

Beianka (student...): One thing that I realized about Princeton is, being a transfer student, is that, Princeton is not a traditional university anymore. The moment, we started accepting transfer students that is the moment that the school is not a traditional school. And I feel like being a part of the transfer program, we're able to see just how much diverse the population is. I'm not [00:00:30] talking about with race or ethnicity, but with thoughts and how we think because you have transfer students who are in their late twenties, some of them are married with kids and they're in the same class as traditional students. And they're probably friends too. So I find that that is really enriching and it brings something new to Princeton. So I really appreciate that about the transfer program.

Vivian (host): [00:01:00] Hello everyone. Welcome to Meet Princeton. A podcast to introduce prospective students and their families to Princeton University, brought to you from the office of admission at Princeton. My name is Vivian Slee and I'm a Senior Assistant Dean in the Office of Admission. And I'm so happy that you've tuned in to join us, to hear from current student voices and others about our community and about what it's like to be a student at Princeton just now. [00:01:30] Hi Alex, how's it going?

Alex (guest): Hi, Vivian. It's going great. How are you doing?

Vivian (host): I'm fine. Fine thanks. I am so delighted that you could join us today so that our listeners could have a chance to meet you. I work with Alex listeners. He is in the office of admission with me and his title is ...

Alex (guest): So, I'm the Senior Associate Dean and also Director of Transfer and Military Veteran Admission, and also a member of the class of 2008.

Vivian (host): Thanks for that. So in a few minutes, we're going to be hearing [00:02:00] from our student guest, Beianka Tomlinson, whom I interviewed way back in the summer. Beianka had an unusual start at Princeton in that her first year was virtual due to the pandemic. And so when I met her, she was very much looking forward to being back on campus again, physically. We'll hear from her in just a minute. In the meantime, Alex, you are the point person for all transfer students in the office of mission. And we had Dr. Keith Shaw on the program a few months ago and I was wondering whether you could [00:02:30] tell our listeners what your role is regarding transfer students versus what Dr Shaw's role is.

Alex (guest): Sure. I'm excited to work with Keith or Dr. Shaw. We work together very closely on the program. He is the backbone of the design and maintaining and growth of the program as well. So, his official title is to be the Director of Transfer Veteran and Non-Traditional Student Program. So basically everything that includes the transfer program and bringing those students in as well as serving them through graduation. Whereas I, [00:03:00] as I mentioned, I am the Director of Transfer and Military Veteran Admission. So basically everything on the front end of that program. And, as I said, I've enjoyed a great opportunity to work with Keith. He's done an amazing job building the program and was really excited to see his efforts recognized recently as the Transfer Champion Rising

Star Award by the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students. That was exciting news announced in the last few weeks.

And he'll be formally recognized for that later this month at their national conference. And really can't imagine a better candidate for that as well or a more deserving candidate. But [00:03:30] my role is more on the front end. So it's the main aspect of recruiting, admission and enrollment. Recruiting meaning speaking to any student who's thinking about applying to Princeton, or is Princeton the right fit for me as a student, as a transfer student or whatever that is, as well as managing the applications when they arrive, managing and overseeing the admission committee with our team here for reviewing those applications and making those decisions alongside the Dean of Admission. And then everything up until enrollment where Keith and I will start to overlap a little bit because he has an impact [00:04:00] and an input on the transfer credit part of the process.

Vivian (host): So if I were a student who were interested in transferring to Princeton, where would I start to look for information about that?

Alex (guest): The first place to start is the publicly available information that we have on our webpages and publications. And I don't mean that to push students to a website and say, do the research on the website, but you're absolutely welcome to reach out to us. And I'll speak with anyone and my team and I will speak with anyone who's interested in transferring [00:04:30] or applying as a transfer or a veteran student or whatever, because that process is very different for the student who's coming from the average high school setting where students are applying and they have more students applying to Princeton, but we're happy to talk to you and answer all your questions. But also, the transfer students page of our admission website is not just about the requirements and the timelines. There's a lot of great information to help you get to know our current students as well our transfer students. There are testimonials, there are blogs and videos that Vivian and you and your team and communications have been putting together.

Vivian (host): Our transfer program is going to go [00:05:00] through a bit of a change. And I wonder if you could tell our listeners some more about that.

