

Alumni Spotlight: Jason Levy '98



Biographical Information:

I was born in East Setauket, NY, and grew up in a variety of places. I spent many years of my youth in Lafayette Hill, PA, and graduated from Plymouth Whitemarsh HS in 1988. I didn't start college until 1993 due to spending time in business and other interests until deciding to go back to school. I started at Montco in the spring of 1993 and then decided to go to school full time. I chose WCU because I visited and walked the campus during an admissions tour. I actually met Phil Tripp that day and really loved the feel of campus and the size, in addition to the strong education and business school. I came in undeclared, but eventually chose Business Management as my major.

What made you go into Student Affairs?

I became very involved in resident life and student activities in my second year on campus. I did lights and sound for SAC events and eventually became president. I was an RA for 3 years and worked as a Student Director in Sykes for 2 years as well. I enjoyed what I was doing and decided that I wanted to keep doing it. After graduating, I went to grad school at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN, for Student Affairs and haven't left a college campus since. I really enjoy working with students and helping manage the Student Center on campus – the community building, student development, and working with my staff and other staff colleagues are the best things about my role on campus.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

I serve as the Director for Student Center Operations at Temple University. My team and I manage the Student Center and Student Faculty Center, as well as some additional spaces and areas on campus. We are responsible for a Game Room, Cinema, Recreation Center & Campus Activities (at the SFC), and facility operation. I have the great pleasure of working with approx. 90 students and 11 full-time staff. We manage day-to-day and strategic operations of our facilities and programmatic areas.

What is a typical day like at work?

Most days are full of email, meetings, and conversations with staff about what's happening today, tomorrow and in the coming days. We do lots of troubleshooting for events and programs as well as working closely with partners on campus for future events or operational

needs. Many days I interact with our student staff or student leaders on campus and I also work closely with a variety of University departments on projects. I hope that each day I have a fun and interesting challenge – with a student group, with the staff or with an operational or programmatic area – and most days I do. It's never the same day twice and it's fun and exciting.

What have been the biggest challenges at work?

Doing more with less is a perpetual challenge in our field. We are often among the areas that get cut first or early in budget challenges. During the down trend a few years ago in PA, Temple had a few years of budget reductions and the entire University struggled. Trying to grow the department, our programs and services, and be strategic about future endeavors is tough in challenging financial situations.

What do you enjoy most about your current position?

The students, I absolutely working with our students. Both the student organizations and the staff in our facilities are just amazing. They are fun, dedicated and caring, interested in improving our community and the greater Temple and Philadelphia area, and they come up with amazing programs, events, and ideas to share with their peers. It's great to see them grow and develop during their time with us. I really don't think students realize how much they impact us during their tenure on campus. Some might think that we see that same things over and over since the students are changing each year or over a few years, but it's often the case that we see new, innovative, amazing things from the students. That's the real fun of the work that I do.

What skills, talents, and other traits are useful and necessary to do your job?

Communication is the number one skill that I find that my team and I need to have. We need to be good listeners and learn what people want from us and we need to be able to share what we need from our constituents. Time and task management are also critically important. One of my previous supervisors told me something that really stuck with me. We need to be able to juggle – manage the important things in the short run as well as those in the longer term – and that is very difficult to do. It's easy to focus on today and tomorrow; and it's easy to focus on 6-9 months from now, but being able to do both is a difficult skill to master. I don't think I have it 100% yet, but I keep working on it and have great help from my team. Understanding budgets and financials is also important for my role. We manage a diverse group of budgets, cost centers, and funds and knowing how they all interplay is critical for departmental success. I never thought I'd use some of the accounting and finance that I learned, but I actually use them quite often. I also learned some excellent technology related skills that I use on a regular basis. Computer oriented tasks, sound and lighting, and other A/V or technical skills are all important components of what I do on a regular basis. I may not be strictly "hands-on" every day at this point, but knowing how to trouble shoot and critically evaluate a situation is very important.

Do you have a favorite or funny story about work?

