

INDIE MAJOR PODCAST

3/18/24 Sophie Takmopoulos

Individualized Major: Global Business in Health Innovation

Ken:

This is Indie Major, a show devoted to the wide ranging stories and visions of individualized majors at the University of Connecticut. I'm your host, Ken Cormier.

I'm here with Sophie Takmopoulos. Welcome Sophie.

Sophie:

Hi everyone. It's great to be here.

Ken:

Thanks for coming in. So, you are an individualized major at UConn. Would you tell us what that is and describe it for us?

Sophie:

Yeah. So, I really thought it was interesting to join the individualized major program. My major is Global Business in Health Innovation. I started actually as a biomedical engineering major. Love the engineering department, Love innovation and creating things. But biomedical engineering specifically gets very niche and very track based. Once you enter a track junior year, it's really hard to like pivot from that. And you might have to take extra years. And at that point, I didn't really know what track I wanted to go down. And I'm like,

okay, well I should probably pivot because I don't want to get stuck in something. Then I switched my major to biology and a minor in entrepreneurship and technology innovation, which was awesome too. But then I was learning about plants and I wasn't really into plants. So I made my own major as global business and health innovation specifically because I've always been interested in science, but not necessarily knowing what direction. And then there was a direction that just clicked. It was going towards health and pharmaceuticals and biotech. But from that business perspective, I feel like the individualized major experience allows you to get more nitty gritty with it. And if you have a passion, you should just go for it.

Ken:

So what I'm hearing is you seem to have a lot of interests, is that fair?

Sophie:

Yes.

Ken:

So, what are the disciplines that you include in your plan of study?

Sophie:

Yeah. Like the topics and the specific parts of it are health and global studies but also hitting on that like business sector of it. Specifically with health, like I mentioned, like biotech and health innovation, it is represented like throughout the other majors. But having niche classes, specifically in global health is important,

right? Because I feel like there's a lack sometimes in biotech or innovation of understanding the past and really understanding from almost like an anthropology perspective of how we should be. And also like epidemiology, which is a class I'm in now based on my plan of study, of thinking about the people first and not just how we could fix a problem that and global studies. I have a global health and human rights course coming up. Also, like the business part of it is important to me because there's this disconnect between business. When you think of like Moderna or Pfizer or these big companies, there has to be a head, there have to be the chief executives and the chief business officers. There's a disconnect sometimes between these big financial people and business people and the people that are in the labs. And I want to be that connection and the bridge between those. So that's a big reason why I combined those sectors.

Ken:

So I'm hearing epidemiology, which is Allied Health, right?

Sophie:

Yes.

Ken:

And then I'm hearing human rights. Anthropology, I think you mentioned. And then this business side. So there are all these interesting ideas that you're working with in your major, and I kind of want to know where did all this start for you? Did you come, I mean, you had this particular experience at UConn where you were trying stuff out. It wasn't exactly working and it sort of ended up with you

crafting your own major. But you must have already had interests in some of these areas before you came to UConn is that correct?

Sophie:

Yes, correct. Yeah. So the big thing for me was I loved science. I took this AP biology course in high school and I loved it. She was just very respectful and reciprocal and wanting to help us learn. And everyone really respected her. As a teacher, Miss Lascardes love her. So that class was just like eye opening. I loved biology, but also I had always this creative side of me that loved, loved drawing painting, always getting involved with like art honor society and stuff like that. So that's why I originally chose biomedical engineering because it combined like that creative aspect but that like bio science side. But I've actually had a lot of role models like in my life that have allowed me to end up at this path. For example, my parents are both in business. My dad actually was an entrepreneur. He built his own company along some other people he worked at, like Goldman Sachs and all that. But also he ended up in this place where he built a company for software for hedge funds. And he was really involved with that. And I remember like, as a kid, like watching them write on this big white board. And I'm like, well, like this is like cool, you know? But I never really considered entrepreneurship for me, but it was that business aspect. And my mom's also in treasury at publicist group, so that was always the business side and it was like watching them do this stuff. But at first I'm always like I can't do business, blah, blah, blah. But I got into marketing later on. And that really pushed the business side and that creative side. But the health side came from my grandparents. So my grandpa came here when he was about seven and he actually got a full scholarship to Columbia Undergraduate here based on a program that he went to. And that's

just like amazing within itself. And sadly, he passed away. But he's the best, Yeh-Yeh, because that's how we say it in Chinese.

Ken:

So your grandfather came here from China?

Sophie:

Yes.

Ken:

At what age again?

Sophie:

Seven.

Ken:

Okay.

Sophie:

Yeah. So basically he worked his way up to be at Beth Israel Medical Center, the outpatient clinic in Manhattan, which is, mind you, very difficult. And he ended up being the head of faculty, but not only just that, but the head of residency, so for all incoming doctors, they would follow him around for their rounds and really like connect with him. And my grandma and him also had a practice for like 30 years.

Ken:

That's interesting. So you have this combination of people who brought you up, who are interested in health and medicine but also entrepreneurship, business, creating businesses. And you also mentioned art and creative arts in there? Do you draw?

