##### [00:00:00.250] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Today on Harper Talks, I'm excited to speak with Dr. Ruth Morales. She is a 2018 graduate of Harper College and is a physical therapist and a recipient of the Shirley L. And Howard a Turpin scholarship for Dreamers. Ruth joined me in the Harper media lab in the west wing of building D. Thanks for being here.

##### [00:00:24.710] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Thanks for having me here.

##### [00:00:26.060] - Brian Shelton

You found your way across campus, okay?

##### [00:00:28.030] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes. Even with all the construction, we do.

##### [00:00:31.230] - Brian Shelton

Have a lot of construction going on and even more coming soon. Building INJ are about to be remodeled, so that's adding more.

##### [00:00:36.570] - Dr. Ruth Morales

That's Incredible.

##### [00:00:37.110] - Brian Shelton

It is. It's fantastic. So you didn't have an easy path to college. You had your son when you were 16, and then you worked as a waitress for several years while you were raising your son in those early years, but you had dreams of being a physical therapist. And originally, when coming to Harper College, you signed up for, I think, what most would consider the most difficult course, which is anatomy. I have to say that I failed anatomy the first time I took it. Why did you decide to come to Harper College and of all courses, to choose anatomy?

##### [00:01:10.050] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Well, the reason I chose Harper was because it was more accessible and it was affordable at the time. Like I said, like you said, I was a waitress, so I didn't have much money for college. My parents didn't have the money to give me to go to college. And so I came here because I felt like Harper has welcoming doors, like everybody's welcomed here. And I took just that one course because college was just going to be a trial. It was just going to be me trying the hardest course. And if I could do it, that meant college was for me. And if I couldn't do it, then I would have to find some other way, another career path that didn't involve college.

##### [00:01:47.750] - Brian Shelton

That's really brave of you. I mean, take the hardest course and then decide whether that's it for you or not. Right? So how did you do in anatomy? Obviously?

##### [00:01:53.860] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Well, I did very well, thanks to. I think it was Dr. Hyde.

##### [00:01:58.230] - Brian Shelton

Yeah?

##### [00:01:58.950] - Dr. Ruth Morales

He pushed me. He always pick on me. He just knew something about me, that I knew the answers. He would always be. Ruth, speak up. I know you know the answer, especially in lab. He would always pick on me. And it was the worst thing in my, like, it was the worst thing in my life at that point, I wanted to quit just because of that.

##### [00:02:16.730] - Brian Shelton

We do that. We recognize students who have something to say but are refusing to say it. And we know if we can get them to speak, that it makes a difference. So I'm glad that he did that. That's fantastic.

##### [00:02:26.970] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I'm glad that he did that too. It really pushed me.

##### [00:02:29.680] - Brian Shelton

It really pushed you? So after that first course, you felt like you were ready to continue and to do more?

##### [00:02:35.360] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes. Not quite, but I was ready to take one more class. So the next semester, I took two classes instead of just the one.

##### [00:02:43.720] - Brian Shelton

Oh. Do you remember what you took?

##### [00:02:44.920] - Dr. Ruth Morales

No, I don't remember. I took so many courses here. I do not remember. It was probably another basic science course, probably a chemistry. I don't remember. Sorry.

##### [00:02:57.160] - Brian Shelton

No, that's okay. That's okay. So I was thinking today if you graduated in 2018, I've been here since 14, so we probably cross paths at some point on this campus. I was thinking about that. What did you think of the college campus during that time? I mean, there's always something going on here. There's always events. There's always construction. What was it like during that time for you?

##### [00:03:16.910] - Dr. Ruth Morales

They were just announcing that they were going to build the library, so I was stuck in the little computer rooms for tutoring because I was in the tutoring center all the time. That place was the best. It was different, and it was in 2016, so that was when some horrible things were said about Mexicans and Muslims. And so Harper reacted so quickly, and they made all these shirts and posters about everybody's welcomed here at Harper. And that made me feel so good. And they had the safe spaces. They instantly reacted to it. And I still have that shirt. I still have it. It's like my prized possession. It says, everybody's welcomed here at Harper College, and it has it in different languages. It's the most beautiful shirt ever.

