

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 0:01

I'm Jessy Blackburn interviewing Layla Taha at SUNY Brockport on September 25th 2019. Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

Layla Taha 0:12

Yeah. My family Well, okay, so, my family is, we're originally from Palestine. It's this country in the Middle East. Okay, sorry. Like, okay. Anyways, so my parents were born and raised there, like all their lives, and then they came to America in like, the 80s. And so I, it's me and my four siblings. I'm the youngest. And I have three sisters and one brother. So wait was the question again? My family background?

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 0:55

Family Background.

Layla Taha 0:56

Okay, so, I was raised in a very Arab/Muslim household growing up. I mean, I still live there. So it's the same.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 1:08

So did your parents go to school?

Layla Taha 1:10

My mom, yes. Okay. So my mom went to yeah, they, my dad only finished like I don't know if he even finished high school, but I think he did and overseas in Palestine. My mom, she always like excelled in school. So she did really well, like she graduated top of her class for her high school. Then she went on to study in Libya, for, she's a medical laboratory technician. So she was studying that. But then when she moved to America, she had to re-get she already had a degree in that, but she had to get the same degree in America so she could be a licensed medical lab tech in America so yeah she went to, when they moved here, they first went to Chicago because that's kind of like where my extended family all my extended family lives besides overseas, so she went to UIC and got her bachelor's degree from there. So yeah, my mom did but my dad's not, he doesn't really have like, more of an education past high school.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 2:05

Did your siblings go to college? Or

Layla Taha 2:07

Yep. All my siblings went to college. My older sister Mona went to UB. She dropped out after like two years. So she's a whole different story. Then my sister Waffa went to UB too she graduated with a degree in International Studies. Or no, yeah, international studies and Spanish. So she's fluent Spanish and then she got her, actually, she got her master's from Brockport in Public Health Administration. And my brother went to St. John's University in Queens, and he got his undergrad in history, which, like, I guess, we're kind of close so like, we kind of like the same things like I like history he likes history. And then he went and got his law degree from UB. So they all kind of went to UB which is weird. Well, I mean, it's close to Rochester so it's not weird, but so he's a lawyer he went to UB. Then my sister who is closest in age to me, Yasmin went to SUNY Geneseo, in sociology, and Spanish, she knows Spanish too. Even though my family doesn't speak Spanish. They just like were really interested in that, which is random, but I mean, it's cool. So she went there, and then she's currently getting her master's degree from UConn in higher education. Something like that. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 3:24

So your family lives in Rochester?

Layla Taha 3:27

Yeah, my family's in Rochester. We live in gates. I don't know if you know, are you from Rochester?

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 3:34

No, I'm from Albany.

Layla Taha 3:35

Oh okay, never mind.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 3:37

Okay. So in Rochester, what was your experience like in high school?

Layla Taha 3:43

High School, it was good. Actually, I think compared to a lot of people. I really loved High School. Like I won most popular. And like, I don't know, I had a really great group of friends, I had a, yeah no, like,

we're all still pretty close. And High School is good. I was always like, I don't know super into school. And like people, I like, you could say I was a teacher's pet, kind of like, in some cases, I don't know. And then, it was good. I was, the only bad thing was kind of like, and I never really grew up with like any other friends from like, the same background as me. So that was kind of difficult in a way because like, I mean, I'm really close to my friends, but they never like, related to be in that level. But other than that, high school was good. It was great.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 4:44

So do you think that you found people like that at Brockport?

Layla Taha 4:48

No. Oh, like from No, I'm no, not at all. I mean, Brockport's kind of like, white for the most part, but I mean. No, actually because before I transferred to Brockport, and I used to go to St. John's University, the one where my brother went. And I went there for a while. And, and there I did find actually, a lot of girlfriends who were, I mean, Arab and like Muslim, so that was nice.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 5:21

Why did you leave there?

