

## Bryce Stanley Rises to Success, Despite Educational Barriers and Discrimination Against His Disability

\*\*\* Recorded on August 19, 2020. \*\*\* [Listen to it here.](#)

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- BRYCE STANLEY: 00:04      Listening to what students say they need when it comes to accommodations and not making them feel like they have to kind of prove to you that that is indeed what they need.
- NICKY MILLER: 00:14      I'm Nicky Miller, Social Media Specialist at Kessler Foundation. I'm joined today by Bryce Stanley and we're talking about his college-to-work experience and how it relates to our 2020 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Recent College Graduates. We recently revealed findings from our survey that dispelled ideas that people with disabilities can't study or further their education. The survey also reveals key factors contributing to the success of students with disabilities such as college career and disability services. Today, we wanted to hear Bryce's story. Welcome, Bryce. Thank you for joining us.
- STANLEY: 00:50      Thank you for having me. Happy to be here.
- MILLER: 00:52      I wanted to start off by giving you an opportunity to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your educational background.
- STANLEY: 01:00      Right now, I am a PhD candidate at the University of New Hampshire where I study economics. Before then I started my college career at community college largely due to my disability, which I'm sure we'll get into earlier. My grades out of high school didn't really leave me with any other options. So I went to community college for a year and then transferred to a four-year school. Worked a little bit inside the startup field and then applied and went straight to grad school.
- MILLER: 01:27      It's nice to hear a little bit about your background starting off at a community college for students who start off at community colleges because I went to one of those to save money and all of that. And look at where you are today. You have a PhD. So that's awesome.
- STANLEY: 01:42      Well, I don't have it yet.
- MILLER: 01:43      Could you briefly touch on your disability?
- STANLEY: 01:45      I have MDD but the disability that I think is kind of more focused on today is I have a sleeping disorder called delayed sleep phase disorder or delayed sleep phase syndrome. So I'm not sure if you have heard of this before Nicky? Are you familiar with this?
- MILLER: 02:01      No, I'm not. Did you want to touch a little bit on that?
- STANLEY: 02:04      Yeah.
- MILLER: 02:04      [crosstalk].
- STANLEY: 02:04      So from my very nonscientific and very limited medical background my understanding of it is that sunlight gives off kind of signals to our brain as it's being received through our eyes, "Hey. It's time to be awake." And then when the sun goes down, it says, "Hey. It's time to go to sleep," right? So I think melatonin is the chemical that our brains produce after the sun goes down to help us go to sleep. But for some people,

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the translation from the sunlight to these chemicals being made doesn't happen very well. And from my understanding, it's also pretty common with blind people because, well, some of them literally can't get in that sunlight through their eyes. And so what this translates through people that have delayed sleep phase syndrome is a kind of natural body clock that can be anywhere from two to seven or eight hours shifted off of what kind of normal society operates at. So, for example, if I was to let my body go the way it wants to and not put up a fight, I would fall asleep each night around roughly 6:00 AM and then sleep till about 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon. It's a kind of everyday struggle to try to wrestle and shift that back to kind of hours that are more-- fit in with most of how society operates. Not only is it the shifted kind of schedule but the inability to alter it that is really difficult. So both the falling asleep and the waking up parts are very difficult. I'm sure my mom can tell you horror stories of her trying to wake me up at 9:00 AM when I was in high school. Now, as an adult, it's a little bit better as far as my ability to manage it. It's a learned process. But so I've been very lucky to have found-- discovered ways to alter my sleep schedule some and have put myself in situations to where I can operate at a slightly different schedule throughout the day than other people.

