

Intro: You are on with career talks presented by the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech a regular podcast featuring students, alumni, and friends of the school offering advice to help you succeed in your career endeavors.

Q: Welcome to career talks a podcast service of the academic services office of the Sam Nunn school International Affairs at Georgia Tech. We're talking with Stephen Hawkins a soon to be graduating graduate student and 2017 PMF finalist. He is with us today to share his insight on the Presidential Management Fellowship the process and offering tips for how to be competitive for this program. Tell us a little bit about yourself, your name, Major, where you're from, what you studied undergrad, how you chose to come to Sam Nunn school International affairs for graduate school.

A: Hi Jessica, yeah so my name is Stephen Hawkins I grew up in the suburbs outside of Atlanta specifically Gwinnett County. I went to high school at North Gwinnett. I did my undergrad also in International Affairs at the University of North Georgia and during that time I also joined the Army Reserve and spent a few years doing psychological operations with including one tour to Afghanistan. So I guess the next part of the question is how did I choose to come here to the Sam Nunn School. So around the same time in my life I finished my Bachelor's degree and I got out of the Army and I was thinking you know, what am I going to do next. And so I had a few other few options one of them I was actually thinking about going active duty into the military and among some other you know some other job prospects. The next biggest one for me was well you know maybe I should try grad school maybe I should go get a master's degree because I found during my undergrad that I really loved studying International Affairs I liked learning, I like the academic environment so I applied to only two programs this one and one of the American. And so I got into both and I remember I came to visit here. Unfortunately, I missed the annual spring fling and open house events because I was out of town for work but I came to visit later, took a tour, spoke with Vince. And at that time I really liked the small program size and I liked what I saw as far as the student body went. So I knew what this seems like a good fit, I think I'll come in here.

Q: So we're here to talk about your recent selection as a Presidential Management Fellow. Can you tell us what exactly is this Presidential Management Fellowship Program and how did you first learn of it?

A: Yes, so the Presidential Management Fellows Program is from what I've gathered so far anyway from a program that is to find you know graduating graduate students like myself and plug them into positions that they would be well suited for in different government organizations. From how it seems and that is the name would suggest it seems like the ultimate aim is to kind of cultivate future leaders in government service but that part I won't find out until sometime in the future so we'll see. But there was the second part of the question?

Q: How did you learn about it?

A: So it's funny I actually learned about him years ago because one of my neighbors who grew up across the street from my family. He told me. About this years ago when I was doing my bachelor's degree and I looked into it then and I told him Look I can't do this, I only have a bachelor's. I need to be graduating with a master's degree at least to be able to apply for this program. Oh well that's unfortunate. At that point I kind of forgot about it entirely and then, when was it, it was the end, towards the end of the fall semester. Oh yeah towards the end of last fall semester. And some of my friends here at school were talking about it and I was like oh yeah I remember hearing about that. I should probably apply too. Right, and so I did, I put in a pretty good amount of effort into it, as as you should if you're trying to trying to get accepted into a program like that. Yeah, so that is how I and ended up applying.

Q: Walk us through these application steps what does the application consist of?

A: Ok so there are some specifics that if I remember correctly they ask you not to divulge but I can give you some of the basics. So one of the things that you do is you have to send in a resume, so for that I would definitely recommend any student that is interested to go to you know career services to have the resume looked at. I did that I think it was my first semester here and it's you know it seems to have paid off. So I really appreciate the work that that they did with me over there. So aside from the resume you're supposed to write a little short sample about kind of yourself and as I recall your suitability for the program. I mean they ask you some more specific prompts but in general if you're writing about yourself trying to sell yourself to the people who are who are offering out you know these positions. And then there is there's a test and on you know there's a few different sections of the test again that probably shouldn't say what what they are. But the way that it seems to me is kind of a three pronged approach you have to resume, who am I professionally, the writing sample you know, how am I a decent writer and can I sell myself effectively and then the testing portion which seems to be measuring general cognitive ability and other such traits so that is in a nutshell the how the application is.

Q: Once you were selected as a finalist what happened?

A: So it's actually pretty funny. I had no idea that I've selected. I remember I had just come home from the gym and I was making lunch and I got a text message from my supervisor Vince and just one word ALL CAPS several exclamation marks, congratulations. And I thought oh wow, did I win something, I don't remember joining or applying for any contest. So I asked him, well Vince did I win something and he said, "oh no, you've been selected as a finalist for the PMF program." Oh man well that's confusing because they haven't said anything to me but apparently they published a list of finalists before they actually sent out e-mails to any of us. So he had been I guess waiting for the list to come out and took a look and saw that I was on it so that was a pretty exciting way to find out.

Q: Where you are now in the process?

A: So now and it changes you know from year to year but at least this year the way that it worked was after finding out that you've been selected as a finalist. They have a virtual career fair. I guess this year that decided not to fly people out to D.C. for a physical career fair which is fine. I feel like a lot of the information that you need to know or find out if you're qualified in your interested position is more than accessible on the Internet. Of course meeting people is great and meeting the people who are offering all these jobs would be you know to be terrific experience but for the most part I guess to save resources and it made sense. So they have this and then after actually I guess would be before that point but then especially afterwards they started adding the jobs onto their talent management system. And the way it goes is you can read through it's organized by agency and you read through to find out what they're looking for, what it is that they do, what your responsibilities would be, and also kind of a pay range and grade range as well that you could fall into within that capacity. So I found the ones that I was interested in that I thought that I you know was well suited for that I get that I could fulfill properly and I applied which was actually much easier than a lot of other applications I've seen because all you since you already put in I guess the legwork at the application. It's pretty simple it's a resume and a cover letter that it. So I sent out several of those and since I've had two interviews. They've both gone really well and I am hoping to hear back from at least one.

Q: Yes, let's keep your fingers crossed. How do your time at Georgia Tech or in the Nunn School prepare you for this program?

A: Well without the Nunn school I couldn't have gotten to the stage of the program for sure. Not only because of the you know graduation requirement but a lot of the of the critical thinking and skills and analysis that I have that I've really picked up here. I mean you know I started learning those things and improving on those traits while I was in you know my undergrad in the military helped as well. But I feel like here this really prepared me for a lot of what they were looking for in these different jobs. So when I you know in my interviews with I've been able to answer questions about you know how much you react in this kind of situation or how do you handle these types of circumstances in ways that I would have been able to without coming here first so I would say. Cognitively I feel like I've improved here, analytically, my skills and writing and being able to understand problems and work through problems have improved significantly and I'm you know frankly looking forward to being able to put them in practice.

Q: What advice would you give graduate students considering the P.M.F. program.

A: apply just definitely apply and you know from what I have seen it's it's supposed to be a great program it's also one of the few government opportunities right now that is exempt from the hiring freeze. So I mean I know that that won't go on indefinitely but it's a pretty secure program and also from what I've heard it's a great whether or not you stay with the organization of your hired into. Apparently it's a great stepping stone into other organizations in government or even into the private sector so I would say definitely apply. And put a lot of you know put effort into your application, take it seriously and also be honest because that's really important too because at the end of the day you know. So yourself but sell yourself

honestly because the truth comes out one way or another so you know highlight your strengths, put your best foot forward and just try.

That concludes our interview. Thank you for sharing your insight and expertise with their audience today.

Thanks for thanks for having me.

Outro: This has been career talks a podcast of the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech brought to you by the Nunn School academic services this and other podcast can be found on our website at www.inta.gatech.edu. Thank you for listening.