Layla Taha 5:23

So, St. Okay, that's a long story. But I went there for two and a half years. And I left because a couple of reasons. The tuition was insane. It was like 60/70 grand a year. I love the school itself. Like it's one of the most diverse schools in America, I think its like, number three, or something out of everything. And I liked it. But like the tuition is crazy. And I didn't really know what I was doing. Like in general with in regards to my studies, like I thought my whole life, I want to be a physician assistant, which was like some bullshit that my mom just kind of fed me my whole life. And my dad, they're like, just, you just have to that like, there's just no other option. So like I did that, their pre pa program for a while, but I actually hated it. And because I hated it, I did poorly in like most of my classes, I did pretty well in like some of them. So my grades were trash. And so in the end I actually didn't even get into the PA program. So I switched over to what my mom currently they have, they have a clinical lab science program, which is like the same thing that my mom works in. So I tried that for a semester and I was just so miserable. Like, just depressed like I over ate everything because I was so sad. Because I hated my classes. And then I knew I didn't want to do that and if I, if I continue to do that, I would've been stuck in that job for the rest of my life. So I decided even though I loved it, and I and I joined a sorority there and like I had all my friends there, which I'm still friends with them. I just knows best for me to leave and not keep wasting my time and money. So that's kind of why I left.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:02

How long were you there for?

Layla Taha 7:03

I was there for five semesters, so two and a half years. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:09

So did you come in to Brockport? Like, with credits?

Layla Taha 7:13

Yeah. So yeah. Then I moved back home, they took a semester off because I needed to, like, just rethink everything. Like what was I going to study? Then I did a semester at MCC. And then I came to Brockport last spring, and yeah, I had a lot of credits, which is why I'm not I only have like this year left.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:35

So are you graduating like on time as you usually would?

Layla Taha 7:39

No, I'm a year late, like all my friends graduated last year. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 7:46

So what made you choose Brockport?

Layla Taha 7:49

Um, so I chose Brockport because it is the closest SUNY to Rochester. And it's cheap. And it's close. It's a, like I can drive, I can get here in like 20 minutes if I speed. And it's cheap. And that's about it.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:11

So did you ever live on campus? Or have you always...

Layla Taha 8:13

No I've always commuted. I live so close. I mean, it'd be a waste of money

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:17

Yeah.

Layla Taha 8:17

To live here.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 8:20

So before coming to college, did you feel prepared? Like after high school?

Layla Taha 8:31

Okay, so no. So when I first went to St. John's, I literally it was like a whirlwind of like, a completely different type of education. The classes I was taking, they were kind of insane. Like they're like, organic chemistry and all these types of biology's and like calculus blah blah blah. So Gates didn't really like when I was at Gates, I always took I was always like, in the advanced class and like, took a AP's and, like, you know, was like ahead, I guess, in school, like in math and science. So that was good like that prepared me but still didn't. I had to, like, just figure it out. Basically, when I got to school, like, oh, how am I going to study correct, because I never really had to try in high school like, I just kind of did well, I mean, I tried in high school, especially math, science. I was never really like, I've always been like, really great in English and social studies type things. But I just had to try harder. So, I did try in that part in high school, I did have to study but it was just different. I wasn't prepared. No.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 9:49

So I know, you changed your major. So what, like what made you choose history?

Layla Taha 9:55

So growing up like, this is going to sound corny, but in middle school, and even in high school, I just always loved history class, like, I always had the best teachers, and I just enjoyed learning about it. And my dad is such like a history lover. Like, you could ask him about anything, anytime, and he'll know about it. It's crazy. So I think that kind of influenced me because he always talks about history at home. But yeah, no, really, like, in middle school, I had the best history teacher ever. He was so funny and cool.

And like, he made me really like it, and I, I just like, when I'm studying history, it, I don't feel like I'm studying. I feel like I'm enjoying it. So. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 10:52

So what do you plan to do with your degree after college?

Layla Taha 10:56

Oh, good question. I actually don't know so. I want to get more experience now in museums, which I'm trying to do, and like more internships to see if I like that. And I would, it would be cool to work in one. But also, I think I want to be a history teacher for high school. So I have to figure that out. Because I'm not in an education program right now. I'm just a history major. So I'd have to go to grad school for that. And I think I want to do that. But we'll see what the future holds.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 11:32

So we kind of talked about like the financial situation. But, so it's better now because Brockport is definitely cheaper. Do you have a job? That you are using to pay for it?

Layla Taha 11:46

Well, I do have a job I work at Wegmans but it's part time and I don't really make that much and I'm not the type of person that can work like 40 hours a week and go to college full time. So I don't pay for my school. I mean, I mostly get loans and like, I have a scholarship right now. And then my mom just pays the rest and like, I know, it's still cheap but I mean, it's still kind of a burden on her. So I mean, like, I wish that wasn't the case, but I don't know somebody has to pay for it so she just ends up putting on her card. Yeah.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 12:24

How did your time management change from high school to college?

