

INDIE MAJOR PODCAST

4/15/24 Rehana Konate

Individualized Major: Crime, Law, and Justice

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 Rehana Konate. How are you, Rehana?

Rehana:

I'm good. How are you?

Ken:

Very good. Thank you so much for coming in.

Rehana:

Thanks for having me.

Ken: Why don't you tell us what your major is and what it's all about?

Rehana:

Sure. So my individualized major is crime justice and law. And it basically explores the relationship between crime law and justice

overall and the institutions that play a role in all of the three themes that I just mentioned.

Ken:

So crime law and justice. Now, what was the inspiration for doing this major?

Rehana:

So I originally came in as a political science major and in high school and throughout all my life, I kind of always knew that I wanted to work in the legal aspect. And specifically, I know this sounds crazy, but like watching Criminal Minds and Law and Order, I've always been intrigued with the criminal justice system. And I noticed my freshman sophomore year. I didn't really get that aspect through my political science major? So I kind of looked around and I saw that there was a crime and justice minor, but I wasn't really interested in a minor just because I wanted to take more than 15 credits in that theme. So that's kind of how I was like, Okay, let's look into my options. And while I looked into the minor, I found the individualized major program, and that's kind of where I started this journey.

Ken:

Did you know you were going to go into political science when you got here?

Rehana:

Yeah. So in high school, I took a lot of, like, AP Govs and AP lit classes, and I don't know. I think a lot of the times I was just

interested in history. I was never, like, a math or science person. So when I was applying to colleges, I looked at majors that closely related to those interests of, like, crime, history, anything that had to do with writing, and political science just stood out to me. So for most of the schools that I applied to, I applied as a political science major.

Ken:

So, in high school, you were really into these kind of government type courses. So, where did that come from? Is this something that you've been interested in since even before high school?

Rehana:

Yeah, as weird as this sounds, I don't know, I've always been like intrigued by, like, history and just reading in general. And I knew from, like, third grade that math was just never my thing. So it's like, I'm going to stay away from anything that has to do with, like, math or science because I always found myself working harder in those courses and just not liking it at all. So I think that's where I picked up on, like, just history in general writing. And then from there, it was just, like, kind of clear for me. Interesting.

Ken:

Do you ever have to do, like, statistics or something for research and all that?

Rehana:

Unfortunately, yes. I thought that my major would kind of keep me away from those things. But, currently, I'm taking a stats class, and

it's just taking me back to why I didn't major in anything math or science related. But I do think that the interesting part is this past summer, I took a course for my individualized major, the research portion of it. And it was an HDFS course that was research based. And although we had to do math in that course, it was interesting just because it related to the research in general. So I think that was the only fun aspect of, like stats or just math in general.

Ken:

So what was what did that research course entail?

Rehana:

Yeah. So we basically had to do research on anything that had to do with children. And I chose to research children with ADHD, specifically how they are affected by public school systems because a lot of the times their behaviors are taken as something else and a lot of the times, specifically with, like, people of color or children of color. They're often not diagnosed with ADHD. So a lot of the time, their behaviors that stem from ADHD are taken as like behavioral problems, but it's just because they can't help it. It's just a part of just, like, having ADHD. So I did most of my research on that, and we found that a lot of the times, similar to my capstone, these children drop out earlier. They're also inclined to getting suspended and expelled. But then again, through this process, they continue to go misdiagnosed.

Ken:

Hmm. Okay. Now, you mentioned a capstone project, and every individualized major here at UConn needs to do some kind of

capstone, a thesis project, a capstone course where people do their own independent research projects. You had a really interesting one. Do you want to maybe chat for a second about what it was that you did for that project?

Rehana:

Yeah, of course. So, I actually really liked my Capstone project just because not only did it entail all of the themes in my major, but it was also just interesting, just because I mentioned the research course. So I kind of had, like, a little bit of background information. But essentially, I researched the school to prison pipeline, but more specifically how students of color are affected by suspensions and expulsions. So how do the public the public school system and just schools in general treat children of color, especially when it comes to behavioral problems? And we did find that a lot of the times these students, their behavior compared to other students are deemed as, like, threatening, which leads them to be more likely suspended, but also not only suspended and expelled, but arrested in schools, which leads to again, that overall school to prison pipeline.

Ken:

Yeah. And this is maybe exacerbated by this presence more and more in schools of these actually police in schools, right?

Rehana:

Right. Yeah, so I specifically looked at Connecticut schools. And as a resident of Connecticut, I did find a lot of this research shocking. So as you mentioned, like, my research also stemmed around school resource officers and how their presence in schools

actually leads to more arrests and suspensions and expulsions, just because a lot of this behavior can be treated by, like, teachers or administrators. But instead, these problems are given to school resource officers, which again, leads to a lot of these arrests in schools.

