- Now at USGS, I get to use my USGS email account. And for example, when I was in Hawaii at a conference, I reached out to one of our volcanologists to see if she would want to meet up, and I got to meet her at the Hawaii Volcanoes Observatory and she met us up on Kilauea. And then using those interactions and meeting these really awesome scientists, I get to highlight them and their careers in these field journals and just expose them as this is real, you can do this. These really fun and exciting and important careers.

- [Voiceover] This is the "ORISE Featurecast." Join host Michael Holtz for conversations with ORISE experts on STEM workforce development, scientific and technical reviews, and the evaluation of radiation exposure and environmental contamination. You'll also hear from ORISE research program participants and their mentors as they talk about their experiences and how they are helping shape the future of science. Welcome to the "ORISE Featurecast."

- Welcome to the "ORISE Featurecast." As ever, it's me, your host, Micheal Holtz from the Communications and Marketing Department at the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education. And we are once again taking our monthly look at one of my favorite programs, the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship. And I have with me one of this year's AEF fellows, Amy Szczepanski. Amy, welcome. Thanks, once again, for being my co-host this time around, I really appreciate it.

- Yeah, thank you so much, Michael. It's so good to be here. I'm glad we can have some more time together.

- Absolutely. And we've got a couple more fellows to talk to and learn about today. So if you would tell me who we're talking with today.

- Sure. We have two amazing fellows, both from USGS, we have Samantha Willsey from Indiana and Sarah Slack from New York.

- Excellent. Well, Samantha and Sarah, welcome to the "ORISE Featurecast." I'm so glad you're here.

- Thank you so much for having us.

- Thank you

- So what I'd like to start with is for both of you to talk about how you got here. What's your background education teaching-wise? And then how did you get to become an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow?

- Sure. So, hi, I'm Samantha. I am a science teacher from Indiana. I have been teaching science for the past 15 years, both middle school and high school. But outside of teaching in Indiana, I have taught in Kenya. I've taught for a year in Uganda, one year in South Korea, and some time in Costa Rica as well. And so I think that that's exactly why I'm here. You know, I love a challenge. I love somewhere that's going to provide me with an experience that can pivot my career and that I can learn from. And I'm from rural Indiana, so any opportunity that I can share unique perspectives and new stories with rural students in the corn fields, I kind of take it. And so that's what encouraged me and pushed me to apply for this fellowship. Kinda crazy to think about living in Washington DC, but it's been so great.

- Awesome. Sarah, how about for you?

- Yeah, Samantha and I have some things in common. We've both been teaching for about the same amount of time and the same grades. I've been 14 years a teacher of science in STEM in middle school. And then after that, our paths have been very different. I have been teaching in Brooklyn, New York, for my whole teaching career, and the students I work with were at Title I schools, so there are kids coming from some challenging parts of Brooklyn. I really wanted to take on a leadership role and that's one of the things that caused me to apply for the Einstein Fellowship. I don't think I wanna be an administrator. I don't think that I wanna be an assistant principal or principal, but I do wanna have the skills and knowledge to lead other teachers to try new things in their classrooms, to explore outside the walls of their classroom, to learn more about science, and to help their students see more of the world around them and see themselves as scientists in that world.

- Awesome. Amy, do you have a question?

- Yeah. So I think it's really interesting that Samantha, you're coming from, as you were saying, like rural Indiana, and Sarah, you're coming from very urban Brooklyn, New York, but you both ended up at the same agency. Can you talk a little bit, I mean, I don't know what you can share and what you can't share, but can you talk a little bit about like what a day in the life at USGS kind of looks like?

- So yeah, we work really well together, which has been just such an amazing benefit of the Einstein Fellowship is having somebody in the office with me who I can share ideas with, get feedback from. And because we have those different perspectives, we can really speak to how different activities or different challenges affect the students in our classrooms. So when we're in the office together, we are constantly sharing ideas what we are hoping to create, asking for feedback on the resources that we've already created and really just participating in meetings and bouncing ideas off each other. It's been a great partnership, and to be working with someone who shares the same sort of passion for teaching, love for our students, and interest in getting our students to really be scientists and engineers instead of just learning science has been so meaningful and beneficial to me as a professional.