Layla Taha 12:27

Oh my God, it's like, my whole life is just studying, writing, reading, and work. And in high school, I did whatever. Like, I just, I don't know, in high school, I put things off like I was a big procrastinator. But now I think I know not to do that. And I like want to get things done. Like I want to sit and write that paper because I know that in the end, if you don't like it's just going to ruin your mental health and whatever it

was called, whatever. So I think, yeah, it changed completely. Like, I was not like that at all in high school. And just kind of put things off like I would get it done, but not till the last minute.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:18

What do you do for fun in or outside of school? Are you in clubs?

Layla Taha 13:23

At Brockport. No, I want to get into some clubs here. But I just haven't had the time, honestly. So, I mean, there are a few that I'm interested in, but I'll have to like, look into that. But besides that, for fun, I hang out with my friends. I like to binge watch, like shows, like any show.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 13:55

So would you join a sorority again?

Layla Taha 13:58

No, because I learned the first time that it was just like a bad, not a bad idea. But it is a huge part of why I fucked up at St. John's, so, no, I wouldn't I mean, and it wouldn't be the same. Because like,

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:12

Yeah it's not the same.

Layla Taha 14:12

Yeah you're sorority is your sorority, like I can't they don't even have, like, if they had maybe that chapter, that sorority here, then maybe I would, but they don't. So, but no, I wouldn't. Because like I said, like, when I went to St. John's and did all that it kind of like, I don't know, maybe I'm hard on myself. But like, I just really had to put all my effort into school and like, no extra stuff. So no, I wouldn't, I just treat Brockport like I come, come to class, print what I have to print and go home and do my work at home.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 14:50

Was it easier for you to make friends in high school or college?

Layla Taha 14:55

Um, it wasn't, I don't, it, it didn't really change. Like, I've always been able to make friends with whoever. So like, I was always, I mean, I was social in high school. And then when I got to St. John's, I made like, all my friends there. So I wouldn't say it was easier or any harder. I mean, Brockport like I said, I come here and go home. So like, obviously, I'm not trying to make friends here. But in regards to that, it no, it was the same.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 15:34

Who had the biggest influence on your college experience? So it can be a parent, a teacher?

Layla Taha 15:49

Like I don't know, I would say...

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 15:59

Pass?

Layla Taha 16:00

No I don't have to pass, the biggest influence, honestly, were my two best friends Melanie and Gina at St. John's because we were all in the same program. And so we stuck together. We did like everything together. We studied together. Like when I was failing, they would help me, they just did like everything for me. So I don't know. I mean, yeah, without them, I would have been done way before I was done. Kind of type thing. So I would say them, they helped a lot.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 16:36

Looking back on your college experience. What would you do differently?

Layla Taha 16:43

Oh my god, I don't want to say, because I'm glad today that I study history. So what I think I would have done, no, okay, this is bad, because I love St. John's. And if the only problem was, how expensive it was and I do think it's stupid to put yourself in all that debt. So what I would have done, I probably still would of went there, this would not have been possible because the only reason my mom let me go away that far was because I was in a PA program. So she thought it was worth it. But if I wasn't she would have just made me go to UB or somewhere like close to home. So she could like I guess have an eye on me. So but because it was like PA was like what like that's like golden like you just have to do that. So I would have,



so it's not, it really would not have been possible. But if it was in my will, I would have went St John's and studied history from the start. So that way would a graduate on time and been studying something I like so I wouldn't have been failing all my classes. Because I just like I just had the best time there and I really did make like all my friends there. I mean, I probably would have went out less because just like really took a toll on me. And yeah, so probably I would have just studied what I like from the jump. And then if I would not have went to St. John's, then I would say just I should just have just went to UB because it's a SUNY and it would have been cheaper and studied history there because I could have made the same friends. Not the same friends but like, same group of friends there as I would have at St. John's but I mean, it was such a good experience like living in New York City was just amazing so.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 18:26

We're looking at like bigger schools? When you were looking?