Alex (guest): Absolutely. We're at a really exciting juncture in the program. So at this point we've enrolled four cohorts and now we're at a point where as the university is expanding physically, but also in student body overall, we're now able to expand the student transfer population as well. So, that a program has been very small since its inception to make sure that we are integrating these students into the environment with the appropriate resources and support. So [00:05:30] it's only been about 10 or 15 transfer students coming in per year. And the president recently announced last, I believe it was last week, that the transfer program will now expand to basically double in size to get from around the 40, between 40 and 50 total students we've had to date, to a total population of a hundred students on campus at any time.

So effectively doubling that 10 to 15 or so that we bring in per year, in an incremental basis to get up to the 100 total students. So, short answer is, we're basically doubling the transfer program [00:06:00] and we're very excited to see that expand along with the rest of the student body and the rest of the campus life.

Vivian (host): Hmm. Yeah. Beianka actually talks about some of the experiences she's had as a transfer student, but also just in terms of the diversity of population that the transfer cohort brings in every year. So can I ask you, with the growth in the transfer program, are we still going to be looking for the same kinds of students?

Alex (guest): Definitely. By the same kinds of students I think you're referring to the very [00:06:30] clear target population we've mentioned has been the reason for us creating this transfer program effectively creating a pathway for students who didn't have that option maybe directly out of high school, many of those coming from community college, some of them coming from a combination of not just college but full-time work or military service or any combination of that. It includes non-traditional students as well as traditional students. So we absolutely have students who directly out of high school, went to a college and then applied kind of traditional transfer students. So it tends [00:07:00] to range from a lot of different backgrounds, but the majority of those are coming from community college and military backgrounds and I think we'll definitely see a lot more of that with our larger cohorts as well.

Vivian (host): Yep. And can I ask you another question? What do you like most about your job in working with the transfer students?

Alex (guest): That's a good question. And it's something that I think about often because sometimes it's easy to define and sometimes it's not. It's one of those things that you kind of know it when you see it even if you can't describe it. But I think there's a lot of overlap [00:07:30] in the transfer population where I like working with the transfer population, as I do work with any student who's coming to Princeton, I think just the exciting range of abilities and talents and experiences they bring and the great diversity within that we see in all students, including our first year students, but there are just some additional added layers I think to that, with our transfer students.

They have as many talents and interests and backgrounds as any other student, including any other traditional student, but they're just more layers in terms of their life experiences. And I think just the diverse perspectives that they bring to [00:08:00] not only allow us to include those perspectives and create pathways for those students to gain from the resources at Princeton, but also to enhance the learning in the entire student body by the diverse backgrounds and perspectives that they bring.

Vivian (host): Alex, thanks so much for joining us today. I'm really delighted that our listeners got a chance to meet you through our podcast. I have the great luck of being

able to work with Alex every day in our office and he is a fantastic colleague and I'm just delighted that he could join us today. So, [00:08:30] thank you very much. And moving on, just to give listeners some context. Beianka Tomlinson was a rising sophomore doing a summer internship when we interviewed her last July. So let's hear what she had to say.

Beianka (student...:

My name is Beianka Tomlinson. And I plan to major in chemistry. And I also want to get a certificate in African American studies, neuroscience and possibly Spanish. But I'll probably [00:09:00] choose one or two of the three. I'm from Kingston, Jamaica. Everybody knows Kingston. I went to Immaculate Conception High School. It's an all girls Catholic school, in Jamaica. The community there, the environment there, I like to believe that we're all very hard working. I'm always surrounded by students in my high school who are really go-getters. And I [00:09:30] think that's where I got some of my adrenaline from and my energy from.

The end of high school I was faced with a decision. Do I go to medical school in Jamaica or do I come and live with my father in the US and open up myself to new opportunities? But I know that while the university at Jamaica is extremely good. The education system is amazing. I wanted to open up myself to new people, [00:10:00] to take myself out of a monolithic environment where everybody is more or less the same, think the same way. So, I decided that I would want to come to the US. I started community college the same year that Princeton opened up their transfer program. So knowing that Princeton acknowledges that, brilliance and great students can come from these backgrounds and can come from community college, it really meant a lot to me. So, when I found out that I got in, [00:10:30] I was excited.

Still haven't seen the school, but I was just all over the place. My dad was excited. I'm the first one in the family to go to college. And this is the college that I'm going into. It was a big moment. I spoke with Dr. Shaw, the director of the transfer program. It was funny too. Actually, the first time I met him was not at Princeton. I met him at my community college. He came for a transfer fair and I went and I saw him and I saw some Princeton pens on the table and I asked him [00:11:00] for a pen and he gave it to me. And I started speaking to him about the transfer program. And me and him were just talking. And then we emailed afterwards. And then the next year, he saw that I got in and he's like, "Oh, I met you before."

