

## Meet Princeton! Episode 1

Morgan Smith ([00:00](#)):

Going into Princeton, I thought it would be the super posh space where you're among the best of the best, but they're also from elite echelon as well. And so I wasn't sure how I'd fit, right? I'd say one of the biggest lessons I've learned is that intelligence comes in all shapes and sizes.

Vivian Slee ([00:26](#)):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Meet Princeton, the 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 joined us and tuned in for our very first podcast from our office.

Vivian Slee ([00:54](#)):

As admission officers, my colleagues and I have the great privilege of enjoying time speaking to all of you, to high school students and their families about things like how to apply to the university, about programs of study that we offer, about our tasty dining hall food, about our no loans financial aid policy, and also just about what it's like to be a student here. In thinking about this last part more, about what it's like to be a student at Princeton, especially now during these very challenging times when our lives, all of our lives, have been up-ended by a pandemic and a national reckoning with racism. We realized that it might be a good idea for our listeners to hear from students themselves, to hear what they have to say about Princeton. And so this podcast was made to offer prospective students and their families a sort of audio glimpse into our community, to hear current student voices talking about their experiences at Princeton.

Vivian Slee ([02:00](#)):

I'll be joined later by Bryant Blount, Assistant Dean of the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students. Bryant works closely with students on a variety of projects. And I actually don't know everything that Bryant does, so I'm looking forward to learning more when he comes on later and tells us. Anyway, we thought he'd be a great partner to give us in the Admission Office and you, as listeners, a little more insight into student life once students are enrolled. He also helped us to interview our first student guest, whom we'll hear from in just a moment.

Vivian Slee ([02:36](#)):

But first, we invited our wonderful Dean of Admission, Karen Richardson, who is also a Princeton alumna from the great class of 1993, to say a few words. And I think she also has some tips for prospective students as well.

Karen Richardson ([02:56](#)):

This year has been an interesting year, obviously, for so many different reasons. And the pandemic of course has changed the way that we have done things here. We were, I think, very fortunate to have had a chance to recruit and admit and enroll a wonderful class of 2024. And as we look ahead to this fall and our virtual recruitment that will happen, we will be meeting students through our computer screens. I think the thing that I hope that our prospective applicants and their families learn from us this year is that we recognize that ever since March, the country and the world have just been in a very different place. And we're all in this together. I always say that an admission counselor's best friend is

context. And so we are always going to take a student's experience and applicant's experience into context.

Karen Richardson ([03:58](#)):

So, we know that the spring and the summer look very different in terms of academics, in terms of the types of extracurricular experiences that students might have had. We know that the fall is also looking very different, whether high schools are opening or not. And we also know that students have different experiences learning remotely. So, we are going to take all of that into consideration. I encourage students to definitely use the section that allows you to give some context, the additional information about COVID-19 and how it has affected your spring, your summer, or your fall, just to give us a little bit more information as we are reading your application and thinking about who you will be on our campus.

Karen Richardson ([04:49](#)):

There are pieces of this application process that you have more control over than others. So, thinking about who you're going to ask to write your recommendation letters and taking the time to think about your essays and making sure that the essays that you write really convey who you are, not who you think we want you to be, but who you are. I know it's easy for me to say on this side of my college admission experience and on this side of the desk, but make sure to breathe through this process, try and enjoy it, do the best that you can, and then enjoy your high school senior year and let the process run through. Good luck.

Vivian Slee ([05:34](#)):

Hey, Bryant, how's it going?

Bryant Blount ([05:41](#)):

Going well, Vivian. How are you?

Vivian Slee ([05:43](#)):

I'm good. Good. So, you helped us to interview our student guest, Morgan Smith. And I'm just curious, how did you first meet?

Bryant Blount ([05:52](#)):

From Morgan's earliest days, she was really involved and engaged in a lot of activities and programs and opportunities to even work with our office as a sort of student worker to see behind the curtain a little bit and support these things to help make them happen and bring, I think, these learnings, these opportunities, these little joys to her peers. Morgan has been involved in program development around things like the student groups she's passionate about. She's also engaged in activities based around identity, around being a good citizen, and just a really good positive force across our campus.

Vivian Slee ([06:29](#)):

Wow. Well, I also just think that we're very lucky to have her here on our first podcast. So, I'll let you take it from here to introduce her.