- Yeah, I think we both have the same goal and scope in terms of environmental justice. I think Sarah is very much focused on her students, the impact that they feel at at a local level and giving them opportunities for advocacy in their local environment. And maybe I am more broad scope, you know, I like to bring the stories in of global impact. I want my students to understand how interconnected everything is so that then they can understand their actions have broad impact. So it's interesting to see the, you know, while we do have different perspectives and different backgrounds, we do have very similar goals.

- Really cool. And just for clarification, the USGS is the US Geological Survey, right? So...

- Correct.

- Can we talk--

- But actually they prefer USGS because so much of the research that USGS scientists are doing is not geological research. There is so much biology and ecology work, environmental science that goes into USGS science that they have started sort of not using that term, geological, anymore.

- Okay.

- When people are referring to the organization.

- Totally fair. I get that.

- Yeah, I didn't know that. That's very interesting. That's super cool.

- And they haven't eliminated it from the vocabulary entirely.

- Sure, yeah.

- It's not just about rocks, they do so much science to study our country.

- That's amazing. Can you talk about specific projects that you're working on? At least to the extent that you can, I know sometimes the agencies don't like us to go too deep into that, but.

- No, we're happy to share. It does fall under this environmental justice umbrella for both of us. For me, coming from rural Indiana, I saw a huge gap in science education, especially elementary education. And so one thing that I did, and it was presented to us as an opportunity to create field journals. And so I've created two different field journals, written them, developed them. The first one is for kindergarten to second grade and another one third grade to fifth grade. And I've been working with a lovely art illustrator, she's a college student. But essentially, these field journals are meant to get kids back out in nature. One of my big missions as a science teacher is for students to disconnect from the digital world, they're so consumed in the digital world day to day, and reconnect to nature. And I think that's the first step needed for my big goal is that if students can understand that they are a part of nature and they belong in these connections, then they can start to understand any of their actions that they take directly have an impact on these interconnections.

- Hmm, okay.

- And I brought in some work that I had started before I began this fellowship on investigating urban heat islands with student scientists. So that's looking at the variation in temperature in urban environments to find places where people will be most at risk in the face of increasingly frequent extreme heat events. But I've started to expand that beyond just urban heat to look at environmental justice issues related to urban environments. And my goal is, by the end of the fellowship, to have created a environmental justice STEAM curriculum that'll likely be targeted at high school students. Where students are first understanding what is environmental justice, understanding the environmental justice issues that have affected their community over time. Picking one to investigate, building the sensors to use to collect the data to investigate it, conducting the investigation, and then figuring out an effective way to share their results with others. And that's where that A piece of STEAM, the art aspect of STEAM will really come into play as well. Students not only need to know the science, but also how to communicate their ideas with others. And using art as an effective means to do that is one way that will be encouraging all types of learners to participate in these environmental justice activities.

- That's really cool. I mean, both of the issues that you're working on are really critical and important. I know, you know, heat islands, I know last summer got a great deal of discussion, right? And communities are trying to find ways to basically cool down their communities, you know, with different kinds of paints and create, you know, planting more trees and and those sorts of things. And then, Samantha, to your point, like when I was a kid, like, we were expected to be outside all day. And you know, I know the world has changed a lot and that just, you know, isn't happening as much anymore. So it's hard to know your place and that you truly belong in nature if you don't spend a lot of time in nature to see where you fit. Right?

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- I think, if you don't mind, I think another really fun bit about being at the USGS is that when I was a little girl, growing up, I was just like you, Michael, always outside, right?

- Right.

- Right. And it was this fantasy that I'm gonna be an astronaut or a geologist or study volcanoes. And then somewhere along the line I was told that's silly. But now at USGS, I get to use my USGS email account. And for example, when I was in Hawaii at a conference, I reached out to one of our volcanologists to see if she would want to meet up, and I got to meet her at the Hawaii Volcanoes Observatory and she met us up on Kilauea. And then using those interactions and meeting these really awesome scientists, I get to highlight them and their careers in these field journals and just expose them as this is real, you can do this, these really fun and exciting and important careers.