Ken:

So sometimes I wonder, what is it that individualized majors maybe share in common. I mean, I know you took a capstone course with a small group of individualized majors, and you probably know some other students who are in the program. I don't know. Is there something about being an individualized major, you think, that kind of connects the group, even though they're studying totally different things? And if so, how would you maybe describe that?

Rehana:

Yeah, I would say it's interesting because in our capstone course, as you mentioned, we were all different, like, individualized majors. And when we were going through, like, just the peer editing process, you can kind of tell that we had some sort of, like, I don't know if I would say connection, but, like, some sort of like similarities, just because a lot of the times when we would give each other advice on our papers and things like that, it worked perfectly almost. So, like, a lot of our advice, they're like, Oh, I was thinking that, but I didn't know if, as a reader, it would make sense. And, as a group would be like, No, yeah, like, we would definitely want to see that. And then we would come back the next week and we're like, Wow, there's so much growth. I don't know. The Capstone course was one of those courses that definitely connected us as a group, even though, like you mentioned, we're all studying different things. So there was, you know, music involved in

some majors while some majors focused on just children in general. So, like, I know for myself, like, my major kind of connected to, like, random majors like Emily's who focused on, like children and just, like, how specific materials help with just engagement and creativity while Yang did youth in sports. But again, they're all some some kind of they're kind of interconnected, I would say. So I don't know. I think that's what brought us together, and you would never think that until we sat there as a group and kind of just worked through the capstone together.

Ken:

Now, I want to circle back for a second here because you said that when you were in third grade, you knew that math was not your thing. But did you know that some of this interest in law or government or politics or, you know, that kind of stuff? How early does that interest go back?

Rehana:

I would say it goes back pretty early. I told my mom that I would become the president of the United States. So it's funny because my mom's obviously going to, like, encourage me. But I told her I was like, Yeah, I'm going to be the first woman, and I'm going to be the first president of well, the first woman and person of color of the United States. And she was like, Yeah, definitely.

Ken:

How old were you?

Rehana:

I wouldn't even be able to tell you. Maybe five, six six. I know it was pretty It was pretty young, I would say you say.

Ken:

Yeah. Good ambition.

Rehana:

Yeah.

Ken:

All right. So you did have an interest in that arena from almost as long as you can remember.

Rehana:

Yeah.

Ken:

And so you're graduating this May, right?

Rehana:

Mm hmm.

Ken:

That's coming up pretty soon. What do you see in your future?

Rehana:

I am currently planning on taking a gap year because I definitely want to just take a break and get some experience in the legal sector before applying to law school just because I know I want to go to law school, but I want to be 100% sure because law school is obviously it's a heavy investment, I would say, so like financially, emotionally. So I just want to be sure that that's the thing that I want to do, even though I know I want to do that, so.

Ken:

So if you right now could picture your ideal career in the large field of law, what kind of stuff would you be pursuing?

Rehana:

It's one of those things that I think I mentioned to you, over the summer, I did an internship as a criminal clerk, and originally, I definitely said I want to be a lawyer, so whether that be like a defense attorney or a prosecutor, that's what I originally wanted to do. That internship definitely changed my vision of what the criminal justice system is and how I want to, like, change it, I guess, I could say, because it was a lot, I would say, but it was a good thing, just because I thought that the experience really opened my eyes and kind of gave me a different way of seeing things. I worked in the superior court in my hometown, which is Stanford. Um, and as a criminal clerk, I worked closely with other clerks, as well as the judge, police officer. So a lot of the times, specifically, during the summer, we were going through a murder case, murder trial, and a lot of the times, I think what people forget is it can be really graphic. So even if you're not working as like the medical examiner, you're going to see things as just a clerk or just a regular person, I would say. So we would go through things like, evidence,

so pictures, bats, whatever, whatever was used for the murder, things like that, just to like, label it and make sure that everything is accounted for as a clerk. And going through that, I was kind of like, Wow, like, this is really graphic. Like, I can't imagine seeing this every single day. So that was like, one of the things that we did. We also went to court every day. And because I was from the town that I was interning at, it made me look at my city a little differently, as well, because there was so much crime that I would never think is, like, going around, like, you know, a few streets, a few blocks. I just I just I was shocked, I would say, not to say that everywhere is perfect, but it was one of those things where I was like, Well, like, I really need to be a little more observant of my surrounding areas.

Ken:

Right. So some of your interests came from being engrossed in those sorts of shows, which are really fascinating and show, you know, some version of the criminal justice system and investigations and trials. And yet when it's real, you found, what, sort of a completely different experience.

Rehana:

Yeah, I, I agree. I think it was definitely a completely different experience in feeling, but I don't regret it, I would say. Like, I think it was one of those things where if I could do it again, I definitely would.

Ken:

Excellent. Very good. All right. Well, this has been fascinating. And thank you so much for coming in.

Rehana:

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.