Bryant Blount ([06:37](#)):

Morgan Smith is from just outside of Los Angeles and is a senior in the School of Public International Affairs. She's also earning her certificate in African American studies. On campus, Morgan has a whole host of roles. She's the President for the American Whig-Cliosophic Society, cohort leader for Vote 100, she moonlights as a student worker for ODUS, and in her spare time, she's a choreographer for the Black Arts Dance Company. This summer, Morgan was an intern with the Eastern District Court of New York.

Morgan Smith ([07:13](#)):

It was in high school that I kind of found a budding voice as an advocate. So, not only founded the BSU, the Black Student Union, finding a need for that space, but I was also a member of our journalism staff, so I got to write on issues that really mattered to me.

Morgan Smith ([07:35](#)):

I think a strong priority I had going into, at least my freshman year, was to not only do well in school, but get to know as many people as possible because I quickly saw that we have world class faculty, you're learning amazing things, but at least for me at the end of the day, Princeton is about the people that I encounter.

Morgan Smith ([08:02](#)):

No one is perfect. Everyone is struggling in their own way, but the beautiful thing is that you're struggling together. I did not know what my major was going to be. I knew that at that time, again, I was premed, but I carried with me really just an interest in politics and activism from high school. I took my first class in the politics department my freshman year. That was super exciting for me because most of my education at that point or at high school was AP classes but science-centered. And so I had this opportunity to explore.

Morgan Smith ([08:41](#)):

I think part of that process was facilitated by the distribution requirements that we have to take. I think the spread of classes that you have to take for your distribution requirements kind of puts you in that space to not just care about, "Okay, I want to get this A in bio because it's going to be a departmental. It's going to count for my GPA." You have to kind of switch up the ways that you think. The way that I think through a politics course won't be the same way that I approach orgo, right?

Bryant Blount ([09:16](#)):

Orgo is organic chemistry. Of course, commonly taken by students who are interested in studying medicine following graduation.

Morgan Smith ([09:23](#)):

I think a lot of that getting through Princeton is something that is learned. And so having teammates and friends who were upperclassmen, who had been through the ropes before... Once you're an upperclassman, those opportunities to kind of reach down to underclassmen, kind of like that lift-as-you-climb mentality, those opportunities definitely present themselves. For example, in the School of Public and International Affairs, I serve on a student committee. And I recently had the opportunity to speak to freshmen that were coming in and trying to figure out course selection and whether or not the School of Public and International Affairs was for them. And I think those opportunities also present themselves just through extracurriculars in general.

Morgan Smith ([10:16](#)):

I'm a dancer in Black Arts Company dance. So, it's a hip hop group on campus. That was a space where I kind of got to shut away the stress of Princeton. And what was really cool was that, especially as a freshman, I'm looking at all these people, I'm like, "Wow, they go to Princeton. They're accomplished and they can dance!" And sometimes during dance practice, we don't start off by stretching. We start off by checking in. It was especially around kind of those times for course selection that I'd ask, "Hey. What do you think about this course? How would that pair with taking this or that?" And having that access to that knowledge through just different extracurriculars, I think that was also very helpful.

Morgan Smith ([11:06](#)):

I had this opportunity joining with Clio on campus. It's the shorter way of saying the American Whig-Cliosophic Society. Founded in 1765, it's the oldest collegiate political literary and debate society in the nation. I might've been able to kind of find that voice and that interest for politics, but I lacked the space to engage with other people, especially with different viewpoints. And so when I arrived at Princeton and I find Whig-Clio, what was really beautiful about the spaces is it's a political society and they have two parties. So, the Whig party, which I'm more of a member of, is more left leaning. The Clio party is more right-leaning. And I always, always went to Clio events. I might not have agreed with a lot of the viewpoint there, but it was a space to respectfully engage with other people. I think it was there that I also made a lot of friends, again, whose viewpoints might not have always lined up with mine, but because I had those relationships, when we in turn begin to debate and talk about where we might have butted heads on, the fact that we were friends, the fact that we had that mutual respect for one another, we might've gone at it, but at the end of the day, we could step away from that conversation and say, "We disagree, but you're still my friend." And I'm going to value that.

Morgan Smith ([12:42](#)):

One moment I think of... It was really just a joyous event, was the midterm elections watch party that Whig-Clio hosted along with Vote 100, the student voter engagement initiative on campus. It was so much fun because there were hundreds of people in the building. And as an officer, we were running around, making sure that people were fed, that the technology and the building was working. And it was really just, I think, a combination of getting to serve my fellow peers by putting on this event and giving them a space where they can engage with the election with their friends, but also I think it kind of brought out something that I've seen in myself where I really enjoy putting on events and kind of running around in the background, making sure that everything is going okay. And that's kind of my job now in Whig-Clio, serving as president.