- I love that.

- Yeah,

- I went back to my classroom a few weeks ago and one of my students said to me, "Miss, I thought you were in space." So there's all different ways that kids are thinking about us as scientists now, but I think it is a good point that part of what we're doing here is showing our students that science isn't just being in a lab with a test tube and goggles on, that it is being outside and exploring your environment, whether that is an urban or a rural or suburban environment, that there's many different ways to be a scientist, and taking part in this fellowship is just one example of those ways. And we hope to bring that back to our students as well.

- Very cool.

- I really can't wait to see you soon, Sarah, and just be like, "Oh miss, I thought you were in space."

- Six months I was up there but...

- It's amazing. So it sounds like you both have really found this, like, pretty, like, specific niche at USGS, and it, like, seems very fitting for both of you. As our interview season is coming up, we have a bunch of people that are gonna be coming to DC soon to interview for next year, which is really wild for us current fellows to be thinking about, that our time is about half up. But thinking about that, when you were going through the interview process, were you thinking like, "Oh, USGS sounds like a perfect fit for me?" Or were you more kind of open to whatever. We talked about this a little bit last episode where when I came in and I saw that I was interviewing at the DOE, I was like, "Absolutely not. I have no idea what that means." And now I feel like it's a perfect fit. I'd love to hear more about your experiences in that realm of the process.

- Yeah, I think one thing about the USGS is that there was not a specific project that they wanted to place us into. And so with that one, Library of Congress was another one I looked at, where they were like, "You could do anything." I remember the Library of Congress, I talked about how I'm really interested in dog genetics and that relationship between dogs and wolves and how dogs have the greatest variation in their phenotypic characteristics of any species on earth. If you think about a chihuahua versus a Great Dane, there is very little genetic variation that leads to that. Anyway, like I can talk about it, I get so excited about it. And they're like, "You can make that a lesson plan, finding resources that connect to those things that you're interested in." So I think some organizations have more specific projects than others that they want people to get involved in. But no matter what, this opportunity provides you the chance to examine the breadth of resources, the breadth of knowledge that exists within the organizations that are interested in you and that you are interested in, and just find ways to make meaning there. So, USGS, so much different science, any science that you're interested in, you can find a connection at USGS, but those opportunities exist in all the organizations to find the things that you wanna learn more about, that you think would have meaning to your students, that you would wanna bring back to your classrooms and your communities with you.

- Yeah, similar. For me, before the interviews, you know, we were selected by agencies. And before I even applied, I was crossing my fingers and saying a little prayer that USGS would pick me to interview, but not to discredit the other agencies. I was selected for a couple, and I thought, "Wow, NSF, that'd be so cool to have, you know, this voice from rural education to have an impact at NSF. Like, that would be incredible." And I was researching NSF. I was, you know, taking all of my notes prior to the interview and just kind of put the pressure on me that maybe that's where I could have the most impact and feel important. But then there was always the little tingle in the back of my heart, I suppose, that was like, "No, USGS is the right space for you." Just knowing my background and what I'm passionate about, that was... And selfishly, I thought that would be the most fun placement. And I think it is. I definitely think it is. So I'm very happy with where I landed and I do think it is. They do a wonderful job of working magic and making sure that everybody is in the right place.

- Yeah, absolutely. That's definitely been like a through line, I think, pretty much with everyone I've talked to throughout the fellowship.

- Yeah, I think that's definitely been something we've observed, you know, just in these conversations as well is fellows find the place they're supposed to be. You know? And can make a difference from wherever that is. Which is great. For both of you, knowing that you're working, you know, Samantha, you know, on these field journals for, you know, really young students, and Sarah on this curriculum for high school students. I mean, this is gonna have an impact on students across the country. How does it feel? Or do you even think about, like, the impact that you're gonna have, like, on education as a whole in helping young people understand, you know, the issues that you're talking about?