##### [00:04:05.700] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. I love that you mentioned that, because it's something, as an employee here at the college, that I feel strongly about, that we are a welcoming campus and that we try to make sure that we are welcoming, making a home for everyone. And so I appreciate you saying that. I'm glad that it's working.

##### [00:04:19.570] - Dr. Ruth Morales

It worked.

##### [00:04:20.390] - Brian Shelton

That library remodel is fantastic, though, right? Have you been in it?

##### [00:04:24.850] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I have not been over there!

##### [00:04:25.180] - Brian Shelton

I'm going to take you over there. Oh, goodness.

##### [00:04:27.990] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I was stuck in little rooms. I don't remember it.

##### [00:04:30.540] - Brian Shelton

It was worth you being stuck in little rooms for the library to be in the condition that it is today, I have to say. Okay, so I noticed you talked about you took a few courses and that sort of thing. You were also in the honors program while you were here?

##### [00:04:42.940] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes, I was.

##### [00:04:43.870] - Brian Shelton

How did the honors program help you while you were here?

##### [00:04:48.650] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Not only was I in the honors program, I was able to join all the courses. And so those courses were all, like, small group, and you had a lot of interaction with the professors because they knew you because of the program. And so I got a lot of one on one interaction with the professors. Shout out to Kyle Knee!

##### [00:05:05.730] - Brian Shelton

I love Kyle. Yeah, Kyle. And I started here,

##### [00:05:09.330] - Dr. Ruth Morales

And so they just made me feel like I was worth something, that I had potential, because I never felt that way. And once I joined the honors program, I felt like I was important.

##### [00:05:22.870] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. That's really great to hear. I teach an honors class every once in a while, every other year or so, and it's great to work with that smaller group of students and really concentrate on what it is that we're doing, because people seem to be a little more focused in those classes, not that others aren't, but you seem to have a larger concentration of people who are focused, so it's kind of fun.

##### [00:05:41.150] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes, we are more focused!

##### [00:05:44.590] - Brian Shelton

Sometimes in a bad way.

##### [00:05:46.910] - Dr. Ruth Morales

A little too focused. (laughs)

##### [00:05:48.120] - Brian Shelton

A little too focused. That's right. I got nine points out of ten. I really wanted 9.5. So I was looking at your bio and really kind of identified with a couple of things in there because I know that you are part of the DACA program, and recently a very close friend of mine who is in the DACA program finally got his U. S. Citizenship. And what a long, arduous process that he and his wife and his children have gone through to do that. Could you tell me how the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program has helped you?

##### [00:06:19.450] - Dr. Ruth Morales

The DACA program helped me in many ways. It helped me get scholarships. If I didn't have the DACA program, I would have never been able to apply for scholarships because I wouldn't have a Social Security.

##### [00:06:30.800] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:06:31.540] - Dr. Ruth Morales

And the DACA program has also allowed me to refinance my loans after graduating from Northwestern.... Which were daunting, as we all know Northwestern isn't cheap. (laughs) And so because of that, I'm able to work. I was able to join the physical therapy program because you need a Social Security in order to join these medical programs, because you go out to work for free in the clinicals. And so if DACA weren't around, I would have never been able to make it to the physical therapy program. So it's helped me tremendously.

##### [00:07:06.110] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. It's such an enormous benefit. Unfortunately, not something that really exists, know, in the current state that we're in. So I always get concerned about the number of students that we have coming into the campus who could certainly benefit from a program like that.

##### [00:07:20.860] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yeah. So hopefully they continue with it.

##### [00:07:23.550] - Brian Shelton

Have you gone through the whole program? Are you a citizen now, or how is that working for you, may I ask? I'm sorry, that might be too personal.