Sophie:

Yeah, yeah. I went to actually an art camp and worked. That was like my first job. It's still on my resume. But yeah, it was one of my first jobs and it's called Usdan and it was a beautiful camp. It was just like all of the arts, music, painting, drawing, photography. And I and you'd get a major in a minor, which is kind of funny, right? As kids you're like, uh, but yeah, I had a major in photography and a minor in drawing and paint for like two years and I really developed like Photoshop skills. But more than that it was just like the friendships and bonds and like, it was just great to have these people who were so interested and immersed in the arts. And I was in the leadership program there. So like you'd watch like the kids and everything and like help them go to classes. And it was just so like warm feeling, right? And I'm so happy to have that experience and like that influence in my life.

Ken:

So you must see a connection between, you know, what we think of as the traditional creative arts, right? Like visual arts, right? That process, that creative process of starting with nothing and creating a work of art, right? You must see a connection between that and some of this entrepreneurship that you're talking about.

Sophie:

Oh, for sure, Yeah. And I'm very connected to like like I mentioned, the marketing. Like I like love Canva and like even just like getting to the drawing board, like I'll draw out slides, that's like one of my new processes. Because in my opinion, business is a lot about process. And once you have the process down, you could make a company again and again and again. So like I have my process of like drawing out slides and like blocking. Okay? Would this element look good here or would it look like empty space? Because there's a lot more intricacy to like pitch decks or marketing that people think there is like getting the color just right or moving it like two pixels over, right. So like I turned that love for art and entrepreneurship into like that marketing and websites pitch decks. It's like an art within itself, you know, but very. And also storytelling, that's a big one too. Because a lot of that's a big thing that I learned in the technology and entrepreneurship course. It's about telling the story because if you're selling a product, like you see all these puppy commercials and stuff like that, it's really sad, you know. But it helps you like donate to these great causes. But when you're selling a product that you know will have an impact, it's about building that story up and letting people know like this is the reality of the situation. If you could help like would you. So that I love telling the stories and that's definitely a creative aspect as well.

Ken:

Wow, wow. Now let me ask you this, Do you have something that you do, sort of aside from this specific, you know, vision that you're pursuing academically and professionally that also sustains you? Do you have hobbies that you're interested in?

Sophie:

Yeah. For sure. Like especially on campus. I just want to talk about our clubs as well. Like I'm a part of global business ambassadors and that's like within the business school and also Minda is like, she's like the global sustainability and business main person. Okay. She's our advisor. She's fantastic. We plan to have big things this semester, like really focusing on professional. And I do spend a lot of time with my clubs like professional development, international relations with other colleges abroad. And also like focusing on interacting with clubs here. So that's like the business side, but I'm actually starting a club and we're about to get tier two certified today to be its future health leaders. So I really do try to surround myself with those like minded people. Like with the business and the health and like trying to collect as many students as possible. And we actually had like 100 plus people interested in future health leaders. When we just put it in the Daily Digest, it's just so fantastic that these people want to get involved and they just are reaching for this idea and they just need someone to start it. So I just, that's something I spend my time on. But other than that I write like I'm a big writer just with like anything, right? Like if I'm thinking something, I'm a big poetry person. I've performed in New York City at Nuyorican Poets Cafe, if anyone knows what that is. But a big place in New York City for poem and a lot of history behind that. I love writing, love poetry. Trying to get into reading specifically about like I've always liked like self care, kind stuff, but also with discipline, right? Because I feel like I'm a big planner and I feel like being honest with yourself is so important. I feel like I'm a big planner, but sometimes I need that execution point, right? So I'm reading David Goggins book right now, so that's been really interesting to hear about his childhood history. Also listen to a lot of Andrew Oberman, So he does podcasts as well. He's a neurologist from Stanford, so he has a lot of insightful things. So that's what I'll really do with my time. And also like get moving, active listening to Andrew

Oberman while doing so, he talks a lot about activeness and stimulating your mind. So yeah.

Ken:

You mentioned the Nuyorican, which is a legendary spot for poetry and performance. Have you done a poetry slam there?

Sophie:

I haven't done the slams. Those kind of scared me. And sometimes you have to do the reading night and then they pick which ones to go to, the slams. I've been to one which was kind of intense, but you know, like I love the concept of it and like maybe one day I could work up to that, but wow. Getting those presentational skills still on the stage and the spotlight is kind of difficult, right?

Ken:

Well, this is amazing. It sounds like you have a lot of energy and that you're putting it in all these sort of different productive directions. And it's so great that the individualized major, at least the platform for it, allowed you to come in and really create your own vision, right?

Sophie:

For sure. And I'm forever thankful for everyone that works with the individualized major. Like I feel like everyone is super supportive and it really like helped like develop the idea that I had. So thank you to all of you guys too.

Ken:

Well, you're welcome. Thanks so much for coming in and talking with us. It's been great.

Sophie:

Thank you so much for having me.

Ken:

Thanks for listening to Indie Major. If you'd like more information about individualized and interdisciplinary studies at the University of Connecticut, please visit our website at iisp.uconn.edu. That's iisp.uconn.edu. We'd also like to thank UConn Enrichment Programs and WHUS UConn Radio for their support of this show.