

SARAH BALDWIN: From the Watson Institute at Brown University, this is Trending Globally. I'm Sarah Baldwin.

For part two of our student spotlight series leading up to commencement, we talked with Ethan Shire. Ethan's a political science concentrator and an active member of Brown's political scene. But his junior year, he took engineering 1010, a class on entrepreneurship taught by Professor Danny Warshay, and it started him on a path he did not expect.

He loved the class and went on to serve as its TA and became an integral member of the Brown business community. We talked about how he first got the entrepreneurial bug and how his interests in policy history and business overlapped at Brown. We started by talking about how engineering 1010, which Ethan refers to as Engine 1010, sharpened his skills as a writer thinker and problem solver.

ETHAN SHIRE: So I actually took the course as a student the fall of my Junior year and I've subsequently served as a teaching assistant, first as an assistant TA and then this year in the Fall and Spring semesters as the head TA for the class. And TAing Professor Warshay has easily been the most fulfilling experience I've had at Brown. Being able to see the intricacies of the course, what happens behind the scenes, and kind of being able to get a sense of how other people think, which has to myself in turn really provided me a platform to kind of better understand my own writing and the way I can express my own self.

So a little bit about the class, it's conducted like a business school course, where each day students come in having read a case [INAUDIBLE] produced by Harvard Business School.

SARAH BALDWIN: What's an example of a case study?

ETHAN SHIRE: Yeah, absolutely. So I guess I'll use one of my [? favorites ?] [? this ?] semester in the course is one called Noodles and Co, which is a chain that actually originated in the Midwest, really like a noodle shop that produced various types of noodle based dishes. So there'd be macaroni and cheese, Asian noodles, things of that nature. And it basically talks about how this company fostered such a sophisticated really human resources platform where they compensated and gave more leadership opportunities to their employees such that those employees kind of performed at a higher level and they in turn provided greater customer service than their competitors.

Then Noodles expands and now it's actually like a nationwide brand. We don't have it here in

New England, really, but it's extremely popular in the Midwest. I know parts of the East coast, Washington DC and Philadelphia. And it's a really cool case of how founder kind of took a different approach to kind of expand their business. The other part of the course that I love being part of is the business plan.

So the class is usually about 35, 36 students. And students are broken up into groups of five or six normally, where they create their own business plan that they pitch at in the semester to different VCs as if it were a real live venture capital pitch.

SARAH BALDWIN: And then what happens?

ETHAN SHIRE: And then from there students kind of have the decision of whether or not they're going to continue their project or not. And kind of my role in all this is helping groups one, settle on an idea. So I'm kind of there throughout the ideation phase, helping generate an interesting topic and an interesting viable business model. And then throughout, when they're working on their financials and also working with groups to actually find experts in their subject area.

And something that I found really interesting, for someone who's been studying entrepreneurship is, although having expertise in a subject area is vital and is important, having kind of a general sense of what needs to be done for business to get going is just as important regardless of what your expertise in a certain sector may or may not be.

SARAH BALDWIN: And have any of those ideas been funded?

ETHAN SHIRE: Oh, yeah, a number of them. I mean, a project Danny talks about all the time is, I'm not sure if you're familiar with Casper Mattress.

SARAH BALDWIN: That was--

ETHAN SHIRE: So that was not born out of the class, but the founders Luke and Neil-- Danny's worked closely with both of them. And Luke actually came to class last fall, which was really interesting to hear him speak about how Engine 1010 and kind of being suppose entrepreneurship as a Brown student prepared him for kind of success, and how he actually had a venture fail before starting Casper. Which obviously is humungously successful.

But actually another product that came out of the class well it was RUNA, which is kind like an iced tea drink. You see it a lot around here. And that actually idea was a business model-- was a business plan presented in Engine 1010 that ended up flourishing.

SARAH BALDWIN: And Engine 1010 is Engineering 1010.

ETHAN SHIRE: Oh, I apologize. That's the course code for the class. So Engine 1010 is the course code. The class is, I've got to be honest, I am a political science Latin American Studies concentrator. My engineering expertise is quite limited. But nonetheless the course is taught in the engineering department.

And I don't know if you're familiar with the [INAUDIBLE] the Nelson Center, but actually just today actually is the official opening of the new Nelson Center building. So there's going to be tons of different opportunities for Brown founders, for Brown students interested in entrepreneurship, to pursue their ventures in the coming years. And it's nice that I'm getting to see this building come to fruition after hearing about for so many years. And also sad that it's coming up just as I'm on my way out.

SARAH BALDWIN: But there's a Shake Shack.

ETHAN SHIRE: But there's a Shake Shack. Yes.

SARAH BALDWIN: So first of all, Ethan, define entrepreneurship and then tell me how-- what about that is interesting to you and then how it overlaps with public policy?

ETHAN SHIRE: So that's a great question. The way Danny teaches entrepreneurship, and I think it's kind of the best way to define the word, is basically you are searching for a solution to a problem without regard to the resources that are being controlled for currently. So basically a successful venture is answering someone's problem.

There has to be some sort of need that you're filling, some sort of void out there that your product, that your idea, that your service is kind of filling the void of. And I think that's really the best way to define entrepreneurship. Danny talks about the burden of abundant resources often, which basically the idea that sure, giant companies, whether they be General Motors or Amazon or Facebook, have tons of resources, tons of capital, a lot of really smart people working there.

