##### [00:00:01.610] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a co production of Harper College and the Harper College Office of Alumni Relations. Today I'm excited to welcome Dr. Leslie Van Wolvelear to the studio. Leslie is a 1983 graduate of Harper College, a 22, a 2022 Harper Distinguished Alumni, and serves as the program chair for accounting at Oakton Community College. Leslie joins me today in the studio at Harper College. How are you doing today?

##### [00:00:29.450] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I'm doing great, thanks. How are you?

##### [00:00:31.360] - Brian Shelton

I am wonderful. Lovely day today. So you grew up in this area? Yes?

##### [00:00:36.410] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So originally from Chicago, Addison, and Polaski area, but I attended high school at Arlington High School that is closed and attended Harper.

##### [00:00:46.410] - Brian Shelton

Okay. So how did you choose Harper after high school? What made you come here?

##### [00:00:50.130] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So Harper was the choice for me, primarily financial, also. I was not quite mature enough at that point to go away, and so my parents said, hey, you're going to college, but figure it out. So Harper was the choice and really helped me get my associates and figure out this whole transfer.

##### [00:01:12.180] - Brian Shelton

So you felt like after high school that you weren't prepared to go away or anything? It wasn't just the money? You just felt like you weren't personally prepared?

##### [00:01:18.640] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Exactly. I was totally not ready to be independent. I thought I was, but definitely was not.

##### [00:01:26.300] - Brian Shelton

Okay, cool. What was Harper like in the 80s?

##### [00:01:29.470] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

It was fun! Walking across campus, fighting the wind. Even in the summer, we did not have the buildings that are here now, but it was fun. We would go swimming in the pool a couple of times a week. There were three of us, two that went to Palatine High School and then myself that went to Arlington, and so we just kind of palled around, honestly. In college, I attended my classes. We maybe hung out a little, but we really didn't get involved, which I regret.

##### [00:02:06.270] - Brian Shelton

Yeah.

##### [00:02:06.810] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I really regret that.

##### [00:02:07.980] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. And you encourage students today to get involved, I assume.

##### [00:02:11.490] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Oh, my goodness, yes.

##### [00:02:13.370] - Brian Shelton

So what was here? I guess, in the 80s, it had been building in the gym and Building A. Right. The one we're in now. What else?

##### [00:02:20.500] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Correct. The library was here, but not, I believe, where it is now. We had building D was the big lecture hall with hundreds of people. Building J, I believe, was here.

##### [00:02:36.790] - Brian Shelton

J is old enough.

##### [00:02:38.260] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yeah. Okay. And then after that, I don't know. Yeah.

##### [00:02:42.160] - Brian Shelton

The campus has certainly changed a lot over the years. I mean, even in the short time that I've been in Harper, I've been here a little less than ten years, and the amount of change, it seems like we never stopped building or remodeling or that sort of thing. And you talk about the wind and the cold. Now you can go basically from every building and not have to go outside if you know what you're doing. So that's a lot of fun.

##### [00:03:00.490] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I know. We did a tour in October, some of us that were so nicely honored, and they took us on this tour, and that's what we kept saying to each other, this would have been so nice.

##### [00:03:16.110] - Brian Shelton

I think about it every day when I'm walking in from W. So you did community college. You did high school. You did community college here at Harper. What was the next step after that for you?

##### [00:03:27.730] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So I transferred to UIC. Go Flames.

##### [00:03:30.200] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:03:31.030] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

And got my Bachelor's in Accounting. I was a commuter kid, so I went in on the train and wandered over to campus. Again, just did college. Did not really utilize the resources, which is looking back, it's very sad, which is why I really encourage my kids. My son is a senior at Illinois State. My students that are transferring to get involved even in one thing.

##### [00:04:00.780] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:04:02.670] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So I did that. Went to work after college as an accountant, was at a company in Schaumburg called Inner Cargo Corporation, an insurance company. We went public while I was there. So much fun, actually. Was I sound sarcastic? But it actually was an amazing experience. A lot of hours. And then they wanted us to all be CPAs back to school, get my CPA, get a Master's, got a second Bachelor's in computers because we had one programmer for the entire company. So if you needed a report, figure it out. So I did.

##### [00:04:42.890] - Brian Shelton

Last CPA exam. That had to be rough, right?

##### [00:04:45.760] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Oh, my goodness. That is the hardest thing I've done in my life. And even my doctoral degree that I finished a year and a half ago with heart, but nothing compared to the CPA. My family, when I passed it, finally, they were like, Leslie, you're not carrying books. What's going on? Aren't you studying for something? So, yeah, that was challenging, but really helping students understand that rigor. And that it's doable. You can do it just persevere.

