##### [00:00:00.170] - Brian Shelton

You're listening to FM 88.3, WHCM, Palatine, Illinois. A broadcast service of Harper College and its board of trustees. 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 Jenn Mepham. She's a 2014 graduate of the Harper College nursing program and in 2023 was named an outstanding recent alumni. Jenn joined me in the newly renovated studios of WHCM in the A Building on campus. Jenn, thank you so much for being here on this freezing cold day. How are you?

##### [00:00:35.710] - Jenn Mepham

Good. How are you? Thank you so much for having me.

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

Yeah, it's fun to get to chat to people. Yeah, we were talking before we got started here today. It's freezing outside, but it's like 76 degrees in the studio, so I hope that you're not sweating as badly as I am.

##### [00:00:50.110] - Jenn Mepham

No. (laughs)

##### [00:00:50.430] - Brian Shelton

All right, so you graduated from Harper College in 2014, which I found interesting because that's the same year that I started working here. So we may have crossed paths at some point, but I'm kind of curious how you found your way to Harper.

##### [00:01:08.550] - Jenn Mepham

So I.... Well, not conventionally. (laughs)

##### [00:01:10.350] - Brian Shelton

Not conventionally. Okay.

##### [00:01:12.090] - Jenn Mepham

So I went to Illinois State and got my bachelor's in biology and graduated from there. Not totally sure what I wanted to do. And so I came home and decided the answer was really close in my backyard, and I was going to go to Harper for nursing. Always heard great things about the nursing program here. And so graduated and re enrolled in school.

##### [00:01:34.100] - Brian Shelton

Wow. That's kind of brave. Is that okay to say that it's brave?

##### [00:01:39.860] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah, I guess.

##### [00:01:40.990] - Brian Shelton

Yeah.

##### [00:01:42.110] - Jenn Mepham

Might have some other words, but...

##### [00:01:44.930] - Brian Shelton

Crazy.

##### [00:01:45.720] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah. Okay.

##### [00:01:46.500] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, I know the feeling. Yeah. I think about it all the time. Like, would I go back to school? And the answer is no? Yeah. Definitely not. Definitely not. Yeah. So you already had earned a bachelor of science before you started here. What was that like, coming back and being a student with maybe. I know the nursing program has students of all ages in it, but maybe being an experienced person who already has a degree, who knows how to study, who theoretically knows how to be successful in college, what was that like working with students who maybe didn't have that? Did you get to be a little bit of a mentor to folks?

##### [00:02:20.690] - Jenn Mepham

A little bit. It was definitely different than being away at a university. So I was living at home. I almost felt more studious.

##### [00:02:33.340] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:02:33.780] - Jenn Mepham

Since I had been away at college, kind of did that, and was really taking it a lot more seriously, I think, than maybe previously, I was working and going to school, so kind of more of an adult, I felt like, than some of my colleagues who might have been right out of high school. And then on the flip side, I had a handful of friends that were also second career. And so really all different stages of life, people that I met and was in classes with.

##### [00:03:07.120] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. This is a weird question to ask. Since you already went through all this stuff and you graduated, now you're coming back to school. Did it make it tough to deal with some of the. Well, I teach here, some of the bs of going to school? Did you have a low tolerance for that, or did you find it all to be okay?

##### [00:03:25.650] - Jenn Mepham

It felt okay. Yeah. I think it's a very intense curriculum.

##### [00:03:32.190] - Brian Shelton

Right.

##### [00:03:33.030] - Jenn Mepham

And so there wasn't much room for that, I guess. You do this and you do this, and then you're done and you graduate. So I think that might have been a little bit of a difference, too, that it was a set curriculum where in my bachelor's, you kind of got to pick some extra classes or a little bit more free rein on what you chose, whereas nursing is very structured.

##### [00:04:02.770] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. When I went to college, I changed my major halfway through, and so all of my previous major became my electives, and then my new major became my major. Right. And so I never got to take anything fun.

##### [00:04:13.490] - Jenn Mepham

Okay.

##### [00:04:14.610] - Brian Shelton

I've always thought that is the one way that I would go back to schools if I could just go and take fun classes that I'm interested in taking. Yeah. So you didn't get to take anything fun while you did the nursing program. Well, I mean, the nursing program is fun because you love it.

##### [00:04:27.510] - Jenn Mepham

It was fun.