- MILLER: 04:17 Well, that's good to know. Thank you so much for sharing that process with us. I want to start off by talking about your college experience. How do you view your decision to go to college?
- STANLEY: 04:26 Coming out of high school, I was pretty disenfranchised with kind of formal education. I had a really kind of negative high school experience where I think the teachers and the administration-- I think it was a combination of not knowing how to and not wanting to make accommodations or deal with me and my disability. So I definitely had kind of a negative outlook on formal education coming out of high school. But I did know that luckily with my condition the only real accommodations I need are a different kind of schedule to work on and then, I guess, understanding from the people that I work with. So I knew going into college if I was able to strategically only take afternoon classes, then some of the negativity that I experienced in high school I could avoid.
- MILLER: 05:22 There was some negativity during high school, right? Was it that teachers didn't believe that you had a disability or how did that come about?
- STANLEY: 05:31 I suspect because it was an invisible disability that they hadn't seen before that they were very skeptical too if it was real or not or if it was me making up excuses and then writing me off as - I don't know - a lazy pothead that just didn't want to go to school. I know clearly was not the case, but I think for some of them, they had a difficult time kind of understanding that this is a medical condition that they have to make accommodations for. And the accommodations really weren't that difficult. If they were to realize that earlier on it could have been a much smoother process. Definitely had a negative experience and a lot of difficulty advocating for myself and getting the accommodations I needed in high school.
- MILLER: 06:10 You talked about you had such a good support system with your mom and your family. But were you ever discouraged from pursuing an education?
- STANLEY: 06:18 Definitely from my teachers in high school, but not from anyone that was within my family or anything like that. I remember at one point in one of my 504 meetings in

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high school, a professor - or not a professor, a teacher - suggested moving me to special ed, which I don't have a learning disability. I have a sleeping disorder. That would not be appropriate. And kind of at that point, I was really discouraged because I realized that the people that are supposed to be teaching me, aren't willing to just learn the very basics about my situation. Because if they would have, they would know that the accommodations I need are not particularly difficult and they're not at all what they had just suggested if that makes sense.

MILLER: 07:14                    If there was a teacher listening right now who is not familiar with a disability like yours, what would you have to say to them?

STANLEY: 07:24                    I think in situations like that just listening to the student and hearing what they have to say as far as how you can best accommodate them is really important. Now, when I teach my own classes here at UNH and know students come to me through the disability services here, it's so easy to just accommodate the things that they need. It's not difficult. I don't understand why it has to be such a weird-- it's almost like a, "Prove to me that you need this," type of thing. It's like, "Just do what they say." It's not hard and it takes two seconds and it helps them tremendously. So I think in many senses just listening to what students say they need when it comes to accommodations and not making them feel like they have to kind of prove to you that that is indeed what they need.

MILLER: 08:21                    You've said advocating for yourself. That must've been very difficult at a young age to have to advocate for yourself to get people to understand what you were going through.

STANLEY: 08:30                    I am extremely lucky because of what my mother does for a living. She has her doctorate in education and works inside the special education field at the neighboring school district where I went to in high school. I probably shouldn't even say advocating for myself, I should say, letting my mother advocate for me. Because like you said I was too young to know. At 16, 17 I didn't know how to advocate for myself or what options I had and what rights I had. And so I was incredibly lucky that my mother was there to do that for me. Because without her, I very easily could have fallen through the cracks in high school.

MILLER: 09:09                    Walk us a little bit through your process and how you decided what college you wanted to attend.

STANLEY: 09:15                    That's a pretty easy one. My GPA out of high school put me in, what do they call it? I think the fourth quartile. So they would break up students by GPA into quartiles. I think I was leading the pack of the fourth quartile. So that basically meant I had no shot at getting into any four-year school. I applied to several throughout Texas where I'm from and didn't get into any of them. And so I just went to the local community college because it was the only place I got into. So as far as deciding which school I went to, that was that was pretty easy.

MILLER: 09:54                    You mentioned your mom being very supportive but what about other family members and friends? Were they supportive of your decision to attend college?

STANLEY: 10:03                    Yes. Absolutely. I'll say this multiple times throughout our talk here, but I very lucky in a lot of senses, in many different ways, in how I've been able to navigate my sleeping disorder and having parents and family and friends that are supportive of me and

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getting an education is definitely one of them. So not just my mother but other people in my life as well.