I feel like the first time you get to Princeton you're always going to be like, ah, that is a given. I feel like you're always going to have that feeling, [00:11:30] every semester for the past two semesters I've had that feeling initially where I'm like, this is so much work. But you got into Princeton for a reason. You have the ability to take on so much. And when you look back you're like, how did I do so much in such a small amount of time? The work load is a lot and it's fast paced, but it's not rocket science that you're doing. You're not going to be finding the cure for cancer [00:12:00] at Princeton. I mean, you could, but you're

not going to be doing that in your classes. So, if you don't understand a topic, it's more than likely it's you psyching yourself out.

That's what happened to me in my first semester with physics. I started doing physics and for some reason I just could not understand it. I realized that I was psyching myself out initially. I was telling myself that this is too hard for me because I am not really a math person. In my head I'm not really a math person. But once I spoke to myself [00:12:30] and I said, you're having imposter syndrome. And as soon as I realized that I was sabotaging myself, but it's not that physics was sabotaging me, my grades started to go up and everything worked out fine.

So, the workload will be a lot. The work itself will not be hard. So, you can do it. I'm always looking for opportunities to [00:13:00] build my med school application because time is coming. There are some resources at Princeton that I took advantage of. And one of them is IIP. They give you opportunities to apply for internships at hospitals internationally. So, I applied to some internships in Bolivia, in Mexico, Ecuador. So that's one resource and they're not just for med school, they're for anyone who just wants to do internships.

[00:13:30] There's also PICS. P-I-C-S. I applied to internships there as well. They do local internships, national internships. So you can apply to internships in different states. And that's how most students get opportunities outside of Princeton. I was in a group chat, a Princeton GroupMe group chat and someone said, "If you guys are interested [00:14:00] in pediatric oncology, there's this doctor that's doing research at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and if you want to just send him an email and that's it." So I'm like, okay. So I sent an email to Dr. Aplenc. He is a Princeton alum. I sent him a cover letter. I sent him my resume, and then he said, he emailed it back and he was like, "Okay, we'll take you." Just like that. So, for my internship, [00:14:30] I am abstracting patient data from their charts and trying to help physicians and pediatric oncologists to find the best method of treatment for kids with acute myeloid leukemia.

So, that's what we're working on right now. I took a class with Professor Carolyn Rouse and it was called race and medicine. It was an anthropology class. And we spoke about disparities in medicine, the origins of medicine and how [00:15:00] racism played a role into it. I see some parallels now with where I am now at CHOP, because we are working on understanding minority children with leukemia. So, the disparities that you see, is some of the disparities that we talked about in class and some of the disparities that we analyze, that we discuss. So it's interesting to see how, what we learned at school is being brought over into real life. It's really a fun class. And very [00:15:30] interesting. I would recommend that class.

You had asked me about a wow moment and I remembered quite a few. I followed that a staff member, Dr. Cecilia Rouse, was on the chair of economic advisors for Biden. It's just amazing that you could learn from someone who is literally working in the White House. And other professors [00:16:00] like Dr.

Ruha Benjamin and Dr. Eddie Glaude. Phenomenal people that do amazing work in African American studies. You can learn from these professors, these amazing scholars. So those are the only ones that I had.

Vivian (host):

We hope you enjoyed hearing about Beianka's experiences at Princeton so far. And I really hope that we might be able [00:16:30] to catch up with her one day again soon. In the meantime, our mailbag will return in the next episode. So for all of the prospective students who are out there listening and who have burning questions about admissions, and if you'd like to hear those questions read and responded to on air, please submit them to the mailbag section of the Meet Princeton webpage on our admission website. As I said earlier, this podcast was created with prospective students both first year and transfers in mind. And so with that, I'd like to direct all of our listeners [00:17:00] to our admission website at admission.princeton.edu.

There you can watch, read, engage virtually and learn more about Princeton University. Meet Princeton's audio engineer is Nick Donnoli of Orangebox Pictures. Mary Buckley, and I, Vivian Slee are producers. Bryant Blount, my wonderful co-host and a consultant for the show, will join us again next time. And original music was composed by Molly Truman from the class of 2024. We'd also like to [00:17:30] give a special thanks to Beianka Tomlinson and Alex Bustin for their fantastic contributions to this episode and a big thank you, especially to our listeners for tuning in. We hope you'll join us next time on Meet Princeton.