##### [00:05:19.930] - Brian Shelton

You said you went back and got a second Masters. When you say that out loud to people look at you like you're crazy.

##### [00:05:25.560] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yes. When I graduated with my doctorate, everybody around me is like, what's next?

##### [00:05:31.440] - Brian Shelton

Right?

##### [00:05:31.760] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

And I joke. I go, Maybe law school.

##### [00:05:34.600] - Brian Shelton

Maybe law school.

##### [00:05:35.710] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

No, I'm done! (laughs)

##### [00:05:37.850] - Brian Shelton

So you did just recently complete your doctorate. What was that process like? I mean, why did you decide to do that after all this time? I guess, is really what I'm asking.

##### [00:05:46.220] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yeah, a lot of my colleagues are like, oh, you want to be dean? No, it was a bucket list item. Honestly, I didn't feel done. It sounds really crazy to people. You're a professor. Why didn't you feel done? And so I did a Doctor of Education with a focus in online education, which is one of my passions. And it was challenging to get into the habit of researching and writing. You're always researching. But it was really good, personally, because it taught me. Don't believe everything you hear or you read. How did they get those numbers? How did they get that opinion? Ask for the empirical evidence. And that was an amazing life skill you think I would have had years ago, but no.

##### [00:06:40.130] - Brian Shelton

So what was the dissertation?

##### [00:06:41.990] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

The dissertation was a qualitative study of gamification and online accounting in online financial accounting courses.

##### [00:06:50.220] - Brian Shelton

Okay, so what does that mean?

##### [00:06:52.210] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

You don't know? (laughs) So qualitative means that you're asking people's opinions. How did you feel about it? And so I've developed four gamification techniques in my all my courses.

##### [00:07:04.620] - Brian Shelton

So what's gamification?

##### [00:07:06.010] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Gamification is taking game type elements and applying them to an educational situation. So the ones I've developed are quests. My quests are basically, take the quiz again. But I started off in this fun, hey, let's continue your learning and take a quest. And students get extra credit, minimal, but they can earn extra credit and continue learning. The second I developed escape rooms where there are problems, they're accounting problems, but I word them in a story type way. I apply it to a real business like Tesla and students have to solve. And then there's quiz questions, various quiz questions. They put in the answers. It's definitely more critical thinking than, what's the answer? I do badges where, based on performance on certain things, they can earn a badge. And mine are developed around the accounting profession. So if you're the highest, you're CFO chief Financial Officer. Next down, you'd be an accounting manager. And then the bottom well, the bottom attained is staff accountant. So I'm sharing accounting. And then my fourth is a syllabus scavenger hunt. So students me, when I was a student did it too. Did not read the syllabus.

##### [00:08:37.210] - Brian Shelton

No! Well, you must be kidding me, right?

##### [00:08:39.610] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

And so here's a way it's it's points, but they have to go through certain things, and there's an Easter egg in there that they can get extra credit right away. Day one.So yeah!

##### [00:08:52.810] - Brian Shelton

You're telling me that the students don't read the syllabus?

##### [00:08:56.810] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Some do! I won't say they don't all but with the syllabus scavenger hunt, I have seen them understand the value. And when they come up to me midterm or right now, we have a week and a half left, and they're like, oh, is there extra credit? And I'll go, what about looking at the syllabus? And they almost always put their hand on their head. Oh, yeah.

##### [00:09:20.450] - Brian Shelton

So how are your students responding to this gamification that you're doing? What's the reaction to that? Do you get pushed back on that because some people are interested in that? You're nodding your head yes on the radio. Yes.

##### [00:09:31.990] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So it's mixed. My results were very mixed.

##### [00:09:36.080] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:09:37.210] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

But the people that did it and I looked at their grades, they were A students. So students that did it performed super well in the class. They liked it. They liked the engagement. Not everybody has time. Community college students are very over committed. Okay.

##### [00:09:59.460] - Brian Shelton

Yes.

##### [00:09:59.460] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

We work, we have families, we maybe want to sleep sometimes we have a full load. Or even part time community college students, when you compare to the four year university students, which my son is, are much more committed with other things. So a lot of my students literally just don't have time, and that's okay. So that's why I set up all of my other than the syllabus, scavenger hunt is the only required. Everything else is extra credit. And so, yeah, I don't require it.

##### [00:10:34.350] - Brian Shelton

Sounds really interesting.

