

Transcript for “Episode 6. Resilience & Bouncing Back”

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Jonny: So I came into IU and on my first day here I was arrested.

Andrew: And all of a sudden you feel so discouraged.

Tyler: So overwhelmed.

Micah: And so, of course, I wasn't doing well.

Mariana: Did the work, I didn't procrastinate, I organized myself and my time wisely.

Logan: Yeah, it really turned me around as a student.

Drew: Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of our workshop series. We're filming on location on a beautiful day at Hilltop Garden. Hilltop Garden is a location on IU campus where students can take classes on such things as sustainable agriculture and also clothing and dye manufacture. We've chosen this location because Hilltop Garden is a place that is full of growth and renewal—two themes important for our episode today. Today's episode is called "Resilience & Bouncing Back."

Molly: I'm Dr. Molly Burke and I work at the Student Academic Center helping students who've been placed on academic probation.

Drew: And I'm Dr. Andrew Koke; I'm an advisor for the College of Arts & Sciences. Now you mentioned academic probation and that hits close to home for me. In my undergraduate years I was on academic probation.

Molly: Well, you're not alone. A lot of students, actually, experience academic difficulty when they get to college. And, you know, for some students, they've experienced some academic difficulty in the past. And for other students it's really a new, surprising experience. And likewise, you know, for some students they've never experienced something so challenging before in their lives, so it really comes as a shock. And for other students, academic difficulty is just one issue heaped onto some other complicated things that they've been dealing with.

Drew: The thing that can sometimes be tricky about academic difficulty is it has a way of sneaking up on a student. Sometimes, perhaps, they've not been checking in with their professor

or checking their grades, and the next thing they know they're hearing some bad news. Other times they might have known that this was coming but they think, perhaps, that if they do nothing it'll somehow correct itself. But either way, it can sometimes lead to digging a hole so deep you can't get out of it.

Now, we're going to be looking at some students today who are going to share their stories with us. Who are these students, Molly?

Molly: The students we're going to hear from today are actually students who have been placed on academic probation, but who have gotten back into good standing and, actually, in a couple of cases, who actually just graduated this May. So we sat down with them and asked them to talk a little bit about their experiences. We just asked them to talk, we didn't give them a script. We just wanted to hear honestly about what the experience was like and, ultimately, what they did to get back on track.

Part 1: What Went Wrong?

Andrew: Like a lot of students who come to IU, I think, when I came to college I just kind of considered it the next step in my academic journey. And a lot of times when you take that step you don't fully have the step after planned out. So I think in high school my schedule was very regimented between school and academics, after school extracurriculars between performing arts and athletics and things like that. My schedule was always very laid out for me. And when you come to college, you don't really realize until you get on campus, but then those time management skills that you didn't realize... didn't really need to come into play in high school really are then on your shoulders; the burden's on you.

Tyler: My Freshman year I lived in an LLC on campus, which meant that everyone that I was living with had similar interests. We were all speaking languages and reading about far-away places and planning travel abroad. And so that led to a lot of late nights in the lounge. And that led to me not attending a lot of my 8 AM courses, courses that needed attendance to pass.

Micah: So, a couple things went wrong, actually. The first major thing was that I chose to come to IU not on my own merit but my family wanted me to come here. And they wanted me to pursue a Physics degree because there were a lot of opportunities that they could get me in. And Physics wasn't anything that I was interested in. I chose to do it because I wanted to make my family happy. So in my whole first year here it was very hard. I didn't like the classes that I was in, I didn't like the professors, I didn't like anything about the program. And so of course I wasn't doing well to begin with. The second major thing that happened is I struggled with social anxiety. And a lot of people think that social anxiety is when you don't want to hang out with people or you act weird around people. And that wasn't the case with me. It was I was scared to

go to class, I was scared to check my Oncourse, and it even got so bad that I wouldn't check my email because I was afraid that something would happen. And of course, not liking Physics and being scared to go to class I just didn't go to class. And so for an entire semester I pretty much just wasted away in my apartment.

Mariana: Well, going into college I had family problems. So, my Grandpa passed away and I was not in the right emotional state, and I was even considering whether or not I was ready for college.

Logan: I think the main thing that went wrong with me being on academic probation was... When I first came into IU I had a large misconception about education. I felt as though college was just like a customer basis; where I would give them some money and I would get a piece of paper and get a degree and go get a job. And being on academic probation sort of gave me a wake-up call and restructured the way I thought about education. It's much more about learning than making money. And that's one of the things I always emphasize to people who are on academic probation—is that they need to look at the learning first rather than the grades, because it's much more about the journey than getting to the destination of graduating.

Molly: So we've just heard about a number of different factors that have contributed to these students experiencing academic difficulty. And of course there are a number of complex issues that students can be going through, such as a family problem or a crisis of some sort or students having to work lots and lots of hours. And for some students coming to Bloomington feels like a shift to a really small place. For other people it feels like moving to a big town. Students can experience a kind of culture shock when they come to IU.