- Yes, I feel it. I was crying last night thinking about it. And those moments don't hit often, but when they do, it's just, like, you don't have a lot of time during your fellowship. It runs so fast, and we're hitting the mid-year point where, whoa, it is just like fireworks going off right now. Constant meetings, constant everything, busy, busy, busy. And then all of a sudden you get your head above water and you take a breath and you realize and reflect, and it just kind of hits you like a train all of a sudden, like, "What am I doing? Me, what am I doing?" And you just get these moments of, I don't wanna say pride, but it is, you know? It's great. It's great.

- Awesome. Cool. Sarah.

- Yeah, I'll second that. I'll also say when I'm doing investigations with my students, we start with the idea of what is global climate change and all the factors that are contributing to that. And the problem can seem so huge and overwhelming. And I tell this story that used to be on this little Hallmark poster of the, I call it the starfish tosser, where a kid is walking down the beach and throwing starfish back into the water that have been stranded by the low tide. And this guy walks up to him and he is like, "What are you doing, kid? There's so many starfish on the beach, you're never gonna make a difference." And the kid throws another one back into the water and says, "Well, I made a difference to that one." And that's how I kind of see my role as an educator in my classroom, that if there's one kid that leaves a STEM class with a new idea about themselves or about their environment, that's why I do it and that's why I love it. And it is so weird to be in a place where we can reach a lot more starfish with the work that we're doing. And I sometimes forget that 'cause it still feels like I'm doing some of the same kinds of activities that I did in the classroom, planning, developing resources, testing them out with groups of students to see how they go and then revising and reflecting on the work that I've done. But it's true. This opportunity provides us the chance to reach a much broader audience, to get resources that we believe in into the hands of more teachers and into the brains of more students. So it's, when we stop to think about it, it's pretty amazing what we have the opportunity to do.

- Awesome.

- Definitely. Yeah, it's very cool. So as you're working through, like, creating these things, and even, Samantha, as you were saying, just like in those times when you get your head above water, what are the things that you think about that you really wanna hold onto? What are the things that you wanna take back, whether you go back to the classroom next year or whether your life takes you in a different direction, what are those things that you wanna carry forward as you go?

- I think it is, it is. Because it's so often as a teacher and we're still in this transition mode, kind of. So often as a teacher, you don't have time to be proud 'cause you pour all of it into your students and you're so proud of them constantly. So I think that that's something I want to hold onto. Take a second for me every once in a while and really think about what I am doing and be excited about it. I put so much of my, you know, so much of my joy has come from my student's success and not my own. And now, this year, I'm in a place, it's just me, man. And if I'm not excited about me, then get out. So it's just a different perspective. It sounds a little selfish, I suppose, now that I'm saying it out loud. But it's unique. It's a unique perspective and it's something that I hope I can hold on to.

- Awesome. Sarah, how about for you?

- Yeah, I think Samantha and I have another meeting later today and we were chatting about it earlier and we're the experts in the room when it comes to what it's like to be in a classroom, what it's like to share knowledge with other people, and just to be recognized as those experts, to think about ourselves as experts. Like, we're here because we know how to teach effectively and that's not a skillset that everybody has. We often don't feel respected in our, I don't wanna say communities 'cause, but, you know, teaching is a noble profession, but not one that people always turn to as a voice of knowledge and a voice of expertise. But that's what we are here. We're the experts in teaching and in helping turn students into STEM thinkers. And so, being treated as the experts has been just a valuable part of this and something that I will take back with me as a way to keep me focused and remind me that what I'm doing is valuable.

- Awesome. I love that. I know that networking and professional development are also a huge part of your fellowship experience. How has that been? And has there been a favorite part, favorite session? I know you were both talking before we officially started the conversation about your respective tours of the Capitol dome and how amazing that was. So talk about what the best part of that has been for you.