##### [00:10:35.390] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yeah, it is. The most fun of doing the interviews. As a part of my doctoral dissertation, I worked with or spoke with 15 students of mine that already had gone through my course. Not current students, that's not ethical. And the word fun, that would come out of their mouth and I'm like, really? The quest you found fun? You like taking multiple choice quizzes? They're like, well, no, but it was fun to think I could get extra credit or the opportunity to get extra credit.

##### [00:11:12.470] - Brian Shelton

I just wonder how should I ask this question? Are the students who think it's fun to get the extra credit the ones who don't need the extra credit to begin with?

##### [00:11:20.990] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Could be okay. Yeah. When you look and say, who's doing it? Oh, they're my A students. Yeah, they're the go getters. I'm going to do everything I can to learn, but specifically this term, students I found are really struggling with their emotional health right now. With coming, we hope, towards the end of the pandemic. We could discuss that separate, but they're really embracing this. Oh, I could go extra credit and get some extra credit. So we have twelve chapters. Once we take an exam on those chapters, they can't go back and do the extra credit. I just recently reopened everything, and people are going in because they really want that buffer.

##### [00:12:13.670] - Brian Shelton

Sure.

##### [00:12:14.250] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So I'm seeing it from a motivational standpoint I researched. Were they motivated? Did they learn and did it help them succeed in the course? So those were my three pillars of my dissertation, and I'm seeing the motivation right now. They're like all for those points.

##### [00:12:33.200] - Brian Shelton

What's that time of the year when all of a sudden everyone's interested in what can they do extra to boost their grade? And it's like, well, you could have done your work to begin with.

##### [00:12:40.520] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Exactly. And I agree. As an educator, I agree. But we also, I feel personally, let's be a little bit more empathetic and compassionate because it is a challenging time. So, yeah, I really am trying to help the students. But you're right.

##### [00:13:00.030] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

After that time of year, if you had studied, right? That's right.

##### [00:13:03.930] - Brian Shelton

So speaking of community colleges and studying, you were a professional accountant, and then you started teaching. How did you choose to, I guess, one, start teaching, and two, why did you choose community colleges for that?

##### [00:13:19.140] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yeah, I actually taught at Harper for a little bit. I've taught also at universities, but I love the community college model. I love the opportunity of teaching. At the four year university you are expected to publish, you're expected to research, and nothing against that path if that's your passion. My passion is teaching and connecting with students. So the community college is really the best for someone who wants to teach.

##### [00:13:54.910] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. And you did Harper, and so you are at Oakton now. How long have you been in Oakton?

##### [00:14:00.740] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I've been at Oakton since 2000, so 22 years.

##### [00:14:06.350] - Brian Shelton

Well, that's not a good question to ask. I was going to ask, are you still enjoying it? But do you?

##### [00:14:09.840] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yes.

##### [00:14:10.180] - Brian Shelton

No, you can ask that because I've been teaching full time well, about the same amount of time since 2000. And you go through phases where you're like, wow, I don't am I really going to keep doing this for another however many years? But I don't know about you, but I find this that at some point in a semester, you meet a student or you have a class that just really makes you remember why you were doing this to begin with, and it kind of reenergizes you.

##### [00:14:37.690] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Totally. This term has reenergized me. Yes. I am looking forward to a little break.

##### [00:14:44.160] - Brian Shelton

Sure.

##### [00:14:44.540] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

That's human, right? But just looking at how students are struggling a little bit more than pre pandemic I saw, it really reenergizes me to go into my class and be positive and energetic and silly because accounting, as Monty Python said, can be dull. Dull. I disagree. But the more I bring in, the more I see the students like, oh, okay, I should care.

##### [00:15:16.920] - Brian Shelton

I should care. Yeah, that's great. So at Oakton, you are both faculty and you are program chair. Is that the title?

##### [00:15:25.130] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

That is correct. I'm department chair for the accounting program. So I schedule, I help with books. I oversee adjuncts, I hire adjuncts. I deal with curriculum committee. We just are developing I am developing a data analytics course for accountants, which is new emerging topic for the CPA exam. One of my adjuncts is Redeveloping QuickBooks Online. So yeah, in addition to teaching financial accounting, the Practicum, and then next fall data analytics, I help with the program development at Oakton.

##### [00:16:07.670] - Brian Shelton

Do you like that?

##### [00:16:10.230] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yes. There's good and bad, pros and cons.

##### [00:16:13.110] - Brian Shelton

I am also a program chair that's why I ask, yeah.

##### [00:16:15.910] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

So what I do like is the ability as chair to do my duties at home. So that's really awesome. But I still have the opportunity to teach both in the classroom and online. But yes, there are things with being program chair where the college sets new initiatives and they push it down to you, and you're like, when am I going to have time for that? But what I like about program chair, I'm visiting our district high schools that have dual credit courses right now.