##### [00:07:29.460] - Dr. Ruth Morales

No, you can ask. It's daunting. Like you said, I applied in 2019, and I'm still waiting for my interview in Mexico to become a legal resident.

##### [00:07:40.150] - Brian Shelton

Okay. Yeah. My friend, I remember he had to go to Mexico with no hope of return to the United States, and that was very. He had a wife and child at the time, and so we were all very nervous. And so I don't think that most people realize how complicated that process is and the effect that it has on families and friends and that sort of thing. So I'm glad that you're willing to speak about it. So I appreciate that.

##### [00:08:02.960] - Dr. Ruth Morales

It's good to speak about it because I know there's students out there that are going through the exact same thing.

##### [00:08:07.690] - Brian Shelton

Yes, that's absolutely right. We have so many. Yes. You eventually finished here at Harper, and then you went on to Benedictine University to get your degree in biology, and then you did a doctorate of physical therapy at Northwestern. Goodness. You couldn't have picked an easier school. Right? Okay. But how do you think your education at Harper helped prepare you for your career and eventually getting your doctorate?

##### [00:08:35.050] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I think they just gave me everything I needed at the time. I was, like I said, I had no confidence, and so Harper just brought something out in me that I didn't even know I had. And it made me more studious. It made me disciplined. And the honors program really helped with all of that because they guided me through everything. They guided me through applications for undergrad, for applications for scholarships. And even after I was out of here, I reached out to them for letters of recommendation for scholarships for Physical Therapy. I think Harper IS the reason I made it to physical therapy school.

##### [00:09:16.560] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. When you arrived at know, transferring from the two year school to the four year, how did you feel there? Did you feel ready to go?

##### [00:09:25.090] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yeah, I felt ready. The honors programs are not easy here, right? So I felt really ready to go. And the professors here were the exact same as the ones in undergrad. It wasn't like I was still at Harper because actually, Benedictine's smaller than Harper, so I felt like I went to a community college. So it was great. That's the reason why I chose Benedictine. I wanted something small just like the honors program classes.

##### [00:09:49.780] - Brian Shelton

And then moving to Northwestern, what was that like? Because, I mean, that's not a small school, right?

##### [00:09:53.550] - Dr. Ruth Morales

That is not a small school, but the program is only 95 students.

##### [00:09:56.610] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:09:57.170] - Dr. Ruth Morales

So that one was a big change, but I still felt ready for it. It was scary to start because you knew you were going to start learning things that you were going to use for the rest of your life in your career. So that was a scary first couple of days, and it's a tough course. A lot of people drop out. I started in 2020.

##### [00:10:19.800] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:10:20.280] - Dr. Ruth Morales

During COVID So we started.

##### [00:10:21.720] - Brian Shelton

Oh, that must have been horrible.

##### [00:10:23.250] - Dr. Ruth Morales

We were online for a year.

##### [00:10:24.540] - Brian Shelton

Oh, my goodness.

##### [00:10:25.990] - Dr. Ruth Morales

So not only was it scary because we were learning a lot, but then it was scary because we were learning a lot online. And that was really tough. That was the toughest part, I think, of my whole educational career.

##### [00:10:40.750] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. I can't imagine doing a program like physical therapy online or nursing or any of the medical fields online. That's just a crazy concept to me. I mean, I know that we did it here at the college, but. Yeah. Wow.

##### [00:10:52.380] - Dr. Ruth Morales

They did a great job, though, I must say.

##### [00:10:54.800] - Brian Shelton

That's good. So you are a physical therapist. Tell people what that is. What does it mean to be a physical therapist? What's your day like? What do you do?

##### [00:11:02.920] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Okay. I'm not a massage therapist.

##### [00:11:04.810] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:11:05.280] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Number one. Let's get that cleared. Because everybody always asks me to give them a massage. I tell them that. So my day to day, I work in an outpatient clinic, which is, we mostly see neurological and dizzy patients. So I see patients one on one for 1 hour.