- So there's two pieces to that, and one is the crew of Einstein Fellows. You're part of a cohort of just an amazing group of people, some who have had similar experiences to you, some who have had a very different track to get to the Einstein Fellowship, but they all can support you. They can all provide you with feedback, they can all go out to dinner with you or climb the steps to see the Capitol dome from the inside and the outside, a very high place. So there's so many great things that just come from being part of this community and that's been incredibly valuable for me. But also, the connections you get to make outside of the cohort have been... I've been amazed by the number of people that I've gotten a chance to talk to, that have emailed me after a conference to say, "It was great meeting you and I'd love to follow up." Who have connected with me, and I'm working now with people back in Brooklyn, and I'm working with folks in Detroit and Baltimore and Richmond and all over the place just trying to build out my ideas, get support and ideas from others, and make connections. And it's really, it's opened doors, it's helped me find people who can support the things that I wanna do and then help me do them better.

- Awesome.

- Yeah, for me, I'm living pretty much downtown DC, so, you know, I used to have two stoplights, a pizza shop and that was it where I'm from, and now, I was overwhelmed when I first got here and stressed with all of the events and all of the things that I could go and do and all of the people that I could meet and go talk to. But I've learned to focus in what am I most interested in. Something that I'm very interested in is critical minerals, transition to green technologies in the face of climate change, and decarbonization. And so I've been seeking those opportunities out at different think tanks around DC, apparently, I love think tanks. The Wilson Center has been great. Brookings Institute has been great. So I go and I get to meet with experts, some from Zimbabwe, the DRC, and South Africa, and here in DC that are working on policies for how we're going to make this transition to green technologies. But just having chats with people that I would never be in the room with. Last week, I was at the National Academy of Sciences for Advancing Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in STEM. And I'm sitting in the room for two days with presidents of universities and all kinds of really important people, and me. And I said, "This is cool that I'm here, but also, I wouldn't have an opportunity like this in Indiana. The conversations would be quite different." So again, it's gaining these new perspectives and meeting people that I would never have the opportunity to chat with and following up and getting coffees and doing all of the DC things that you're supposed to do afterwards. It's just a completely different culture and I'm loving all of it.

- Awesome.

- I think that's a really interesting piece that you both talked about that I don't think maybe we talk about enough as part of this fellowship. A lot of us talk about the work that we're doing at agencies, which, of course, is really important and very interesting, and we've talked about a bunch of times now how the thought into the agencies that fellows are placed at. There's a lot of thought that goes into that. But there's also this other piece of almost personal development of living in DC just full stop period. And how that's so different for essentially, I won't say everyone, but almost everyone regardless of where you're coming from. Like Sarah and I coming from Brooklyn, DC is very different than that even if they're both urban areas. And then, you know, Samantha coming from a more rural place, super different. And just having that experience of not only working in the agency but being able to go to a think tank talk or being able to go to a coffee talk or some kind of cultural event and really just expanding out your worldview that way, I think is really something that we should talk about more. Which leads me to my next question. I'm hoping that people are listening to this and saying, this sounds amazing, I want to apply. Like, this sounds great. What advice would you have for those people?

- Sure. For the application process specifically?

- I mean, whatever you think would be most impactful.

- As far as the application process goes, keep in mind that, you know, a lot of effort goes into placing people in the correct agencies and that might be the goals of the agency. It might be a very specific project that we have no idea what that project is going to be. So you can't predict anything. So try not to answer the questions in a way that you think somebody wants an answer to look like. But just be yourself, be reflective of your practice. How do you collaborate with other teachers? What is your mission? Like, really dig deep. We get so distracted by this question all the time. Like, what is your why? No, really, like, think about it. Why are you a teacher? What are your goals? What is your mission? What are you hoping to accomplish in your career? And just really let yourself shine in your essays because they will get used as far as the interview process. They will get used in your interview again, like, during your interview they're going to ask you about things that you wrote about in those essays. So make sure that you are genuine in writing those essays.

