00:00.23

michaelholtz

Welcome to the ORISE Featurecast. As ever it's me, your host, Michael 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 ae fellows Amy Szczepanski. Amy welcome! Thanks once again for being my co-host this time around I really appreciate. It.

00:33.15

Amy Szczepanski

Yeah, thank you so much Michael it's so good to be here. Glad we can have some more time together.

00:39.47

michaelholtz

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.

00:47.11

Amy Szczepanski

Oh sure we have 2 amazing fellows both from USGS we have Samantha Willsey from Indiana and Sarah slack from New York

01:00.39

michaelholtz

Excellent, well Samantha and Sarah welcome to the ORISE Featurecast. I'm so glad you're here. So what I'd like to start with is for both of you to talk about how you got here?

01:06.50

Samantha Willsey

Thank you so much for having us.

01:06.34

Sarah Slack

Thank you.

01:19.40

michaelholtz

What's your background education teaching wise and then how did you get to become an Albert Einstein distinguished educator fellow.

01:28.72

Samantha Willsey

Sure so hi I'm Samantha I am a science teacher from Indiana I have been teaching science for the past fifteen years both middle school and high school but outside of teaching Indiana in Indiana. I have taught in Kenya I've taught for a year in Uganda 1 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.

01:59.86

michaelholtz

Think.

02:03.36

Samantha Willsey

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 cornfields. Um I kind of take it and so that's.

02:18.44

michaelholtz

Um.

02:21.30

Samantha Willsey

That's what encouraged me and pushed me to apply for this fellowship. Um, kind of crazy to think about living in Washington d c um, but it's been so great.

02:32.67

michaelholtz

Um, awesome Sarah how about for you.

02:33.90

Sarah Slack

Yes, 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 and middle school and then after that our paths have been very different.

02:46.68

Samantha Willsey

After them handle them.

02:51.58

Sarah Slack

I have been teaching in Brooklyn New York for my whole teaching career. Um and the students I work with were at title one schools so there are kids coming from some challenging parts of Brooklyn. Um. 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 want to be an administrator I don't think that I want to be an assistant principal or a principal but I do want to 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.

03:42.78

michaelholtz

Awesome Amy question. Do you have a question.

03:49.27

Amy Szczepanski

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. Um. 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.

04:17.97

Sarah Slack

So yeah, we ah work really well together which has been just such an amazing benefit of this ah 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 um 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 um 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.

05:08.86

Samantha Willsey

It's been a great plan.

05:14.13

Sarah Slack

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.

05:27.38

Samantha Willsey

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 a local level and. Um, giving them opportunities for advocacy in their local environment. Um, and maybe I'm more broad scope you know I like to bring the stories in um 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.

06:16.18

michaelholtz

Really cool and just for clarification. The us gs is the US geological survey right? So um, can you talk of.

06:19.58

Samantha Willsey

Correct.

06:20.60

Sarah Slack

Yeah, 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

06:30.25

michaelholtz

But.

06:39.11

Sarah Slack

They have started sort of not using that term geological anymore when people are referring to the organization.

06:44.12

michaelholtz

Um, okay, totally fair I get that So sure.

06:47.86

Amy Szczepanski

Um, yeah I didn't know that it's very interesting. That's super cool.

06:50.81

Sarah Slack

Mean I mean they havent eliminated it from the vocabulary entirely. But ah, it's not just about rocks. They they do so much science study our our country.

06:53.51

Samantha Willsey

You can't do branching.

06:57.37

Amy Szczepanski

So.

07:05.34

michaelholtz

That's amazing Is can you talk about specific projects that you're working on at least to the extent that you can I know I know sometimes the agencies don't like us to go too deep into that. But um.

07:17.19

Samantha Willsey

No, we're happy to share it does fall under this environmental justice umbrella for both of us for me I so coming from rural indiana I saw a huge gap in Science Education especially elementary education. And so 1 thing that I did and it it was presented to us as an opportunity to to create field journals and so I've created 2 different field journals written them developed them. 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. Zoomd in the digital world day to day. Um and reconnect to nature and I think that 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.

08:30.74

michaelholtz

Move and come.

08:33.61

Sarah Slack

And I've really 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 have 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.

09:16.10

michaelholtz

Um.

09:32.36

Sarah Slack

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 we'll be encouraging all types of learners to participate in these environmental Justice activities.

10:02.17

michaelholtz

That's really cool I mean both of those both of the issues that you're 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? Um, and. Communities are trying to find ways to basically cool down 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. We were so 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.

10:56.98

Samantha Willsey

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.

11:09.32

michaelholtz

Right.