- MILLER: 10:31                    Yeah. Because you mentioned your grades being very poor. So I can only imagine that that support system helped a lot--
- STANLEY: 10:39                    Yes.
- MILLER: 10:39                    --pushing you forward. What kept you going? Because sometimes some people, after going through a disability, having poor grades, they'll be like, "Maybe I'm not cut out for this." What kept you going? What motivated you?
- STANLEY: 10:53                    I really enjoy learning. I'm a very curious person, I suppose, and definitely enjoyed the challenges that school can bring on. And I knew that if I just was able to have classes at a time to where I could attend them regularly, which I didn't have in high school, then I had confidence in myself that I could avoid the difficulties as far as getting the grades that I saw in high school.
- MILLER: 11:19                    So having that flexibility in college definitely helped with your academic career?
- STANLEY: 11:24                    Yes. The accommodations I need can pretty much just be the different schedule, which is difficult to get in high school, but not difficult to get most of the time in college. Especially if there's multiple offerings of the same course, then it's not a difficult thing.
- MILLER: 11:46                    While in college, what was the biggest barrier you faced and overcame?
- STANLEY: 11:50                    Occasionally, there wouldn't be multiple offerings of a course. So there were definitely a couple of times to where I had-- I think 9:30 was-- 9:30 AM courses that started then and that was a challenge because I knew it would be unrealistic to try to make it to every single one of them throughout a 15-week semester if they met twice a week. But I could still, plan ahead and do my best to make as many of them as I can, and the ones I don't make still be able to stay on top of the coursework. And so that was really challenging at times because it's easy to get discouraged if you miss two or three classes in a row, and it's really easy to fall behind if you miss two or three classes in a row. And I was able to get through undergrad without any major hiccups on that end. Although, at sometimes it definitely looked like that wasn't going to happen.
- MILLER: 12:38                    Our survey revealed the importance of college career and disability services. Could you share your opinion about that? Did you use any college career or disability services that you wanted to just touch on?
- STANLEY: 12:53                    I didn't and I desperately wish I had. I just wasn't super aware of them when I was an undergrad. It wasn't something that I think was really properly advertised. I'm sure if I had gone in there, I would have met people that were eager to give me the help I needed, but my strategy was much more to kind of white knuckle it. A lack of being aware of what exactly was at my disposal was kind of the bigger struggle on that end.
- MILLER: 13:27                    You graduated with your bachelors. You have your masters. Throughout all of that time, you didn't use any disability services at all? You kind of just figured it out on your own?

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- STANLEY: 13:37                    Yeah. If there was a class I had missed because it was in the morning and missed several times, I might go to the professor directly and explain to them the situation. In which case, I largely just needed them to not think I was a jerk that was blowing off their class, but I could still make up the classwork on my own. And yeah, I never went through disability services, but looking back, I definitely wish I had. I was lucky to not have professors that took off grading points for a lack of attendance or anything like that. Because without going through disability services I didn't have as much as a bargaining position.
- MILLER: 14:14                    What about career services? Did you ever at once anytime need them to help with resumes or a job search or anything like that?
- STANLEY: 14:22                    Yeah. Yeah. I think so. At Bryant, where I went for undergrad, they're pretty big on their career services. It's a very good department there. And so I think I went through them when applying for internships during the summer when I was an undergrad.
- MILLER: 14:38                    And do you think that they're helpful in any way?
- STANLEY: 14:40                    Yeah. The one at Bryant I know is very well viewed, and I think they get ranked in the national rankings at times. I never found a job through them, but that doesn't mean that they weren't helpful.
- MILLER: 14:54                    You mentioned accommodations. Was it pertaining to your disability or anything like that?
- STANLEY: 14:58                    Right. The times when I-- when the only class offering was in the morning or early afternoon, and it was a class I had to take, I can't ask them to change the time of the class, but simply just recording the class. That way, if I do end up missing it because I cannot wake up, I can view the lecture online. And most classrooms, these days are set up with that technology, or especially now during this pandemic when so many of them are going remote. So it's not a difficult thing for the professor to do. It's not really that big of an ask. And that can really allow me to kind of relieve the stress and anxiety. Because if I do miss a class, it's not the end of the world because I can just easily log on and watch that lecture.
- MILLER: 15:47                    I'm just curious to know because you said you really didn't utilize the disability services at school and you said they weren't properly advertised. So how do you think colleges can improve their services to accommodate students with disabilities, especially someone who has a situation like yours?
- STANLEY: 16:06                    There's various ways that colleges can get information out to students. Now, at UNH where I'm at now and where I'm teaching a class this fall, I think it's pretty standard for professors to include that information inside their syllabus and discuss it with their students on the first day of class. So in my syllabus, I have a section carved out about the Student Accessibility Services, the disability service office at UNH, and plan to talk to students here on the first day of class about everything inside the syllabus, but definitely will include kind of highlighting that for them.
- MILLER: 16:45                    What were your expectations about college and how did it compare to the reality?
- STANLEY: 16:52                    That is an interesting question. I don't know. I was definitely nervous because as we touched on, I wasn't the best student in high school. But in another sense, I was excited to finally get to have classes that I could show up for regularly and actually see

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how good of a student I was because I didn't get that chance in high school because the majority of my classes, I was missing a fair percentage of them.