##### [00:04:27.830] - Brian Shelton

I wish this was tv. You could see your face. All right. Yeah. So then you got your bachelor's degree, then you came back and you essentially got an associate's degree, and then you got a master's degree. Right. Do you just love school? Do you love studying? Is that it?

##### [00:04:44.330] - Jenn Mepham

Not necessarily studying. I love learning.

##### [00:04:46.800] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:04:48.250] - Jenn Mepham

And it's funny, we were talking about going back to school. I probably will eventually go back for a terminal degree. I don't know if DNP or PhD, but maybe once my kids get a little bit older.

##### [00:04:59.210] - Brian Shelton

What's the DNP?

##### [00:05:00.930] - Jenn Mepham

A doctoral of practical nursing.

##### [00:05:05.230] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:05:06.290] - Jenn Mepham

So it's more clinical focused instead of a PhD. That's more like research or academic focused.

##### [00:05:13.740] - Brian Shelton

And what would be the advantage of getting that degree?

##### [00:05:16.550] - Jenn Mepham

I love school.

##### [00:05:17.500] - Brian Shelton

Because you love. All right. Okay.

##### [00:05:19.540] - Jenn Mepham

No, I think just more knowledge. So clinical. The DNP focuses on how do you bring knowledge to clinicians in the field and a PhD, my understanding, is it's focusing a little bit more on the research and the learning of the field.

##### [00:05:37.720] - Brian Shelton

Okay. Yeah. What was the master's program like for you after doing a bachelor's and then going back and doing it? Because it's weird to do a bachelor's than an associate's. Right. So what was the master's program like for you?

##### [00:05:49.810] - Jenn Mepham

So it was all online. So, again, a very different format. So I went to Indiana Wesleyn and I only was on campus twice, once for graduation. So it was very different than either of my previous schooling. It required a lot of determination because I was also pregnant and had an infant when I did that.

##### [00:06:13.400] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:06:13.800] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah. So my second year of grad school was. My daughter was an infant. So a lot of dedicated time and late nights.

##### [00:06:24.400] - Brian Shelton

Okay. Yeah. It's a lot to work, have a family, and go to school. And we have so many students here at the college who are doing that. Just the nature of community college. Right. And so I always admire our students, in particular, our older students who have a family and job and all that stuff that they have to take care of, because it's a lot.

##### [00:06:43.910] - Jenn Mepham

It is. And it's admirable when you're able to go and do that to advance your career or change your career to be happier and ultimately better provide for your family.

##### [00:06:57.000] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. So you started as a nurse, and you're still a nurse, but you now specialize in system simulation. What is system simulation? Give me the long version.

##### [00:07:07.840] - Jenn Mepham

The long version. So, healthcare simulation is, the way I explain it is I get to play with big, giant dolls. Okay. So they're life size simulators that are probably 5'8", 5'9" and 5'10". And they can do all sorts of different things. They can blink. We can talk through them. They have heart sounds, lung sounds, bowel sounds. We have a birthing mannequin that can give birth. Those are our adult size ones. Then we have ones that are the size of premature babies. So one fits in like the palm of my hand. And we work with teams in the hospital to go through situations they might encounter. Oftentimes, they're what we call high risk, low volume. So if it happens, it's big impact to our patients, but they don't happen all the time. So how can we prepare our teams in an environment that's a safe learning environment where they can make mistakes and not harm someone and then learn from those to go back into their field or into their area and work and care for people.

##### [00:08:23.670] - Brian Shelton

Wow. So something that doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it usually goes wrong or can go wrong.

##### [00:08:31.810] - Jenn Mepham

Its stressful.

##### [00:08:32.080] - Brian Shelton

And so you're training for that in basically a lab environment. Right. And that way, if it does go wrong, no one is injured or dies. Right.

##### [00:08:40.630] - Jenn Mepham

Right.

##### [00:08:40.810] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. That's crazy. That's very interesting. So how did you get involved in that? That seems like a specialty. That seems like something that not a lot of people are involved in as far as, like, running something like that.

##### [00:08:50.670] - Jenn Mepham

So, nursing school, we did a lot of simulation, and oftentimes that can be really stressful for nursing students. Sometimes it's pass fail or high stakes. You get graded on them. And so I experienced a lot of that while I was here at Harper, and I always thought it was an interesting modality of training, because when done correctly, you're really immersed in the environment. I had always had an interest to love hate relationship when I was a student, it was stressful. But then going into the clinical environment and seeing nurses who are working, being able to get that educational opportunity to practice things was really intriguing. So when I was in my master's program, I did one of my clinical components with the Sim educator and moved into the position right as I was graduating.