11:11.51

Samantha Willsey

Right? And it was this fantasy that I'm going to 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.

11:18.21

michaelholtz

With.

11:30.72

Samantha Willsey

Reached out to 1 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 Killauea um, and then using 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. Yeah um.

12:01.43

michaelholtz

Um I Love that.

12:03.28

Sarah Slack

I went back to my classroom a few weeks ago and 1 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. Ah. 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 1 example of those ways and we hope to bring that back to our our students as well.

12:44.51

Amy Szczepanski

I really can't wait to see you soon Sarah and just be like oh miss I thought you were in spate. It's amazing. So it sounds like you. Both have really found this like pretty.

12:45.40

michaelholtz

Um, very cool.

12:52.70

michaelholtz

Um, ah ah.

12:52.92

Sarah Slack

Um, six months only I was up there. But.

13:02.16

Amy Szczepanski

Like specific niche at Usgs and it like seems very fitting for both of you. Um, as our interview season is coming up. Um, 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. Um, but um, 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. Um, and 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 in that realm of the the process.

13:39.76

Samantha Willsey

That we help.

13:51.19

michaelholtz

Um.

13:56.48

Sarah Slack

Yeah I think 1 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 could talk about it I get so excited about it and they're like you can make that a lesson play on finding ah 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 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.

15:20.80

michaelholtz

Um, and.

15:28.70

Sarah Slack

Find the things that you want to learn more about that. You think would have meaning to your students that you would want to bring back to your classrooms and your communities with you.

15:41.10

Samantha Willsey

Yeah, similar for me. Um, before the interviews you know we 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. Um. But not to discredit the other agencies I was selected for a couple and I thought wow and Nsf that'd be so cool to have you know this this voice from rural education to have an impact at and Nsf like that would be incredible and I was researching on sf I was.

16:10.10

michaelholtz

Um I stay.

16:16.94

Samantha Willsey

You know, taking all 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. Um, 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.

16:48.86

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

16:49.10

Sarah Slack

Is it.

16:50.12

michaelholtz

Um.

16:53.78

Samantha Willsey

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.

17:05.39

Amy Szczepanski

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

17:06.20

michaelholtz

Um, ah.

17:14.56

michaelholtz

Yeah I think that's definitely done something we've we've observed you know, just in these conversations as well as fellas find the find the place they're supposed to be you know and and can make a difference from wherever that is which is great. Um.

17:21.84

Samantha Willsey

Hey.

17:31.20

michaelholtz

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 going to have an impact on students across the country. How does it feel or do you even think about like the impact that you're going to have like on education as a whole in helping young people understand you know the issues that you're talking about.

18:03.45

Samantha Willsey

Yes, I feel it I 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.

18:06.45

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

18:08.24

michaelholtz

Um.

18:11.91

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

18:22.99

Samantha Willsey

Um, and we're hitting the midyear point where it is just like fireworks going off right now. Constant constant meetings. Constant Everything busy, busy, busy and then all of a sudden you take you get your head above water and you take a breath and you realize and reflect.

18:23.00

michaelholtz

Um, you.

18:40.25

Samantha Willsey

And it just kind of hits you like a train all of a sudden like what am I doing me what am I doing um and you just get these moments of I don't want to say pride but it is you know? um, it's great. It's great.

18:43.80

michaelholtz

I think I forgotten.

18:57.41

michaelholtz

Ah, call Sarah.

19:00.37

Sarah Slack

Yeah I'll second that I'll also say um when I'm doing ah investigations with my students. Um, 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. Ah and I tell the 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's like what are you doing kid. There's so many starfish on the Beach. You're never going to make a difference and the kid throws another one back into the water and says well they made a difference to that one and.

19:46.59

michaelholtz

Um.

19:47.10

Sarah Slack

That's how I kind of see my role as an educator in my classroom that if there's 1 kid that leaves a stem class with a new idea about themselves or about their environment that that's 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 because it still feels like I'm doing the same 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 and reflecting on the work that I've done but it's true are this opportunity provides us the chance to 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 stopped to think about it. It's it's pretty amazing. What we have the opportunity to do.

20:52.45

michaelholtz

Um, awesome.

20:54.59

Amy Szczepanski

Definitely yeah, it's very Cool. So as you're working through like creating these things and even smanthe you're saying just like in those times when you get your head above Water. What are the things that you think about that you really want to hold onto what are the things that you want to take back. Whether you go back to the classroom next year or whether your life takes you in a different direction. Um, what are those things that you want to carry forward as you go.

21:27.26

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

21:30.15

Samantha Willsey

Um I think it is it is because it's so often as a teacher and we're still in this transition mode kind of um so often as a teacher you don't have time to be proud. Um.