MILLER: 17:23 Did you dorm at all? I know you said you started with a community college.

STANLEY: 17:28 Yeah. So when I transferred to a four-year school here in New England, I lived in-- I lived on campus, yeah.

MILLER: 17:36 And what was that like?

STANLEY: 17:37 I didn't need accommodations as far as accessibility to the dorm or anything like that, so I think it was a fine experience.

MILLER: 17:46 As a person with a disability, did you feel limited in your college experience?

STANLEY: 17:50 That was only really an issue on the few times that I had to have morning classes that I just couldn't avoid registering for a class in the morning or early afternoon. And so at that time when I would end up missing several classes in a row, it could get really frustrating. And I understand that that's not something that other people typically have to deal with. And so in some ways, it is easy to feel limited when you miss three or four classes in a row.

MILLER: 18:19 What about outside of academically? What was that like?

STANLEY: 18:22 As an undergrad, I was really interested in kind of startups in various different small tech companies or venture capital, and I was able to get a couple of internships at small startups. And I was attracted to that area, one, because I found it interesting but, two, because the startups tend to be much more flexible-- much more flexible than say large, established companies. And so I knew that getting adjusted work hours at a startup wouldn't be near as difficult than if I was trying to get that at say Microsoft or some company with thousands of employees that has a much more top-down organized structure. So when I did work in the private sector, I throughout the interview process would relay on the kind of situation that I'm dealing with and let them know, "I can still work the same number of hours a week, just noon to eight instead of nine to five." And luckily, that went over well.

MILLER: 19:25 One of the factors that was revealed in our survey is how important internships are and how they really help students with and without disabilities gear up for the workforce. So how was that-- what was that like for you and how do you feel that it helped in any way?

STANLEY: 19:39 Yeah, I mean, I really enjoyed my experience. You learn a lot. You learn a lot about your preferences and how you like to work and what areas you work best in. And obviously, I went into academia and not into the private sector after college, but I still valued that experience.

MILLER: 20:02 You're still very young. You have a lot to learn and a lot to grow. But you've also had quite a journey and a lot of different experiences with your academic career. What advice would you give your younger self with everything that you've gone through? You mentioned high school and being discriminated and all of that stuff. What advice would you give to your younger self?

STANLEY: 20:25 I would tell my younger self to be more patient, I think that would be a thing I could have heard more when I was younger, and not to get so frustrated when I oversleep

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class I really wanted to go to or that I really needed to go to because I had missed ones before. Kind of have patience and not get so frustrated when the sleeping disorder does get in the way of life.

MILLER: 20:49

Does any of your experience ever affect the way that you teach in school?

STANLEY: 20:56

I think it definitely makes me a more, I guess, understanding or flexible teacher. I have a few policies that I put into place, specifically for kind of students with disabilities, even ones that might not have gone through the formal channels to get accommodations. So, for example, all exams I give are untimed, and I think that's really important both for students with various disabilities but then also for English as a second language. Sometimes it can take them longer and so giving untimed exams, I think, gives them a chance to not feel limited in trying to display their understanding of a subject. And yeah, I mean, I just-- I think I've seen how important it is to be willing to make the accommodations that your students need.

MILLER: 21:52

Bryce, thank you so much for sharing your story. I really appreciate that you came out today and decided to have a discussion with us.

STANLEY: 22:00

Sure. And I thought of a thing-- you asked what I would tell my younger self. Can I add something to that real quick? I would a 100% tell younger Bryce, and also a good chunk of the people listening, to go to therapy sooner or go to therapy at all. Do that. Put that on their 100%. [music]

MILLER: 22:21

Thank you for sharing that Bryce.

ANNOUNCER: 22:23

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