Some of the best times are the most tense or challenging related to events or deadlines. We consistently provide service to challenging or interesting clients and while I find it fun, some situations are also stressful and only afterwards do they seem funny. We have hosted some amazing speakers including President Obama, Vice President Biden, Hilary Clinton, and

some fabulous programs like Hardball with Chris Matthews (a Temple Alum) and Game Day from ESPN. They are all fun, but my favorite would probably be the NCAA basketball tournament viewing parties we hold each year. Temple basketball (men's and women's) is often in the tournament and as they are often "away" games, we typically show them in one of our event spaces on our large screens. These programs are exciting, dramatic and fun and bring out the best of our students to support our athletes.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I have a motorcycle and I love going out for long rides or vacations with my wife Dayna. We have ridden all over the tri-state area including down to the shore. We visit friends and just sightsee when the weather cooperates. I also love to travel in general. Dayna and I are both in the student affairs arena so we sometimes travel to conferences together. We have seen some great parts of the country as part of work travel and that's lots of fun. We also visit Newport, RI (a favorite spot) every couple of years. Additionally, I am car fanatic and I tinker on our vehicles as well as attend car shows whenever I can. Last year Dayna and I went to the Mecum car auction in Harrisburg and had a blast!

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Truthfully, I see myself in the same place I am now. I hope to be in my role at Temple, possibly with some additional areas of responsibility, a larger staff and some additional resources. I am happy with my job and am taking classes toward an MBA. If something changes and I am not in my current role, I would be very happy working at another college either in Student Centers/Student Affairs, Financial/Business Affairs, or Athletics. While it would be interesting to work in a private or other public sector position, I look forward to working on campus each day and hope I can do so for a very long time.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

Almost no one goes into college to become a student affairs administrator. It typically happens because of a particular undergraduate co-curricular experience or set of experiences. I would tell anyone who would listen that if you are excited about the work you do as a student leader – be it an RA, SGA or programming board executive, orientation leader or student director – that you can do it for a living if you want. It's not all that glamorous and the pay certainly isn't a strong motivator, but the rewards are significant and the experiences are truly amazing. It takes some work as many folks attend graduate school, which I strongly encourage, but it's not required. I would also share that it's important to get a variety of experiences and don't minimize anything as part of the process. Each unique position, volunteer, paid or otherwise, adds to one's resume and makes each person unique.

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

The work I did in my business classes has helped me tremendously. I was pushed to think strategically and work with many different people on projects. This has helped me be a strong team member and project leader over the years. While I don't think I use accounting theory each day, the process of learning accounting, chemistry or marketing has helped me to do the work, or support those doing the work, each and every day. I truly thank the faculty for their ethic of care and time spent, in hindsight, of course. My classes helped me become a stronger critical thinker and time manager and those are skills I use every day.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

Personally, my relationship with my wife is my greatest accomplishment without doubt. I never thought I'd get married but when I met her and we spent time together, it wasn't long before I knew I wanted to spend my life with her. She is an amazing partner and my best friend. She understands me, most importantly what I do for a living, because she does something in the same field, and she is wonderfully supportive and fun.

Professionally, there are 2 things that I am very, very proud of. First, is an award that Temple won through our professional association a few years ago for our student staff-training program. We basically kick started the program and after 2 years, submitted the new curriculum to the association for an annual award. We were very fortunate to be recognized for excellence. The staff did an amazing job with staff training and development initiatives and it was great to be recognized. The second is more of a personal achievement, but still much of the credit goes to my staff. This past semester I was recognized as the recipient of the Edgar Whiting award for regional service, leadership and volunteerism. This is an award given by our professional association at our annual regional conference and it was the first year for our new region. I was so humbled to be the first recipient and believe that much of my professional success is due to my mentors and my involvement in the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), my professional association of choice.

What's your favorite memory from when you were a student at WCU?

This is an easy one. While working with SAC, we brought Bill Bellamy and Tommy Davidson to campus for a comedy performance in Hollinger Gym. I was the person who was to greet them when they arrived on campus and the green room was in Ehinger Gym. Mr. Davidson arrived first and we really just hung out and talked, as he was a bit earlier than expected. I let him know that Mr. Bellamy would be arriving shortly and he was very excited; he didn't know they would be performing together that night. At one point, I grabbed a basketball from the office we just shot around for a few minutes. He was in a very nice suit and dress shoes and hit 11 free throws in a row. When Mr. Bellamy arrived, they greeted each other and we continued to relax in the gym until the sound check and show time. Just before we went on stage, I asked them both to sign the basketball and they did. That ball lived in the SAC office for several years and the night's event was a huge success. It was a very memorable night for me, for SAC and for the campus that year.