21:30.49

michaelholtz

Ah, the stumborn.

21:48.12

Samantha Willsey

Because 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 um and be excited about it. Um, 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 if I'm not excited about me then get out.

22:23.44

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

22:25.74

michaelholtz

Um, fifty people.

22:26.19

Samantha Willsey

It's It's just a different perspective. Um, it sounds a little selfish I suppose now that I'm saying it out loud. But um, it's unique. It's a unique perspective and it's something that I hope I can hold on to.

22:38.63

michaelholtz

Awesome Sarah how about for you.

22:44.00

Sarah Slack

Yeah I think ah Samantha and I have another meeting later today and we were chatting about it earlier and ah we're the 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 skill set that everybody has we often don't feel respected in our.

23:03.89

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

23:20.75

Sarah Slack

I Don't want to say communities because but you know teaching is is a noble profession but not one that people always turn to as as a voice of knowledge and a voice of expertise but that's what we are here. We're the experts.

23:21.53

Samantha Willsey

Kiss the wind. But.

23:29.80

michaelholtz

Um, me.

23:39.15

Sarah Slack

In in teaching and in helping turn students into ah 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.

24:08.96

michaelholtz

Awesome. I Love that um 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 your respective tours of the capitol dome and how amazing that was so um, talk about what the best part of that has been for you.

24:40.46

Sarah Slack

So there's 2 pieces to that and one is the crew of einstein fellows you're part of a cohort of just an amazing group of people. Um 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 to see the capitol dome from the inside and the outside and very high place. Ah. 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 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.

25:17.48

michaelholtz

Um, move.

25:31.64

Sarah Slack

Have emailed me after a conference to say it was great meeting you and I'd love to follow up. Um, who have connected with me and and I'm working now with people back in Brooklyn and I'm working with folks in Detroit and Baltimore and ah. Richmond and in 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 open doors. It's helped me find. People who can support the things that I want to do and then help me do them better.

26:07.80

michaelholtz

Awesome.

26:08.99

Samantha Willsey

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.

26:22.45

michaelholtz

Um.

26:28.80

Samantha Willsey

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 who knew the Wilson Center has been great. Brookings Institute has been great. Um.

26:52.97

Sarah Slack

We should let me.

26:55.17

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

26:57.28

michaelholtz

Um.

27:03.60

Samantha Willsey

So I go and I get to meet with experts some from Zimbabwe the the drc and South Africa and 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 um, 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

27:42.40

Samantha Willsey

Presidents of universities and 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.

27:51.48

michaelholtz

Um.

27:55.63

Samantha Willsey

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 is just a completely different culture and I'm loving all of it.

28:03.27

michaelholtz

Right. Awesome.

28:09.44

Amy Szczepanski

Think that's a really interesting piece that you both talked about that I don't think maybe we talk about enough as a part of this fellowship. Um, a lot of us talk about the work that we're doing at agencies which of course is really important very interesting and um, you. 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. Um super different and just having that experience of.

28:57.70

michaelholtz

Me.

29:05.98

Amy Szczepanski

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.

29:22.74

michaelholtz

Absolutely would.

29:24.56

Amy Szczepanski

Which leads me to my next question. Um I'm hoping that people are listening to this and saying this sounds amazing I Want to apply like this sounds great. Um, what advice would you have for those people.

29:35.19

Samantha Willsey

I Can always. Sure for the application process specifically.

29:43.64

Amy Szczepanski

What I mean whatever you think would be most impactful.

29:49.63

Samantha Willsey

Um, 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.

30:01.11

michaelholtz

Um, who.

30:02.86

Samantha Willsey

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.

30:35.24

michaelholtz

Um, right.

30:35.37

Samantha Willsey

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. 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.

31:02.63

Amy Szczepanski

Ah, shh.

31:02.80

michaelholtz

And.

31:05.88

Sarah Slack

Um, yeah I feel like the the essays were the hardest part and 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 going to be working for and with um, it can be a chance to really show your creativity. The things about science or stem that you love? Um, but there's no one right. Person to be an einstein fellow. We have people with ph ds and people with masters and people with just bachelors. 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 ah an amazing experience in the einstein fellowship. So what Samantha said is so true. Just be you ah 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.

32:19.95

michaelholtz

I like that and Sarah and Samantha did you ever and any Youtube 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.

32:36.30

Sarah Slack

Oh my gosh if anyone says no I never doubt it I will kill them. Yeah is a lot like the lag between when you submit your essays and when you hear that you've been invited for an interview is is months I think it's like four months

32:44.20

Amy Szczepanski

Um.