##### [00:09:53.730] - Brian Shelton

Okay, what's the most challenging part about doing that, working with the Sim? Is it the tech itself? Is it, like, programming or setup or what's the.

##### [00:10:01.650] - Jenn Mepham

So we have our counterparts. We have simulation operations specialists who focus all on the technology they program the mannequins do the maintenance, the setup. I think the most challenging is probably facilitating the conversations after they do the simulation. So the simulation is fairly short in comparison to the whole session that we're with them and after is really breaking down why they did what they did, and what's their critical thinking revolving around their actions and thoughts and behaviors? And how do we identify gaps and then close them?

##### [00:10:38.180] - Brian Shelton

Okay.

##### [00:10:38.560] - Jenn Mepham

So it takes some skill to facilitate that and ensure psychological safety to our learners.

##### [00:10:45.110] - Brian Shelton

Wow. Yeah. So it's a lot of interpersonal skill managing people.

##### [00:10:49.790] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah.

##### [00:10:50.500] - Brian Shelton

That's very interesting. I think that we're in an age where it seems like everybody has kind of, like, forgotten about COVID It almost seems like, let's move on. Let's just move on from there. But did you use simulation technology during the peak Covid times?

##### [00:11:07.340] - Jenn Mepham

We did.

##### [00:11:07.590] - Brian Shelton

How did that. What did you do with.

##### [00:11:11.270] - Jenn Mepham

So kind of interesting... I had a stretch assignment, so I was prior to Covid, I was at Good Shepherd doing simulation. Then Covid happened, and in the beginning of COVID I was able to use simulation to train on how to prone patients. So laying them on their belly so when they're intubated and they're not able to move themselves. How do we safely move the patients maintaining their airway and all of those elements? So I started going to a lot of the sites in both Illinois and Wisconsin to help with that, and then Covid, the vaccine came out and I was redeployed to help manage the vaccine clinic at Good Shepherd. So I kind of used simulation, but then also used other nursing skills that I have to help the pandemic.

##### [00:12:07.950] - Brian Shelton

Okay, I'm just kind of curious about that. What was that like for you as a nurse to work during that time period? Was it scary for you, or did you feel like you were protected and that you knew what you were doing?

##### [00:12:18.350] - Jenn Mepham

A little bit of both, yeah. My daughter was three at the time, so having a little one at home was scary, like being at the hospital. Am I going to bring something home to her? Especially when we weren't really sure right when we were unsure. But I also think it just was kind of the norm. I go to work and I do my job and I help people, especially in the vaccine clinic. I think that was really something that I'm very proud of to be able to help get vaccinations to so many people and do something that was never done before. Setting up mass vaccine clinics was new.

##### [00:13:00.680] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, that was such an interesting time. And you think about it, it's amazing how we went from, here's a disease that we don't know anything about to now we know how the disease works. Now there's a vaccine, now we're going to set up a mass vaccine clinic and get as many people vaccinated as possible. To today where people are like, yeah, I don't need that. It's a very interesting cycle.

##### [00:13:24.530] - Jenn Mepham

When it first came out, we were counting vials. We were counting doses in vials, we were counting syringes. It was a lot of management of the vaccine.

##### [00:13:38.870] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, I remember being at a pharmacy and the pharmacist is like, I have one dose left and I'm going to have to throw it away. Does someone want a vaccine? And I was like, yeah, sure, I'll take it. It's very interesting how that's all changed and now it's plentiful. We can all get it and then people aren't getting it for whatever reason, that sort of thing. So I find that very interesting as well. But it must have been a very interesting time to work. And how cool was it that you got to set that up and be a part of that? What a very unique career experience. I guess is what I'm trying to say.

##### [00:14:05.200] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah. Well, another part of simulation that we do is translational simulation, so we can use it not specific for training, but to identify workflows or processes. So we actually did simulation with the clinic to ensure how we were setting it up was going to function as intended. So we essentially walked through a day in the clinic and we had people pretend they were coming and they moved through the different areas. So it was cool to see my real job and my redeployed job come together in that way.

##### [00:14:39.230] - Brian Shelton

So are you still working directly with patients as well?

##### [00:14:42.170] - Jenn Mepham

No, I don't.

##### [00:14:43.840] - Brian Shelton

Do you miss that?

