. I was so uncomfortable. And I'm pretty comfortable in most settings, but it just was a different type of experience.

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JS ([38:39](#)):

It sounds like a leftover from a beauty pageant. Sorry.

AG ([38:42](#)):

No, it was weird. It was weird. It was a wonderful honor, and I share it with so many of-- not just Marist folks, but really great folks. And it was nice to get to meet other people in the community who had been honored for this. So that was really neat.

JS ([38:56](#)):

Nice to have your work validated.

AG ([38:57](#)):

Yes, for sure. For sure.

JS ([38:59](#)):

Beyond your immediate group.

AG ([39:01](#)):

Yes. But the Professional Excellence Award for N4A was really special. I had gotten the Professional Promise Award, which is for a practitioner who's been in the field for less than five years. So, I got that early on in my career, and I remember thinking like, well, maybe if I stay in this long enough, I'll get the Professional Excellence award. That's really like a big deal. So, when I got that award at our convention, you know, and I got to stand up in front of all of my colleagues, thousands of people and get that award, it was really special. So, I mean, I really, I have been very involved in our professional organization, which has definitely helped me to

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learn more about industry standards and how we can, you know, kind of use best practices. But yeah, that one was really, really cool because it's something that my colleagues thought I deserved the colleagues that are doing the same work as I am in a school they're not in every day. You know, they only know what I do based on what I share and what they see on social media. And so that was really nice.

JS ([39:59](#)):

That's wonderful.

AG ([40:00](#)):

Yeah. It was nice.

JS ([40:00](#)):

Congratulations.

AG ([40:01](#)):

Thanks.

JS ([40:02](#)):

The Marist mission statement specified our commitment includes, you know, three things, but the third one is a sense of community. Building a sense of community. And certainly that characterizes the athletic division as a whole. Department as a whole. But I-- can you talk about the ways that your program helps to build that sense of community?

AG ([40:22](#)):

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I mean, I think, you know, there's a lot of us in athletics, right? You know, we make up a huge part of the campus. And so, I think sometimes, unfortunately, because of where we're located, we kind of get left out of the equation or forgotten inadvertently. And I also think sometimes people forget that our student athletes are also students. Like that's what they're here for. So, we really want to make sure that we're engaging in the campus. And I know that's a hard ask for student athletes. We're asking them to do service. We're asking them to be good citizens. We're asking them to have good GPAs and also perform in your sports, hey, win a championship if you can. Right [laugh].

I always talk about the pie. So, there is this imaginary slice of pie or pizza pie if you choose. And there's three slices for a student athlete. It's their academics, it's their sport, and their social life. And if you ask them to put that pie, visualize it and-- or draw a picture of it, the social life is a tiny little slice. And I mean, social life, not just going to parties and making friends, but what else are you doing on campus? What else are you doing off campus? Are you involved in other organizations? Are you, you know, serving, you know, in student government? Are you a part of, you know, the band? Are you a part of the drama? And they just don't have the time to do that. They kind of look at me like, come on, I don't have time for that. But I think that's so critical. I want our faculty to come to them and say, you have really excelled in this class. Have you thought about maybe being involved in some research? You know, I want them to pick them out and say, this is a great opportunity for you. You may not have thought about this as a PhD program, but maybe you should consider something like this. Let me help you get there. And I think that's really where I want to be able to kind of foster that sense of community.

Let's look at student athletes as more than just athletes. What else can they accomplish if given the opportunity, if someone says to them, I see this in you. Maybe you haven't seen it in

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you, or maybe you don't think it's possible, they might be more likely to try. And so, I think those are really important ways that we can partner, particularly with other offices on campus too. It doesn't always have to be faculty. You know, for instance, working with Dr. Antonio in DE and I, if there's a student that has an opportunity to work on a project with him, if there's a student that has an opportunity to be part of student government, while they're also a leader in student athletes, like of student athletes, let's find a way to make it so that it doesn't have to be so time consuming for them, but they see the value in how this can help them in the long run. But I think that's really kind of constantly on my mind. How can we make it so these athletes see that they can contribute to this campus, but also the world based on all these amazing humans that are on this, you know, on the campus here.

GN ([43:14](#)):

Who is your voice to speak? I'm thinking of the board of trustees. Okay. Ordinarily I think of them only involved in the academic programs, you know, and things like that. Or development, finance, or the dormitories and so on. And yet, you know, the way you speak, you know, you should have more piece of that pie. I don't know who your voice is. Is it the president? Is he more sympathetic to you?

AG ([43:41](#)):

Yeah. Definitely. I think, you know, between him and, you know, I report to the provost now. I've always reported to academic affairs. Well, since 2007 we switched over. So, I used to report to John through Tom and now I report--.

GN ([43:54](#)):

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John Ritschdorff.