Drew: But in all of our years working with these students at Indiana University, we've never come across a student who could not have succeeded. They were all smart enough.

Molly: Absolutely. Every student who gets into IU has met the admission standards and every year the IU admissions office turns away, literally, thousands of people. So what that means is that the people who are here have earned their spot here. They deserve it. They're the ones that made the cut.

Drew: But the thing is, when you're in academic difficulty, even though you might know in your head that you're smart enough, you don't feel like you're smart enough. You actually begin to doubt whether or not you have the intelligence to make the grade. You may even begin to wonder if Indiana University is the right place for you.

Molly: Students can feel ashamed. It also can be a really isolating feeling. So we asked the students to talk a little bit about what it felt like to go through that, because we feel like

acknowledging the difficulty that you're going through actually can be a big part of coming to terms with it and then being able to move on.

Part 2: The Low Point

Andrew: When you get discouraged academically, particularly the one instance I can think of or the one example I can think of that is the most effective is class attendance. When you get discouraged and you feel like you're getting behind everything just keeps piling on top of one another. Miss one assignment here, miss a test here, miss a couple classes here and there, and all of a sudden you feel so discouraged. And it almost serves as a way to justify yourself, that it's OK to miss class, it's OK to miss assignments. It just snowballs one on top of the other and, before you know it, things have really gotten out of hand, so... More than anything it's just a really discouraging feeling to know that you've struggled and failed academically.

Tyler: Once I actually decided to begin checking my grades on Oncourse to find out how I'd been doing in these courses I had barely attended, I realized that in most cases there were not enough points in the semester to recover my errors. So I felt so overwhelmed. I was asking, "What am I going to do?", "How can I save myself?", "Is there anything that I could even possibly change?" And because I'd not thought about the resources ahead of time, I didn't think of a plan, a distinct plan that could help me get out of the hole I'd dug myself into.

Jonny: And those struggles that I faced coming from high school to college ultimately landed me on academic probation. So that's kind of how I got there. And then, finding out, you get an email telling you, saying that you're below a 2.0. And getting that email is kind of a shock to your system.

Mariana: It's just... it's just something I never expected to be on.

Logan: I was mainly just very disappointed in myself, because I knew that I could do better than that.

Andrew: For me, struggling academically was never about an inability to learn the material. It was a time in my life when I lost confidence in myself and lost confidence in my ability to achieve my potential.

Micah: What the turning point for me really was, was realizing that I was using fear as a crutch to not do what I wanted. And I was afraid of what my family would think of me, I was afraid, like, if they would be happy, and I was afraid of failing. And I was using that fear to just stay in my own little box.

Andrew: I think the turning point for me was... I think when I was struggling I was very nervous about other people finding out about my struggles—in particular, I would say, my parents. My parents have helped me a lot in terms of being here at IU. So I think finding out that I was really in a bad spot and kind of, I guess, thinking, "Well, how are my parents going to react to this?"... it was a really big burden on me.

Tyler: Inadequacy. I felt very inadequate because I also knew that all these people I was talking to and the friends that I had made, they weren't saying that they felt swamped or that they felt lost in their semester. They were attending their courses, doing OK. They would talk about tests and quizzes that they had done well on or papers that had received good grades and I wasn't sharing those same feelings. I felt worried that everyone else was doing college right, and I wasn't.

Drew: Those were some really difficult feelings the students were talking about. And I've met several students in my time who haven't admitted the situation to their parents, or to their friends even. And some have not even admitted what's going on to themselves. What they're really doing is hiding from the situation.

Molly: Well that makes sense because, you know, it really takes a lot of courage to face your difficulties straight on. It's a big risk to go and really try for it, because when you try and you give your all, you're risking that if things don't go right, it's going to feel even more disappointing. And that's why I have so much respect and admiration for the students that we've talked to today. Because they really had the strength and courage to just go for it. So let's hear from them about what they decided to do.

Part 3: Solutions

Get to, and get into, class

Logan: I had been going down a path where I had habits of just getting by with the bare minimum in every class. And when I got to college and I got on academic probation, that was a huge realization. So I had to turn that around and stop playing a game with my professors where, like, seeing how much I could get away with and really figuring out ways to see how much more I could do. And turning around from being disappointed in myself to being proud of myself for my achievements was a much better feeling.

Micah: The first major thing that I had to work on was getting out of my comfort zone. And for me, that was actually going to class and speaking in class... and I found the more that I participate, the more that I pushed myself out of the comfort zone, the more I wanted to tackle more things. It was like that snowball of motivation.

Schedule and organize it.

Andrew: First and foremost, I think, a lot of times in school the tasks you have can be so big and daunting that you don't really know where to start. For me, getting myself back on track was about splitting those big tasks up into more manageable chunks. And a lot of that came through scheduling my time more effectively and more detail-oriented time scheduling. Basically, I needed to make to-do lists, I needed to make a full schedule, 24 hours a day of what I was going to do. Whether it was studying for a test, whether it was going to class, whether it was group meetings, even playing basketball with my friends, going out to the movies—I scheduled everything and I adjusted my time scheduling accordingly as I went through the week. And I think scheduling even the simplest of things allows you remain focused on, sort of, your list of priorities.