##### [00:16:51.960] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:16:52.530] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

And so that's so cool to go and talk to the high school students, even the ones that sit there with their arms crossed, looking at kind of scowling at you, it's still cool to connect with them and share why community college, even over the summer, might be an option, you know? And so I try not to sell Oakton. I try to sell community college concept as a whole. Yeah, right, because you don't know where they're going to live. You don't know where they will be.

##### [00:17:21.930] - Brian Shelton

I talk about that all the time. We didn't have a great community college system where I grew up. We had one, but it wasn't really there. And I'd never even thought about it. But I spent two years in the wrong major, and that was a very expensive mistake. That was a very expensive mistake. And so I talk to our students here at Harper about that all the time. Like, you have made the right choice. You were in the right place. You were doing the right thing. And even some of them who I meet in their last semester here, and I asked them, what's the plan? And they're like, I still don't know. And I'm like that's okay. That's normal because you haven't made a mistake yet.

##### [00:17:54.630] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Exactly. That's one of the things I love about meeting. I meet all my students for 15 minutes in the first three weeks. So first three weeks, I'm exhausted, which is okay, but I just ask them, what do you want to be when you grow up? What interests you? And many of them are like, I don't know. And so we help explore and connect them to the career services and things like that.

##### [00:18:22.130] - Brian Shelton

What's the most rewarding part of working at the community college? What do you think?

##### [00:18:25.620] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Students. I love meeting with students. On LinkedIn I'm connected with quite a few of my previous students. One a day, love a day. He was with me in 2008 and just was your average high school student just sat in the back of the room scowling at me, and he went on and graduated from DePaul. I really nagged, let's be honest. I nagged him to get through my course. And he's a financial analyst now. He's a senior financial analyst now, downtown and soaring. And to me, if I can help students find something that interests them and help them succeed and support themselves, life is awesome.

##### [00:19:18.480] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, it's fantastic when you make connections like that with students, too, and you keep in contact with them over the years and watch their careers and their lives grow, it's so much fun. It's one of the great joys of being a community college professor. It really is.

##### [00:19:31.190] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I know.

##### [00:19:32.180] - Brian Shelton

I don't think that you get that at the four year university.

##### [00:19:35.110] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I don't think you get the connection. When I talk to my kids, who my son is a senior in Illinois State, my daughter went through there, and they would reach out to certain professors, but on average, it was, Professor Comes does their job, leaves.

##### [00:19:52.260] - Brian Shelton

Right?

##### [00:19:52.960] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Community college. You can really connect more one on one. The classes are smaller, so you can make that connection.

##### [00:20:00.630] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. So in 2022, you were recognized as a Harper College Distinguished Alumni. What was that like for you?

##### [00:20:08.470] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Oh, my goodness, that was such a humbling day. Harper kudos for all that they did for us and making us feel special. I still get goosebumps when I think about that day. And then when we were leaving after the ceremony, they had these big pictures of us, and they're like, no, take that. So I have that in my office at home. Don't know what I'm going to do with it. I do. People come over and visit, and they're like, wow, what do you do with that?

##### [00:20:52.190] - Brian Shelton

What do you do with that?

##### [00:20:54.040] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

I don't know.

##### [00:20:54.680] - Brian Shelton

Excellent question. There's a certain amount of vanity and ego having that there, right?

##### [00:20:59.830] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

No, well, at first I'm like, oh, I could bring it to Oakton. Then I'm like, no, like you just said it's like, no, that just doesn't feel right.

##### [00:21:08.370] - Brian Shelton

I do this show, I've done it for a while now, and people tell me, oh, I listened to the episode you do the other day you did the other day. And I'm like, I don't listen to them. It's so weird for me to and then I'll be listening to a podcast in the car, and it'll finish, and then this show automatically loads next. And I'm like, oh, my gosh. And you turn that off right away. I couldn't imagine having a giant picture.

##### [00:21:27.460] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Of myself hanging out looking at yourself.

##### [00:21:30.760] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, that's horrible. Not horrible, but you know what I mean. So that's great. That's fantastic to be recognized by the school and to continue to have a relationship with the institution even though you are at one of our sister rival schools. (laughs)

##### [00:21:49.010] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

It's okay. It's all okay.

##### [00:21:50.870] - Brian Shelton

We're all friends. We're all friends.

##### [00:21:52.360] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

It's all good.

##### [00:21:53.830] - Brian Shelton

So we've talked about this a little bit, but I always ask everyone, what advice do you have for, I guess, two groups of people. One, the student who's thinking, should I go to a community college? And I guess the second would be, while you're at the community college, what should you be doing to maximizing that opportunity?