- Yeah, I feel like the essays were the hardest part, and once you do that, the interview really just gives you a chance to engage with the agencies now. The people who you will be replacing. And the people you're gonna be working for and with. It can be a chance to really show your creativity, the things about science or STEM that you love. But there's no one right person to be an Einstein Fellow. We have people with PhDs and people with master's and people with just bachelor's. We have people who've been teaching for less than 10 years and more than 30 years. So there are all kinds of people who are drawn to apply to the Einstein Fellowship and then who can succeed and have an amazing experience in the Einstein Fellowship. So what Samantha said is so true, just be you, be your why, show them why you want to do this and what value you as an individual, you as an educator can bring to this experience.

- I like that. And, Sarah and Samantha, did you ever, and Amy you too, like did you ever doubt? I know the process is pretty rigorous, right? In terms of getting through interviews and the application, like, did you ever doubt that you would get where you are?

- Oh my gosh. If anyone says no, I never doubted, I will kill them. Yeah, it's a lot. Like, the lag between when you submit your essays and when you hear that you've been invited for an interview is months. I think it's like four months. And so that's four months of like, "Ah, well, guess I'm never going to hear from them." 'Cause they don't tell you what date they're gonna contact you. And then once you get the interviews and you meet this group of incredible people, the 30 or 40 people who are invited to interview, again, you're like, "Wow, everybody here is amazing." And it then just comes down to making that genuine connection, really showing what you bring to the table and what brings you to the table. Why do you wanna do this? Why do you believe this is a good choice for you, a great opportunity and something you will benefit from, your community will benefit from and the agency that you're connecting with will benefit from? But yeah, I doubted it up to the minute, yeah.

- All the way.

- Yeah.

- Honestly, when I first learned of the fellowship, it was a colleague had sent me the information about it and the application and said, "I think you should apply, you'd be great at this." I was like, "There's absolutely no way they would ever select me for this fellowship, but I'll apply anyway because it would be really cool to have a paid-for trip to DC for the interview weekend."

- Right. At the very least.

- Well that was kind of my goal.

- Right.

- Was to make it to the interviews and then, long story, but I finally got to the interview weekend, and you're in this room with incredible educators, and again, there's no way they're ever gonna pick me for this. Everybody is so fantastic, and impressive, intimidating a little bit. You see the panel of current fellows, equally amazing and a little intimidating. So yeah, there's doubt. And then you get here, and you're like, "What am I doing here? This is crazy." But it's finally starting to sink in, and the confidence grows the longer you are here.

- So halfway through your fellowship you're like, okay.

- Business cards that say Einstein Fellow on them. I love having those business cards to drop, so.

- Yeah, absolutely. I mean, similar to... I mean, both what Samantha and Sarah were saying, my goal was, again, to make it to the interview. And on the previous podcast I talked about how when I was accepted into the fellowship, I was pretty convinced there was a mistake, and I had to, like, send emails and call back and just be sure. But when I came for interview weekend, they were very kind and took us on a tour of some neighborhoods, and I was on a tour with Samantha and one of our other wonderful fellows, Kenji. And I remember walking through these neighborhoods and thinking like, "It's kind of pointless that I'm looking at these apartments because if I'm on a tour with these two people, like, there's no way that they're gonna pick me. These people are so talented." And then I was sitting at a table with one of our DOD fellows, Melissa Thompson, and just talking to her about her experience and then every person I talked to I felt like I dropped another, like, rung on the ladder, Everyone is so impressive and everyone is so great. Like, there's no way that I'm ever going to be chosen. But as those words are coming out of my mouth, I'm also thinking, like, everyone should apply because there's not like a one size fits all. There's all these different spaces that people fit into. But kind of what you were going back to earlier at the beginning of the podcast too, Samantha, that I don't think teachers give themselves enough credit. There are very few times where we can kind of sit with our pride and kind of be proud of ourselves versus being, or maybe instead of saying versus, in addition to being proud of our students. So not only is coming to interview weekend super humbling, but it's also like a great reminder of, "Wow, I'm, like, actually qualified for this." So I don't know, it's pretty cool.