Tyler: I realized that I would have to become much more organized. I decided that every class needed a binder, or a folder, or a specific notebook where I could keep everything important for that class. Also, this helped me to study, because once I would look through that class's binder, it wouldn't be a mess of loose papers, and half-sheets filled out, and post-its—it would be dated pieces of paper that I could follow.

Find the right major for *you*.

Mariana: Actually, my advisor sent me an email about a workshop seminar, so if you didn't like the business classes there was something different in a different department that was business-like. And that's what got me into telecommunications, which is my major, that I'm really, like, happy and... I fell in love with it. And so thanks to that I found the major I liked, I got more interested in my classes. And I did the work, I didn't procrastinate, I organized myself and my time wisely. And, most of all, I just enjoyed myself and I really liked my classes and now my major.

Micah: And the other major thing was talking to my family and expressing to them that Physics wasn't what I wanted to do and I'm not going to get anything out of life if I'm doing everything for them. And so I had to make that big decision to change my major to something I was going to enjoy. And once I faced that fear and talked to my family, things just happened to turn around. I enjoyed the classes that I was in, I enjoyed going to class, I wasn't afraid that my family was judging me, and I just started doing really well.

Connect with people that can help.

Mariana: ...helping me seek out my professors, which I normally wouldn't have done because being in such large classrooms I'm kind of not into putting that much forth effort to get to meet them. But I did. And I visited my advisor more often. I still see her sometimes and she still recognizes me, which is awesome! And also just my instructors...

Tyler: My advisors and professors were another really helpful resource. I used my advisor that semester more than any other semester until now. They helped me to choose classes, to know more about the classes I had decided on, and to help me find other campus resources that would help me with tutoring, or studying, or just a quiet place to breathe.

Andrew: The best thing I did while I was here at IU was to surround myself with people whose strengths were my weaknesses. The support group I had here at IU—my friends, my fraternity brothers, my girlfriend, everyone—I felt like placed a really big importance on achieving their goals and finding value in how small tasks during your time in school can help you achieve your long-term goals. So, I would say, the most important thing you can do is to find people who encourage you to better yourself. Find people who maybe offer qualities that you don't and kind of emulate people around you and learn how to do the same to others.

Tyler: What helped me stay motivated was knowing that there were people who were doing college successfully, people that stayed organized, people that attended all of their classes. I knew that I was intelligent and capable and that I could do that, too.

Look at the future.

Logan: I changed my mindset on education because before, as I said, I was on, like, a basis where I thought it was just money. And when I actually came to value it and see what it could actually do for me later in life... yeah, it really turned me around as a student.

I try to look long term at the future because, me specifically, I'd like to go to graduate school. And then if I do well in graduate school, I'd like to pursue a Ph.D. So, those senses of achievement that I get from doing things is what keeps me motivated, because I know that no matter how well I do on something, I feel like if I did well on something I can always do better. And I like proving things to myself like that.

Micah: Yeah, when I face a setback now, I look at it as a learning experience rather than a stumbling block. If I can overcome everything that I had already overcome in the past, there's nothing stopping me but me from overcoming what problem faces ahead of me right now, yeah...

Take-Aways & Credits

Drew: What was so impressive with these students, Molly, is that they saw what they needed to do to change their circumstances and then they went and did it—they became proactive towards their own education.

Molly: Absolutely. And students can start doing that simply by attending class. And, actually, not just attending class, but really coming to class prepared, ready to engage with the materials, and learn from their professors and their fellow students.

Drew: In addition to attending class, creating a schedule for the entire semester and also keeping all your classes organized.

Molly: And students will find that their academic difficulties become a lot easier when they find something interesting to study. So, when students find a major that really works for them, things get a lot easier. And if students aren't sure about what they should major in or what they really are interested in, they can talk to their academic advisors, who are a great resource.

Drew: If students are having trouble on campus or at home, they could visit Counseling and Psychological Services in the student Health Center. And if they're interested in being tested or having accommodations for disabilities, Disability Services for Students is available as well.

Molly: So, we're not here to say that there's a quick fix or that it's going to be simple. But we have seen that when students repeatedly take some of the actions that we've been talking about, things really do get better. Each of the students that we heard from today was ultimately able to take an experience of struggling academically, think about it, decide what they really wanted for themselves, and then frame that experience as a positive learning experience. And, in fact, I actually know of several students who were admitted to a graduate program or who got a job offer because they were actually able to talk about the experience of overcoming academic difficulty. So, students can find that, actually having that type of struggle, and getting through it, helps them to be stronger and better learners as well.

The Students:

Jonny George, IU Junior

Andrew McCarthy, IU Senior

Tyler Keown, IU Senior

Micah Nethery, B.A. in Computer Science, Indiana University

Mariana Cervantes, IU Junior

Logan Doyle, IU Junior

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Produced By
The Student Academic Center
<http://sac.indiana.edu>

Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Co-Hosts
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