##### [00:11:21.480] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:11:21.960] - Dr. Ruth Morales

And I treat them for either. I have a lot of Parkinson's patients, so I treat them for their deficits that they have, that Parkinson's causes. And for the dizzy patients, we help them relieve that dizziness by doing some crazy maneuvers. I don't know if anybody has had vertigo and had crazy maneuvers done on them. We do those maneuvers all day, and then we give them exercises to do at home.

##### [00:11:45.200] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:11:45.620] - Dr. Ruth Morales

So it's a very rewarding career. I really love it because you get to see them every day, three times a week for 1 hour, and then you get to see how they progress. And then when they leave you, it's sad, but you're happy because they've actually made progress.

##### [00:12:01.790] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. That's Fantastic. So is this like a normal nine to five kind of thing, or what are your hours like? How does that work out? Maybe there are some students out there considering physical therapy.

##### [00:12:12.350] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yeah. So my clinic is actually open till 07:00 p.m. So we have a rotating schedule. So Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, I start at seven, leave at four, have an hour lunch, which is great. And then Mondays and Wednesdays I start at ten, leave at seven. So it's 8 hours and 1 hour lunch. It's a pretty chill schedule.

##### [00:12:34.950] - Brian Shelton

But you get to work with different people all the time.

##### [00:12:37.160] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes, I get to see different people every day, every hour. And we have people coming in for free evaluations. And it's a very interesting career. Sometimes people throw you curveballs and you're like, oh, never seen this diagnosis before.

##### [00:12:52.900] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:12:53.320] - Dr. Ruth Morales

And so that's when you reach out to the higher ups, to people who have had more experience than you.

##### [00:12:58.300] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Well, as we were talking before we started today, I told you that I had shoulder surgery in October. So I'm in physical therapy twice a week. Right. For months on end. And you develop a relationship with your physical therapist because these people, they know so much about you. They know your aches and pains and everything that you're going through, and they're trying to heal you through the process. And it's not something that I had experienced before. And so I have this deep respect for the physical therapy occupation now. Right. Because I've gone from not being able to lift my arm at all to being able to put my arm behind my head, which is, I never thought I'd be able to do again after my surgery. You feel so defeated after your surgery. And physical therapists, I think, really make you feel like you can accomplish something again.

##### [00:13:39.660] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes. And I think that's why I chose this career, because we get to uplift people. We usually get people at their worst, like the worst chapter in their life, because something tragic happened. And we get to encourage them. We have to be very happy and encourage them to keep going. And they'll see progress eventually.

##### [00:13:59.840] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. What do you think the biggest challenge is for a student who's maybe considering physical therapy as a career? What do you think is maybe the most difficult part for them?

##### [00:14:08.430] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Probably the most difficult part is getting those hours in. They're requiring a lot more hours of volunteering or shadowing and then just getting into the programs. I know they're very competitive, especially if you're just trying to stay here because you have a family or you can't afford to be living out somewhere else. It's challenging to get into the five programs that are here in Illinois, but I think that's probably the worst one, the most complicated one.

##### [00:14:37.110] - Brian Shelton

How old's your son now? I didn't do the math.

##### [00:14:39.440] - Dr. Ruth Morales

He's 16.

##### [00:14:40.430] - Brian Shelton

He's 16.

##### [00:14:41.190] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Junior in high school.

##### [00:14:42.360] - Brian Shelton

Oh, wow. What's he thinking about doing?

##### [00:14:44.590] - Dr. Ruth Morales

He doesn't know. He said, don't even look at me. Don't think I'm going to become a doctor. (laughs)

##### [00:14:50.410] - Brian Shelton

He's not inspired by his mother's educational path?

##### [00:14:54.110] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I would have thought so, because sometimes he would come here to Harper with me when he had the day off.