Speaker 2 ([43:55](#)):

Yep. And then now I report to Katie. And so, I think obviously she's got a great voice and she's been, you know, she's newer, but she's got an opportunity to get in front of people that might, you know, want to hear some of these things. But Kevin has been wonderful, and President Weinman and President Murray even before that, I always felt were very approachable if there was something that we wanted to bring to that level for sure.

JS ([44:19](#)):

Your Marist profile mentions that you and your wife live in Highland. So, what's it like being out on a campus as traditional as Marist? And how has that changed over the years that you've been here?

AG ([44:33](#)):

Well, I think in the beginning it was a little challenging. I felt, you know, just a little more guarded. And I really wanted to protect that part of myself. And I was new and I wasn't sure what my future looked like here. And like I said, I thought I was only going to be here ten months. So, I was very private and very guarded, and I did my job and I left, and I didn't really talk about anything too personal. And then over the years as I became, you know, more comfortable with people and obviously thought I might be staying here a little longer, you know, I became more open and trusting and I became part of things here that I think were really important. You know, I joined some committees and particularly LGBTQ subcommittee of the Diversity Council. I was on the Diversity Council. I championed Marist marching in New York



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City Pride. In 2016, right after my wedding. We marched in New York City Pride as a college. And I never thought in a million years that I would've seen that happen. And so, to me, the biggest piece-- takeaway for that is that our student athletes and our students and our other faculty and staff feel a better sense of community and a sense of safety because we have grown. And, you know, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy getting-- ultimately it had to be Dennis to say, all right, we can go with our Marist shirts and march in New York City Pride, and we had these tiny little signs. And, you know, Bobbi Sue Tellitocci gets a lot of credit for that. And she was in the alumni office at the time, and we had a great committee who was doing really good work, and I think that helped. You know, he saw us making change and moving the needle on the campus, and he was like, okay, let's go do this.

JS ([46:14](#)):

Wow. That's great.

AG ([46:14](#)):

So that's definitely one of my proudest moments. But yeah, coming here initially was a little tricky to navigate that. Yeah.

JS ([46:23](#)):

I think seeing other faculty members, other employees do the same thing at the same time that helps too.

AG ([46:29](#)):

Yeah. You feel that everybody wants to feel like they belong to something, right? So, you know, we want to make sure that we are connecting with the right people who have similar experiences.

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And obviously it's always good to connect with people that have very different experiences. You learn in every relationship, right? But when you're feeling alone or you're feeling like, I don't fit here, you always want to find your people. So that helped.

JS ([46:52](#)):

Especially when you get pushback. You need them. So, you do serve on the diversity council?

AG ([46:58](#)):

I don't anymore, but I did for like seven years.

JS ([47:01](#)):

Okay. And when you were on it, you were co-chair of the Outreach Access and Inclusion plan.

So, with that background, and knowing that President Weinman has made DEI a centerpiece of his vision what steps do you think the college should take next?

AG ([47:21](#)):

Well, I think, you know, I got to-- I had the privilege of being on the search committee for the vice president of DEI, so Dr. Antonio. And that obviously was an inaugural position for Marist. So, when President Weinman came to campus and said that was one of his first charges, I was very excited because I said, we have all these people trying to do this work in addition to their full-time jobs. And that's kind of very common. It's not something just Marist does. We take on these passion projects and we volunteer for these committees, and we want to help out because these things are important to us. But we knew a lot of us who were doing this work, and there was kind of like a group of us who always got the phone call or the email when somebody wanted something on the DEI front that we couldn't do it without some support. So having him

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here has made a huge difference. And I know he's just kind of-- he had a staff member, he lost a staff member, now he's got somebody, you know, full time on his staff. So, continuing to collaborate with him I think has been huge.

But I also think hearing from our students is always really the most important thing. And so, having the opportunity, you know, we did a march for Black Lives Matter, right after the COVID started, yep. And George Floyd, so that fall and having people participate and it was pouring rain, and there was all these covid protocols and how we lined up and how we separated ourselves. But we got it done and it was clear that our students really, this mattered to them. And so, I think every time we have an opportunity to make change in this area, we have to consider our student voices because they're the ones that are walking into classrooms. They're the ones that are walking into buildings. And yes, our faculty and staff need to feel safe and welcome here too. But we're here for students and if they don't feel comfortable and they don't feel safe, then, you know, we're not, we're not doing our job right.

GN ([49:14](#)):

It's almost twelve o'clock. It is twelve o'clock. So, one last question.

AG ([49:19](#)):

I'm fine. I don't want to keep you guys, but I'm not in any rush.

JS ([49:22](#)):

Elizabeth wants you to go to lunch [laugh].

AG ([49:24](#)):

She can wait. She's my boss.

**Alyssa Gates**

GN ([49:28](#)):

We have time for this. Are you going to be here next five years? You think there's enough glue to keep you around? Is the money going to be good to go somewhere else?

JS ([49:41](#)):

She owns a house in Highland.