But then again, when there is sort of a niche in this market, they may not be the best ones to fill it because they have so many other obligations. And that if they were to launch a venture and it fails, that would hurt them a lot more than a startup by a few recent college graduates that really have nothing to lose. And so there really is a distinct advantage that smaller

companies that kind of have young founders that really have not much to lose, they actually have a competitive advantage over some of these larger giants.

SARAH BALDWIN: Do you remember when you first became interested in it?

ETHAN SHIRE: I would say my interest exclusively came out of the class. So my first two years at Brown I spent a lot of time in the Watson Institute, going to events, running different programs, putting on events myself. And my interests were kind of squarely focused in the public policy realm. I always had an interest in foreign defense policy, national security work.

And the summer before I took Danny's class, actually, I was in Washington, DC working for a think tank called the American Enterprise Institute where I was doing national security research for a think tank scholar there. Which was an amazing experience. But I knew I always had an interest in kind of the private sector, particularly business and startups.

And I was never someone who was super interested in investment banking or anything like that. I didn't have much of a sophisticated financial background. And so I guess I had this preconceived notion that that's what prohibited me from engaging in kind of entrepreneurial community, the business community here at Brown. Which is a very rich and robust community in and of itself.

But I was taking Engine 1010 and learning more about what are the tools that it takes to be successful in business, and kind of engage more in the Nelson center, I really learned that having a background in public policy where you kind of have this based interest and demonstrated skill sets us to do it to do adequate research and solve problems-- that's really the skill set necessary to be successful in a startup and business writ large.

SARAH BALDWIN: Very cool. And tell me what your thesis was about?

ETHAN SHIRE: Yeah, I did my thesis on the 1994 AMIA attack in Buenos Aires, which was attack on the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. The AMIA was sort of like the focal point of the Jewish community, sort of akin what we'd call a JCC here in the United States. And it is actually the deadliest terror attack in Argentina's history, where 85 people were murdered.

And in the 25 years since the attack took place, which was on July 18, 1994, there have not been any adequate arrests. The current suspects of the crime are out and about. None of them have been brought back to Argentina to stand trial. And so my thesis looked at one, how

was the attack conducted, and two, why has there been this tremendous failure of the rule of law in Argentina to bring to justice the perpetrators of this heinous, heinous attack.

SARAH BALDWIN: You're active in so many different dimensions, from entrepreneurship to public policy to history to this topic of your thesis to international relations. Is there a way you see all this cohering after Brown?

ETHAN SHIRE: I guess part of the reason I chose Brown was because of the open curriculum, how it's feasible to concentrate in multiple disciplines. So I'm a political science Latin American studies concentrator that has serious interest in public policy, and I've been involved in various political groups on campus. But also this interest in kind of business and entrepreneurship.

And I think one of the great things about being around undergrad is that you can have your foot in so many different doors where it's much more difficult to do so once you are an adult with a full time job. And so honestly the way I've looked at it, I've just been trying to pursue my own academic and recreational interests during my time at Brown to hopefully allow me to figure out what to do in my life after Brown.

I know in the immediate future I'll be working for a really small boutique management consulting firm in Boston. And my eventual hope is to apply to law school or business school or maybe a joint program that allows me to get both degrees. One of things I love most is that I've been able to combine so many different interests, even though they might necessarily not link together naturally.

I think nonetheless they provide me with a really an effective skillset to hopefully have success in whatever industries I end up pursuing. But in the short term, I have really loved my four years here at Brown. I don't think I would've had a better undergraduate experience anywhere else. And I think that's because I've been able to pursue so many different interests.

SARAH BALDWIN: Real quick, what will you miss most?

ETHAN SHIRE: Wow, that's a great question. Just speaking to my friend from high school who goes to other schools, other universities, I think the attention that undergraduates get here is unparalleled. Whether it's working with my thesis advisor, Professor Erica Durante, my second reader, Professor J. Brian Atwood, both of which, phenomenal scholars.

Professor Durante was so incredibly helpful throughout every step of the process of this thesis research. Brian Atwood is an extremely accomplished diplomat himself, working at the highest

levels of State Department. And then of course my relationship with Danny, with Professor Warshay, someone who has had incredibly successful business career and then has done so much here for the Brown community and who himself is a Brown alum has done so much for his alma mater-- class of 87.

And I think just this attention that I've gotten from that I've received from so many leaders in their industries I'm not going to get that the real world when I'm a management consultant. And I'm going to have to put a lot of long hours doing fairly mundane routine tasks. What I'm going to miss the most about Brown is basically this exceptional attention I've received from meeting scholars and leaders in their fields.

SARAH BALDWIN: This episode of Trending Globally was produced by Dan Richards and Babette Thomas. Our theme music is by Henry Bloomfield. I'm Sarah Baldwin. You can subscribe to us on iTunes, Stitcher, or your favorite podcast app. If you like what you hear, leave us a rating and review on iTunes. It really helps others find the show. For more information about this and other shows, go to Watson.Brown.edu. Thanks for listening. We'll be back soon with another episode of Trending Globally.