##### [00:14:59.300] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:14:59.620] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I would ask professors and he would come and he'd say, yeah, I'm coming here. And I ask him now at 16, oh, are you still going to Harper? Ehhh.

##### [00:15:07.330] - Brian Shelton

We'll get him.

##### [00:15:08.340] - Dr. Ruth Morales

He just goes ehhhhh.

##### [00:15:09.810] - Brian Shelton

We'll get him. We have all kinds of really cool programs here. So I ask everybody who comes on the show the same question. What advice do you have for current Harper students? You were a Harper student. You went here. You've gone on to be a successful person in your career. What advice do you have for them? What would you tell them to do?

##### [00:15:25.670] - Dr. Ruth Morales

I always tell them to enjoy life as a student. We're so caught up in, don't be so caught up in grades. I remember I had tunnel vision. I had tunnel vision for school. I just focused on school. I wanted to get A's all the time. Well, that's, I guess, part of the honors program thing mentality. But I just wanted to get A's. And I was so focused on getting scholarships that I missed out on a lot. I missed out on birthday parties. I missed out on graduation parties. Just friends and family would call me and ask me to go out, and I would be like, no, I have to study. When I knew I could have taken that time off, 5 hours off for one Saturday, that would have been okay. And I lost a lot of relationships because of that. And I feel like as students, especially when you're first starting at Harper, because it's usually the first step, you're so focused on your career, and you feel like it's so far away. Like, for me, I knew it was going to be seven years. And I hated when people ask me, oh, how long is the program, how long is it till you become a physical therapist? And I'd be like, seven years. What year are you in? My first year.

##### [00:16:32.830] - Brian Shelton

That's daunting, right?

##### [00:16:33.950] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes. Because you feel like you're never going to make it, that it's going to take forever, and so just enjoy life as a student. It's actually, now that I look back, those seven years were the best years of my life. You get to meet so many friends family. Not family, but friends and professors, and you make some really great connections. I'm still friends with people from Harper. I'm still friends from people from undergrad. I still talk to professors from Harper and undergrad. And so just enjoy your time as a student. Don't stress so much about grades. And I know it's stressful around midterms and finals, but it's actually a really fun time.

##### [00:17:16.140] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. That's all really great advice. I'm just kind of curious, though. Why do you think you had that tunnel vision?

##### [00:17:21.770] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Because I was a first gen. I was the first in my family to go to college. I didn't want to fail. My biggest fear was failing because I would fail not only myself, but my whole family who was rooting for me to become a doctor of physical therapy.

##### [00:17:37.390] - Brian Shelton

That's a lot of pressure. Yeah.

##### [00:17:39.430] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yeah.

##### [00:17:39.990] - Brian Shelton

And is everyone happy now?

##### [00:17:41.440] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Yes. I purposely did not change my last name when I got married so that when I graduated, it'd be Dr. Morales.

##### [00:17:49.710] - Brian Shelton

I know a lot of women who have done that, and the answer is, my husband did not earn my doctorate. And I love that.

##### [00:17:57.930] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Actually, when they called it out graduation day, they all screamed because they were happy to hear their last name as doctor.

##### [00:18:06.790] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. I love it. Absolutely love it. Thank you so much for coming today. You're an absolute delight. I wish you the absolute best in your career as you move things forward and for your family. And I really appreciate you coming to campus today to talk to us.

##### [00:18:21.440] - Dr. Ruth Morales

Okay. Thank you for having me. This was great.

##### [00:18:23.800] - Brian Shelton

Great to have you. Dr. Ruth Morales is a Harper College graduate, a physical therapist, and an inspiration. If you're enjoying Harper Talks, please subscribe. And while you're at it, rate and review us so that others might find us. Harper Talks is a co production of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. This episode is edited by Coby Pozo. Our online content producer is Matt Byrne. Our theme music was created by Aidan Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.