

**Introduction:** My name is Kristen Silton. I graduated from the College in 2010 with degrees in theater studies and a minor in Mathematics.

**Question 1:** Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

**Response:** The recession was pretty big in 2009 so jobs were a bit hard to come by at that time, especially jobs in the creative industry. So when I graduated, I was really just looking for work. And I got lucky that the Center for Creativity & Arts was hiring a new fellow the year I graduated, and it ended up being a really good fit for me. So I did that right after college, sort of with the intention of hanging around for a couple of years until the job market picked back up and then going about my way. I figured out about halfway through college that I wanted to go into arts administration. So theatre was my primary area of interest, but in the couple years I was at Emory, I really did learn about all the different disciplines because I was working to market and increase visibility for all the arts departments and programs and all the events that they put on for the public. But I really did want to stay in the theater. So I was kind of looking for that next step after that job.

Looking back on sort of between college and where I am today, one of the things that I always like to share with current students, especially, is just the value of the Emory network to kind of help you get to the next point for yourself. I mean, for me, it's been completely integral to every job I've had. I mean, I worked at Emory right out of college. So I worked for the Center for Creativity & Arts. I met a lot of amazing people through that work, who I even work with professionally now, sort of outside of the Emory arts world. After I worked at Emory, I went to work at Horizon Theatre Company, which is in Little Five Points in Atlanta. And I got an interview for that job because I emailed one of my theater professors from college and said, *Hey, I'm looking at this job*. She said, *Hey, I'll talk to the artistic director. I know her and I'll put in a good word for you*. After I worked at Horizon, I went to work at Actor's Express, which is another theater company in Atlanta. And I actually interned there while I was in college at Emory, thanks to an internship that one of the theater professors set up for me. So I mean, I already knew the artistic director because I'd already done that. So I worked there for about five and a half years. And then I ended up in this job at the Alliance, which has honestly been an unexpected surprise because I was just kind of feeling a little lost as my time as Actor's Express was winding down. There wasn't really anywhere for me to grow at that organization because it's relatively small, it only has between six and eight full-time employees at any given time. And out of the blue, I got an email from Doug Shipman, who happened to be the CEO of the Woodruff Arts Center at the time, but who I had met on the Emory Alumni Board. And he shot me an email and said, *Hey, there's this job open, I think it'd be great for you*. And I was like, *I don't know if this is what I want*. I ended up applying for that job and interviewing for it and not getting it. But during the interview, the artistic director at the Alliance, Susan Booth, who I actually sit on the advisory board for the Center for Creativity & Arts at Emory with, she noticed that I had a lot to say about the education programming at the Alliance. Even though it was completely unintentional on my part, she reached out to me and said, *Hey, we're hiring a marketing position in our education department. And we think you'd be perfect for it. Will you come in and talk to the director?* So for me, Emory has been this huge throughline in terms of my career trajectory, and it's sort of always been there for me when I needed to make a change.

**Question 2:** Reflecting on your journey from graduation to now, what were things that were unplanned/unexpected but meaningful to your growth?

**Response:** I mean, I'm a funny one because I always wanted to be an administrator. I never considered myself much of an artist, even though I studied theater in college. I love theater, but I've always been like a stage manager or a props designer, or managing director type person—that's really where I fit into the scheme. But I love art and...I was only on stage once while I was at Emory, it's just not my cup of tea—I took one acting class. So it's funny because I work around creatives all day long and I've always not considered myself a creative. And then during this pandemic, I had a really interesting transformation. Because all of a sudden, I work at this Tony award-winning massive theater company and we can't produce shows anymore. We've moved everything online, it's all virtual. And oddly, it's like I've become part of the production team. Because for the Education Department, we produce shows for children and with children ages 0 to 18. And we have a specific program called [Theatre for the Very Young](#), which is for ages 0 to 5. And we have these virtual productions and I was tasked with creating an interactive online experience for these shows for children to engage with when watching a video might not be exactly the most engaging thing for them to do. And so that's been really interesting because I've actually been part of almost the creative team in a way that I never envisioned myself being a part of it.

Just to give another example, I've collaborated with a group of people at the Alliance. This year, we're producing an animated film called “Sit In”, which is a 33-minute animated film that was adapted from something that was supposed to be a play for the stage. But it's about a young girl in Atlanta, and she's learning about the history of the Civil Rights Movement and sit-ins and peaceful protests. And so one of the things we wanted to do with the show was create opportunities for families to have intergenerational dialogue about the Civil Rights Movement and their experience with it. And so we started trying to figure out a way to do this and we ended up creating a card game. It's almost like Apples to Apples plus charades in a way, but it combines them together to play a game with your family. And you learn about protest chants and murals and all these different pieces of activism, but it's through the lens of theater. And that's been crazy, to be a part of the creative process. So I feel like I've discovered this bit of creative that I didn't even really know I had. And now it's like something I'm excited to carry forward as I keep going.

**Question 3:** What advice do you have for your younger self?

**Response:** I feel like when I was a student, it would have been really helpful to know that no matter how amazing your classes are, and the relationships you'll form with your peers and your professors are invaluable, the skills that you really use when you go out into the real world are what you pick up in your extracurriculars. I mean, I'm sure there's a knowledge base for specific professions that it is the classes that are super helpful. And I use my history of drama classes and I know how to read a play, and that's very helpful to me in my professional life. But a lot of the skills that I've needed are more about being flexible and knowing how to work on a budget and being creative and knowing how to collaborate. And those are the things that are sort of the intangibles that you pick up in college that actually end up mattering more than anything. Writing is such a big part of what you do as an Emory student with the writing requirements and everything. And I think they're annoying when you're a student, but when you get out into the real world, you don't realize how many people don't know how to write. And it's just such a benefit to have that skill in any industry that you're in.