Layla Taha 18:30

Oh yeah, I didn't want to go to a small school like my sister in Geneseo. I hate Geneseo. I hate that campus. I hate the student body there like it's so small and ugly. And I was like, but she's that type person. Like, she hates big things. And she's an introvert and she just doesn't. I mean, not that like extroverted people don't go there because they do but she likes like small campuses. But me and my other sister Waffa, like the one that went to UB she like, is like me, like very social. But yeah, I was looking at middle to bigger campuses, and I did not want to go to a small school at all. And I wanted it to be diverse. So St. John's was like the perfect fit honestly. I mean, they're kind of trash though. Like their admin- I don't know, it called their financial aid was just bad the whole office was terrible. There's a lot of bad to it. And there's a lot of good, you know, because they kind of exploit the, their whole diversity thing because they use that in a lot of their advertising. But at the same time they don't really care about, there was like rallies and riots going on about how they don't care about certain student bodies like yeah, in regards to like, they're, like civil rights and stuff like that. So yeah, I don't know. I got off topic. I don't know what we're talking about.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 19:49

No it's good. We were saying what you would do different.

Layla Taha 19:54

Oh, yeah. So that's what I would do, there's a couple of different options.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 19:59

What advice would you give to your freshman self?

Layla Taha 20:01

Oh my god, this is so sad. Layla, like, don't talk to guys. And don't, I wouldn't say don't join a sorority because that was honestly the best thing ever and I made all my friends there so that I would still tell her to do but I would say prioritize your time better and like don't let your social life get in the way of your academic life. But I mean, I did really try and I really did study a lot but it just wasn't enough like that program was insane. It was a four year PA program which is not even existent. Like today they changed it because the national PA board made them change it because there's no such thing, it has to be five or six years like you can't fit all that curriculum into four years. So it was psychotic like, like there was just, everybody, you had to take like six classes like two labs each semester. And it was just insane. So I did try so I wouldn't say because like I remember sitting in the library for hours and studying and studying and then at like night I would go out so maybe just prioritize your time better, join I would say join more clubs because there were other stuff that would've enjoyed. But I was always scared to because like I didn't know if the people like me, which is stupid, but I should have joined different things. Because I was really just like stuck with my group of friends which I love them but like me should have got out more of my comfort zone. So like do that and don't gain weight.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 21:46

Okay. My last question is do you have any, like memorable or favorite memories from college that you want to share?

Layla Taha 21:59

Favorite memories? Yes, ugh there's too many to count. It was such was the best time ever. Not that don't love Brockport, but it's just not the same as when I was at St. John's but. Okay, so I studied abroad for a semester in Italy. So that whole semester is just.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 22:18

Here? Or at...

Layla Taha 22:19

At St. John's. Yeah, not here. But, that was just the best time of my life. Like, we didn't do any school work. We just like, you know I don't know, we just like went and explored Italy for a whole semester which that was amazing. I met my best friend Yasmin there. She has the same name as my sister, which is funny. She's Egyptian. So that was like my first time having like, a close friend who was, because I'm Palestinian and she's Egyptian. So like, we related on a lot of levels. And not only that, we related because like, like I said, growing up, in high school I only had like, my friends who are not from the same background. And she was the same way. Like, none of her friends were Arab like her. So we were like,

we just have such similar personalities. Like, we're both very Americanized, and like not really that cultural. So we could relate on that level, like we love to go out and like just travel and I don't know. So I think meeting her was one of my yeah, definitely one of my favorite experiences.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 23:45

Did she go with you to study abroad?

Layla Taha 23:47

No. She was a year older. So no, she didn't, she wanted to study abroad, but it was okay with the, because she was also in the PA program, but she actually completed it and like works now and is a PA. But basically, for study abroad, if you wanted to go with the PA program, you have to have a certain amount of people sign up. And luckily for my year, we had, you to have at least 10 people, which is so difficult because nobody wanted to go because everyone was scared that they were going to like fail their classes there. They thought it was going to be harder in there then it was in Queens, which was actually the opposite. Like the teachers, they didn't care about anything. Like they gave us the answers to all the finals, like they knew we were in Italy wanting to like enjoy ourselves. So that was stupid, they should've went and also probably money issues too. So I shouldn't, that's important. But oh, so for her year. I don't think enough kids signed up. So she couldn't but she would definitely would have went if it was possible.

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:48

All right.

Layla Taha 24:49

Is that it?

Blackburn, Jessy R (jblac7) 24:50

That's all I have. Thank you.

Layla Taha 24:52

You're welcome.