Bryant Blount ([13:50](#)):

It bears mentioning that Morgan is the first Black female president in the history of this organization.

Morgan Smith ([13:56](#)):

Making sure that the programming that we put on, not only that people are enjoying it, but everything is going right. Everything that had led up to that day with the tabling in Frist, I think that was definitely a moment where, at the end of the night, I kind of sat back. I was tired, but I was like, "We did it. We showed the student body why we are Whig-Clio and how we have the resources and the officers and just really determined team members to put on something of that magnitude."

Morgan Smith ([14:37](#)):

What really solidified everything for me, it actually wasn't one class, but it was an extracurricular experience that I had. There's a trip called Halftime offered by the school, all expenses paid. It's really fun. You take three or four days between semesters and you go on basically this retreat to upstate New York. And you're with a small group of your peers. It's just for sophomores, which is why it's called Halftime. You're halfway through your Princeton career. And it was really just a space to slow down, really be still even, and think of not only what I wanted the rest of my Princeton experience to look like, but also consider what life after Princeton would look like. And that's when I decided to switch from pre-med to pre-law. And the pieces kind of fell in after that.

Bryant Blount ([15:31](#)):

We also asked Morgan to record some sounds from her time at home. Let's listen in on that soundscape now.

Morgan Smith ([15:42](#)):

So, coffee is just as a central part of my life at Princeton as it is at home now, fortunately not with the Coffee Club where I actually used to work as well, whole barista and everything. Instead, I make coffee here.

Morgan Smith ([15:57](#)):

So, at home I use a french press, and it sounds much fancier than it actually is, but that also means that I have to ground the beans myself.

Morgan Smith ([16:23](#)):

So, once my beans are ground, I put them in the press. And then I'll just put some hot water on it. At home, we have a hot water dispenser. It's really, really convenient for all the tea and coffee we drink at home. Five minutes and then I have a fresh hot cup of coffee. I don't think anything can top Coffee Club though.

Morgan Smith ([17:06](#)):

I think I have maybe one more thing that can kind of speak to what it means to go to Princeton. So, I mentioned before that I was in a space of anticipation because although I had some perceptions about what Princeton was, I was still in a place of uncertainty about what this journey would look like. And there are moments, and I don't think just in your freshman year but I think kind of sprinkled throughout, where it really hits: this is what it means to go to Princeton. And I call it kind of like that Princeton magic.

Morgan Smith ([17:44](#)):

I'll never forget. It was the first time I had ever really stepped on campus. It was to check in and grab my dorm key. And basically walking through the Baker Rink, the ice skating rink, with my parents, stopping at each station. And at the very end of this line, you take a photo in front of a logo wall and a staff member basically hands you and your parents this heavy, kind of coffee table book. It's called Princeton Impressions. And they were just giving this out to everyone. And I was like, "They can afford to do this?" So, not only did I get a chance to kind of just the magic of the day of really checking in and beginning that journey as a freshman, but kind of like that slice of magic that my parents got to take with them as well. And that whole day was just such a beautiful moment, especially because sitting in the dining hall for the first time with my parents... And my dad and I, we love to eat, so we were going back for seconds

and thirds. And we were so impressed with the food, too. We're like, "I won't miss my mom's cooking that much if I get to eat this every day."

Morgan Smith ([18:59](#)):

I'll never forget, again, sitting in Wilcox eating and that process of beginning to reflect what it means to go to Princeton. And I'm not a first generation college student, but I am the first in my family to go to an Ivy League school, right? And my dad reflected on this and I've only seen this man cry maybe that was the second of three times. And he was literally in tears thinking about how I'm not here alone. When I step into this space, I bring him. I bring his late father who he laments that he doesn't get to see me in this space, but I know that he's here with me.

Vivian Slee ([19:52](#)):

So, Bryant, I told our listeners earlier that you'd be joining us. I'm so glad that you're able to join us. I also admitted that I don't know what all of your work entails in the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students. So, I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about that.