##### [00:14:46.170] - Jenn Mepham

A little bit. I miss it in a.... Nursing is hard work.

##### [00:14:51.860] - Brian Shelton

Yeah.

##### [00:14:53.390] - Jenn Mepham

And I think, yeah, it's nice to be with people and be with patients and be there, but I really like knowing that I'm helping make nurses or other disciplines in the hospital feel comfortable to do their job successfully.

##### [00:15:09.050] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Nursing is hard work, and when you get a good nurse, you know, it. It's very obvious. And not that I'm saying there are bad nurses, but you can tell when they're really good at what they do. I told you before we started, I had surgery a while back, and one of the nurses that I had, she only works with one patient. That's it. Through the surgical process, they work with one patient the entire time. And she had come from working with multiple children, and she was so thankful that she was just working with one patient now and that she was able to concentrate on that. And I thought that was really interesting. There are so many facets of nursing, I guess, is what I'm trying to say, that I find it interesting how the career evolves and how you can go into it thinking you're doing one thing and how it evolves into another. Like you, for instance. You went in as a nurse, a bedside nurse, and now you are running these system simulation, teaching other nurses how to nurse.

##### [00:15:55.930] - Jenn Mepham

Right. Yeah.

##### [00:15:56.450] - Brian Shelton

That's really fascinating.

##### [00:15:58.330] - Jenn Mepham

It is.

##### [00:15:59.410] - Brian Shelton

Do you know that you're cool?

##### [00:16:01.090] - Jenn Mepham

Do you know, some people have told me that.

##### [00:16:04.940] - Brian Shelton

Some people have told you that. So you're so cool that you're now a Harper college, outstanding recent alumni.

##### [00:16:12.060] - Jenn Mepham

Yeah.

##### [00:16:12.460] - Brian Shelton

How's that make you feel?

##### [00:16:14.640] - Jenn Mepham

Pretty proud. Yeah, it was really an honor and, yeah, it's still really exciting.

##### [00:16:21.840] - Brian Shelton

It is exciting, isn't it? Yeah.

##### [00:16:23.450] - Jenn Mepham

Who nominated you for my. She's a friend and a coworker, Becca Westrate. And then I also had a nomination from another colleague, Kari Kinjini, who her and I have the same role. She's my counterpart at good.

##### [00:16:39.890] - Brian Shelton

That's great that your friends and colleagues would take the time to recognize you in that way. That's fantastic. So I ask all the guests who are on the show the same question here towards the end, because I'm always curious what they have to say. What advice do you have for current Harper students? Like, if you sat down in a room with Harper students, what would you tell them today based on your experience here and your experience in life?

##### [00:17:03.430] - Jenn Mepham

Don't give up.

##### [00:17:04.580] - Brian Shelton

Don't give up.

##### [00:17:06.570] - Jenn Mepham

It's challenging. And when you're in the midst of anything, really, whether it's school, a class, a test, it will eventually end and you will be better on the other side of it. So just keep pushing through and you'll be grateful you did.

##### [00:17:23.300] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. Was there a point where you felt like you wanted to give up?

##### [00:17:26.610] - Speaker 2

Oh, yes.

##### [00:17:27.420] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. How did you get through that? You're just telling yourself.

##### [00:17:30.420] - Jenn Mepham

Or was there probably lots of tears, lots of talking with other students that we were all kind of in that boat together? And I don't know if it's like this with other careers, but if you're in nursing school with a group of people, you just form this bond and you get through it together and you help everyone else get through it. And similar in nursing, I feel like you just see a lot of different things and people who are also in that field understand that they've gone through that. And so you have a special relationship with those people.

##### [00:18:11.130] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. It's a shared life experience. Right. And then it kind of keeps you together as well. Right.

##### [00:18:16.820] - Jenn Mepham

It does.

##### [00:18:17.080] - Brian Shelton

Keeps you linked together. That's really interesting. Thanks so much for being here. I really appreciate it. You're absolutely fantastic. I look forward to seeing what you do in the future because you're going to be a Distinguished Alumni next. Not just a recent alumni. Yeah.

##### [00:18:29.990] - Jenn Mepham

Well, thank you so much.

##### [00:18:31.060] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Jen Mepham is a Harper College Outstanding Recent Alumni. 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 Kobe Pozo. Our online content producer is the lovely and talented Matt Byrne. Our theme music was created by Aiden Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.