- I just also wanna add. I know that there are some people who are here with us this year who went to interviews more than once or who applied multiple times, and it's just finding that right fit too. So people that don't make it to the interview stage this year, that doesn't mean that you are not destined to be an Einstein Fellow. It just means you weren't a good fit this year. And the perseverance to continue to apply, to continue to put yourself out there, I think, is also really admirable and something that deserves recognition, and eventually, for some of us, got them that recognition that they deserved because, you know, don't give up after one try. It is worth it to keep trying and keep putting yourself out there for this.

- I love that.

- Definitely.

- That's so important.

- One of the wonderful things that our program manager, Jill Latchana, said on our first day of orientation was, "If you're here, that means you're qualified. If you are not accepted, it's not because you're not qualified, there's just not a perfect fit for you this year." And that's something I've kind of carried throughout the whole fellowship, of this idea of like maybe not being a perfect fit and kind of taking if I wasn't accepted as kind of a blessing because I wouldn't wanna spend the rest of the year in this place that's not a good fit for me. And in coming into that interview space, like, again, Samantha and Sarah were saying, you don't know what this mold that they're looking to fill is. You don't know what the agencies are looking for. So again, if you make it to the interview, you're highly, highly qualified. If you're applying for this program, you're qualified.

- Yeah,

- Right. Absolutely. Well, last question for everyone, and it's my favorite question is, what brings you joy? And Samantha, I'll start with you.

- Well. Wow. Besides kittens.

- Kittens are totally valid, man.

- Period. Done.

- I love when I can provide people with new experiences and maybe that is in my classroom. You know, it brings me so much joy when students run into my classroom excited. Like, "This is the best class of the day." And then students leave your classroom telling you, "Thank you, Mrs. Wilsey." It warms my heart. Or it could be an experience that... I take students on international trips, and I remember this kid was afraid of heights and we were in the rainforest of Costa Rica, and he did not want to zip line, almost tears in his eyes. And I said, "Strap it." Like I buckled him in. And then I said, "Say whee." And I pushed him into the rainforest. And you could not wipe the smile off of that kid's face at the end of the day. So I just... It really brings me joy. I guess that's the teacher in me when other people experience joy for the...

- Yeah, I like that. Sarah, how about for you?

- A lot of things do. I have two fantastic dogs, and getting to spend time with them. Here, I used to bring them into my classroom with me a couple days a week as our school's therapy dogs and just watching kids interact with the dogs, and like Samantha said, I got joy from watching them be joyful around the dogs, but now I get to do that more 'cause I'm here with them during the day. Being outside and appreciating our environment no matter where I am, it's harder to do in Brooklyn. It is easier to do here, but that is something that I really value, and exploring new places, the chances to travel either as a working professional or in my free time is so valuable to me. And in that, seeing new places and thinking about different communities and different parts of our country and of our globe is really valuable too. And it brings me a lot of joy.

- Awesome. And Amy, how about for you?

- So, last time I gave a very, I don't know, nice response. So I feel like I'm gonna counteract that one this time. This week, what is bringing me joy is, this is not sponsored, but arepas from a Arepas Zone on Massachusetts, that is again, not sponsored, not getting any money for this, but that is what is bringing me joy this week.

- I second that. That place is dangerously good.

- So if you're in DC...

- Tell 'em Amy sent you.

- Look for the arepas.

- Exactly, exactly.

- I love it. Well, Amy, Sarah and Samantha, thank you so much for spending this time with me today. I really appreciate it. It's been a pleasure to get to know you and to learn more about your experience as Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellows. And I hope that educators who might be listening will take your advice and apply and be who they are to get to experience the fellowship as well. Thank you so much.

- Yeah.

- Thank you so much too.

- Thank you for having us.

- Thank you for listening to the "ORISE Featurecast." To learn more about the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, visit ORISE.ORAU.GOV, or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, @ORISECONNECT. If you like the "ORISE Featurecast," give us a review wherever you listen to podcasts.

- [Voiceover] The Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education is managed by ORAU for the US Department of Energy.