##### [00:22:15.050] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Yeah. So when I actually talked to high school students and I will explain the benefits. Um, if you are funding your own education, if you don't have a full ride or mom and dad are paying, consider community college. It will save you substantial amounts of money and that you can then use for other things. Right. I also really encourage my students to get involved, because nowadays what you have on that resume will open doors or close doors. And so if you're involved in the accounting club or DECA or whatever your passion is. Do improv, do theater, whatever your passion is, somehow get involved at the community college. Because that's what employers are looking for. They're looking for people that go that extra step. And it also helps you. They say, your first two years, you're becoming a well rounded individual with all the gen eds. Okay, I buy in. That's good. But also, being involved will get you a network of people you could reach out to, you know, for jobs or whatever. So getting involved.

##### [00:23:33.690] - Brian Shelton

It makes a huge difference. I just had a student right before Thanksgiving, he sent me a message, and he said, you remember how every day you would come into our class and say, you know, if you're a media major, you need to get involved at the radio station of the campus newspaper? I'm like, well, yes, of course. So I did a show at the radio station, even though I wasn't interested in radio. And guess what? That's what just got me a job in the marketing department at and he told me, and I'm like, So cool. Good for you. Fantastic. And thanks for letting me know that it worked out for you. And I talk about that all the time, too that I was the general manager of my college radio station when I was in school. And that one resume item has led to every single job that I've had in my entire career, including this one here. Because they were looking for someone who could advise the college radio station, not just run their media program like, oh, hello. Yeah, I have that experience. So it's interesting how things that we do when we're kids, young adults, can have such enormous influence on our lives in a positive way.

##### [00:24:30.280] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Right. And students might find something they're interested in. They may go oooh radio. Maybe I don't want to be the person behind the microphone, but maybe I want to be involved somehow. I talk with students, especially the young men. Young women also like sports, but you see the passion more coming out in class from young men. And I'm like, okay, you love basketball. How about working for the Bulls? And they're like, I could do that. Yeah. So combining your major, what you're going to do to support yourself and a job, how cool is that?

##### [00:25:09.720] - Brian Shelton

You might not play for the Bulls, right, but you could work for the Bulls.

##### [00:25:13.110] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Exactly. In 2016, this is an awesome story. If we have a quick moment. 2016, I had a student who worked still at the Cubs, and in 2016, a really cool thing happened for us northsiders. We won the World Series, and he sent me an email in our learning management system and said, hey, I wasn't a doctor then. Hey, Professor V, I just wanted to let you know I'm actually going to get a World Series ring. I, like, fell off my chair and said, no way. Once he got it, he sent me pictures. He was a staff accountant at that time. He's now an accounting manager at the Cubs and, and has a World Series ring. And so all the young men in the classroom in high school when I go and they're all like, what?

##### [00:26:07.750] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. So 20 plus years as a community college educator. You did the associates, the bachelors, two masters and a doctorate. What's next for you? What's on the horizon? Or you're not there yet?

##### [00:26:23.770] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Well, I just finished data analytics five certificate bundle through the AICPA society, american institute of certified public Accountants. It's our national organization. And I needed to upskill to be able to develop and teach data analytics. And so that has been my most recent journey back into education. Great learning experience. Brain feels full at the moment.

##### [00:26:55.330] - Brian Shelton

I don't think that a lot of people think about when we developed these courses, like a couple of years ago, I needed to develop a Social Media Management and measurement course, right. And I know a lot about media, but that's not necessarily my thing. Right. So I spent a year studying social Media management and measurement and reading every book that there was and every article and everything just so that I could write that course and then let someone else teach it. Right. And I don't think that a lot of people think about that when it comes to college course development and that sort of thing and the amount of work that goes into that. So good for you. Good for you. That's fantastic.

##### [00:27:26.820] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Thank you.

##### [00:27:27.290] - Brian Shelton

That's great. Well, I want to thank you so much for being here today. Today you're a great guest, very energetic and fun to talk to and I wish you the absolute best as you continue your career at Oakton. And I'm going to have to bug you about some of this gamification stuff because you've really piqued my interest.

##### [00:27:43.320] - Leslie Van Wolvelear

Reach out.

##### [00:27:43.960] - Brian Shelton

Really exciting. Leslie Van Wolvelear is a Harper graduate and a 2022 Harper Distinguished Alumni. You've been listening to Harper talks. The co production of Harper Radio and Harper for alumni relations. Shannon Hynes produces the show and Erica Berger gets it online. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.