Bryant Blount ([20:09](#)):

Sure. So, in ODUS, as we're more colloquially known, we are the point folks for everything that begins to happen outside the classroom really, the nonacademic components. Broadly speaking, we can be thought of as the folks who help manage student activities and programs, so student government, student groups, large scale events. We also help uphold and communicate community standards, so we are the office that helps share those expectations with our students when they join our community. We are also the support system, right? So, we are very vested in the health and wellbeing of our students. And we have a system that, again, helps to promote healthy behaviors, help people manage the transition to campus and supports them while they're here.

Vivian Slee ([20:59](#)):

That's wonderful. We all, as admission officers, speak about Princeton having this fantastic network of support. So, I'm really glad to hear about it in action. Now, Morgan talks about Whig-Clio a lot, and I'm just wondering if you could explain a little bit more about Whig-Cleo and what that means, to our listeners.

Bryant Blount ([21:17](#)):

Sure. So, the Whig-Cliosophic Society is basically one of the oldest political science and debate societies in this country really. And it has a long story history on our campus as being the home for all kinds of political activities, whether that's college political party groups student organizations, or even ones that are interested in policy or activities. For example, mock trial or debate certainly has a robust program under Whig-Clio. International relations council. There's a number of ways. Model UN. There's a ton of ways in which these students are able to explore, engage, challenge their beliefs and interests over their four years here.

Vivian Slee ([22:03](#)):

Was the Vote 100 initiative, was that something that came out of Whig-Clio? Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Bryant Blount ([22:10](#)):

Sure. So, Vote 100 is an intentional program designed to help engage our undergraduate student body. Princeton's informal motto, at least as you may know, the formal ones in Latin, but Princeton's informal motto is, "In the nation service and the service of all humanity." And with that, I think, comes an institutional focus on civic engagement, on civic duty. And as Americans and American citizens, for example, voting is one of the fundamental ways in which you engage in that. There have been data over the past several elections, however, that indicates the Princeton students, for a number of reasons we believe, do not actually vote at rates comparable to those of their peers, both in the Ivy League and in their age cohort. And so Vote 100 was sort of born as an intentional campaign to reverse that, to help students engage in that action. And if not able to vote, for example, because they may not be 18 at the time of the election, or because they may not be citizens, for example, to find ways to engage civically adjacent to that, right? Even for someone who can vote themselves, there are ways to expand that power by helping others, perhaps, register to vote, by raising important issues that may animate folks to vote or help them connect these issues to the action, and to just generally change the culture to one in which it's a Princetonians duty and expectation or engage civically.

Vivian Slee ([23:41](#)):

That's fantastic. What a great organization. Do you happen to know the university's informal motto in Latin?

Bryant Blount ([23:47](#)):

No. That one would be on me. I was a history major when I was and not one of classical Greek or Latin history.

Vivian Slee ([23:56](#)):

Okay. Morgan also talks a little bit about Princeton magic. I don't know if you have anything you wanted to add about that. What is Princeton magic for you?

Bryant Blount ([24:06](#)):

I am a Princeton alum and the common thread, I think, that really makes this place interesting is the amazing people that come here, both to teach, to work, and to study. And the threads that ended up connecting them in this special place during this special time in their lives is one that will endure forever and forever be enriching, so that to me is a bit of the magic as it happens, as it unfolds here, as it will come in the future, and as it has been, I think, for a long, long time,

Vivian Slee ([24:32](#)):

That's nice. That does sound very magical.

Vivian Slee ([24:39](#)):

We hope you enjoyed learning about Morgan's amazing experiences at Princeton as much as we did. As I said earlier, this podcast was created with prospective students and their families in mind. I'd like to direct all of our listeners to our admission website at [admission.princeton.edu](http://admission.princeton.edu). There, you can watch an information session with an admission officer, or you can chat and connect with current Princeton students among many other options there. So, have a look at it.

This transcript was exported on Oct 21, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Vivian Slee ([25:10](#)):

Meet Princeton's audio engineer is Nick [Denali 00:25:12] of Orange Box Pictures. Mary Buckley and I, Vivian Slee, are executive producers. Bryant Blount is our cohost and consultant. And original music was composed by Molly Truman, who is also our master sound designer and engineer from the class of 2024. We'd also like to give a special thanks and shout out to our Dean of Admission, Karen Richardson, and to Morgan Smith for their great contributions to this episode and to our listeners for tuning in.

Vivian Slee ([25:42](#)):

Now, if you have any questions about anything to do at all with admissions, and you'd like your questions to be answered live on air, please write into our mailbag found on the Meet Princeton webpage on our website. Thank you so much for listening, and we hope you'll join us next time on Meet Princeton.