AG ([49:43](#)):

I own a house in Highland, so I'm not going to move anywhere. But I do look at the future of college athletics and it's a little scary for me. It's-- I'm managing a lot more things than I used to have to manage. And so, I feel sometimes like maybe it's time to end that chapter and consider another option that wouldn't be college athletics. And I don't know what that is.

JS ([50:05](#)):

What would it be?

AG ([50:05](#)):

I feel like I'm in a part, a point in my life where I want to do something bigger. Like I want to change the world. I want to do more worldly causes. I feel like I've done a lot of good here, but it's such an isolated space and it's like an island. I want to do something bigger. I want to do something in the equity space. I want to do something to support a nonprofit. I want to do something where I can kind of get my hands a little dirtier and really see the fruits of my labor in a different way. So--.

JS ([50:39](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

We can really see you doing that [laugh]. We, we don't want Marist to lose you but it's very clear--.

GN ([50:44](#)):

How do you feel about the White House [laugh]?

AG ([50:46](#)):

Right. Well, I don't know about all that. Not politics. But yeah, I think that's my next calling. I just don't know what it looks like yet. And it would, it would probably have to be, you know, a remote opportunity, which I'm not sure how I'd feel about, but we're, you know, we're here and we're not going anywhere.

JS ([51:01](#)):

We're not that far from Albany.

AG ([51:01](#)):

That's true. That's true. That's an option.

GN ([51:04](#)):

You have a lot of energy in you yet. I think there's years more of--.

AG ([51:07](#)):

Yeah. I got to get--.

GN ([51:08](#)):

I wish I had half of it. You know.

**Alyssa Gates**

AG ([51:10](#)):

You do. You do. It's in there.

JS ([51:12](#)):

What do you see in Marist's future? Or what would you like to see in Marist's future?

AG ([51:21](#)):

I feel very positive about some of the things that I've seen with regard to, you know, what the next strategic plan looks like. And, you know, some of the things we've talked about with Kevin and the town halls. And I like having that opportunity to get kind of these updates regularly. I think that's been really great. Again, I feel like he's very approachable and I feel like, you know, he really hears the needs of our students. He's at events, he's listening, he's watching, he's acting. And so, I feel very positive on the leadership side of things. In terms of athletics, you know, we just hired a brand-new football coach after, you know, our football coach of thirty-two years retired. There's an entire new staff in that office. He brought in all his own staff. So that's a little scary because I've been with the same people for twenty years. And, you know, like anything, when there's a change, it's a little freaky. Right now, my goals and my objectives are to try to just get to know them, see how they work. They can see how I work. If we need to tweak some things, I'm not above doing that. But I think they're going to be more interested in getting to know the players and getting to know the systems and, the players. You know, I want to make sure they're taken care of too. I know there's some players that are disappointed that their coach is no longer here, the coach that they know and are comfortable with and recruited them. So, I want to make sure that I'm, you know, “mom-ing” them if I have to and taking care of them as they kind of go through that transition. So, you know, I think that's a little bit scary, but I do feel

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like, you know, we're starting to move in another direction. And I think, you know, let's see what happens. Like, I'm open to the possibilities and, you know, there's other changes we've seen in athletics with staff.

GN ([53:11](#)):

Right. Yeah, last year--.

AG ([53:11](#)):

You know, and you know, there's-- it's nice when there's always a familiar face that sticks around like Aaron. But this is a whole new experience for me, and I think for many of us in athletics. So, we're going to see what happens. But, you know, I have faith that, you know, these are good people and we made a good hiring decision and that our students will adjust. And it's a good learning experience for them too. You know, this, you might have a different boss in your lifetime. You might have multiple bosses. So, it's the same idea. It's-- you're learning from someone different who you may or may not get along with. And hopefully everybody's really happy with the change. And you know, we start showing that in the fall, you know, when we start winning.

JS ([53:51](#)):

Exciting to think about.

AG ([53:51](#)):

Yeah. It is exciting to think about.

GN ([53:53](#)):

**Alyssa Gates**

Well, thank you very much. This is being recorded. We'll delete anything we don't like you see [laugh].

JS ([53:58](#)):

No, we don't, we can't change a word of it. But, you know, you've made a really important contribution to the archives. We're really, really grateful. I don't know how all of this information could have been gathered and preserved in any other way. So, I'm really glad that you did this. Really appreciate it.

AG ([54:13](#)):

It was such an honor and I was just so shocked that you reached out to me. And I'm first of all, to hear from you again, has been lovely [laugh] and to meet you has been lovely. And I've just really enjoyed this experience and I thank you for what you're doing to preserve this history and, getting these, these voices who've had such a, you know, valuable experience here. So, thank you to you both because it's a lot.

JS ([54:36](#)):

It's quite a place, isn't it?

AG ([54:37](#)):

Yeah, it is. It really is.