32:55.20

Sarah Slack

Um, and so that's four months of like ah well guess I'm never going to hear from them because they don't tell you what date they're going to contact you and then once you get the interviews and you meet this group of incredible people the the 30 or 40 people who are invited to interview again, you're like wow everybody here is. Amazing and ah it's it's then just comes down to making that genuine connection really showing what brings you what you bring to the table and what brings you to the table. Why do you want to do this Why do you believe this is a ah.

33:26.69

Samantha Willsey

The table of.

33:32.11

Sarah Slack

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 submit it that rank. Yeah yeah.

33:37.36

michaelholtz

Um, of me.

33:42.69

michaelholtz

All the way.

33:44.31

Samantha Willsey

Yes, honestly when I first learned of the fellowship. It was a colleague had sent me the information about it in 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. Have a paid for trip to Dc for the interview weekend. So that was kind of my goal was to make it to the interviews and then long story. But I finally got to the interview weekend. Um, and you're in this room with incredible.

34:05.60

michaelholtz

Right? at the very least right.

34:07.61

Sarah Slack

And.

34:22.95

Samantha Willsey

Educators And again, there's no way they're ever going to pick me for this. Everybody is so fantastic and oppressive intimidating a little bit. Um, you see the the panel of current fellows equally amazing and a little intimidating. Um.

34:31.72

Sarah Slack

Business.

34:42.19

Samantha Willsey

So yeah, there's doubtful and then you get here and what am I doing here. This is crazy but it's finally starting to sink it and the and the confidence grows the the longer you you you are here.

34:54.22

michaelholtz

So halfway through your fellowship. You're like okay, it's real.

34:54.40

Sarah Slack

Yeah, once you get those that I get know what to get those business cards. They I fell on them I Love having those business cards to drop. So.

34:58.60

Samantha Willsey

If they can they can do it I can do it I'm going.

35:08.10

michaelholtz

Um.

35:08.74

Amy Szczepanski

Yeah, absolutely I mean I are similar to I mean both what Samantha and Sarah were saying um my goal was again to make it to the interview and on the previous podcast I talked about how. When I was accepted in 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. Um, they were very kind and took us on a tour of some neighborhoods and I was.

35:25.16

Sarah Slack

Um, see.

35:39.27

Amy Szczepanski

On a tour with Samantha and one of our other wonderful fellows Kenji and I remember um, 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 2 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 1 of our.

35:46.88

Samantha Willsey

I Want it.

35:52.12

Sarah Slack

Deserting.

35:53.39

michaelholtz

Um, this investment.

35:58.39

Amy Szczepanski

Dod follows 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 of 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.

36:22.53

Sarah Slack

The hint is.

36:32.24

Samantha Willsey

Think Teachers get another.

36:36.89

Amy Szczepanski

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.

36:48.70

Samantha Willsey

A.

36:54.86

Amy Szczepanski

But it's also like a great reminder um of Wow I'm like actually qualified for this. So I know it's pretty cool.

36:55.72

Samantha Willsey

I. Okay.

37:02.80

Sarah Slack

I just also want to 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.

37:11.34

michaelholtz

Um, me.

37:16.26

Sarah Slack

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 ah and the 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 to keep trying and keep putting yourself out there for this.

37:38.97

michaelholtz

Um.

37:44.92

michaelholtz

I Love that. That's so important.

37:47.47

Amy Szczepanski

Definitely one of the wonderful things that our program manager Jill Laana 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. Um, 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 um 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 want to spend.

38:17.16

michaelholtz

We.

38:20.12

Amy Szczepanski

The rest of the year in this place. That's not a good fit for me. Um, and in coming into that interview space like against Samantha 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. Um, so again. Ah. If you make it to the interview. You're highly highly qualified if you're applying for this program. You're qualified.

38:44.59

Samantha Willsey

Yeah.

38:46.93

michaelholtz

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

38:58.31

Samantha Willsey

Well um, Wow Besides Kittens um now.

39:02.62

Sarah Slack

He.

39:05.42

Amy Szczepanski

Period period done.

39:05.45

michaelholtz

Ah, Kittens are totally ballad man. Ah.

39:07.24

Samantha Willsey

But 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.

39:15.95

michaelholtz

Um.

39:26.88

Samantha Willsey

And then students leave your classroom telling you thank you Mrs Wilcy it warms my heart um or it could be an experience that um 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 zipline.

39:45.91

michaelholtz

I thoughtful.

39:46.58

Samantha Willsey

Almost tears in his eyes and I said strap it like I buckled him in and then I said say we 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.

39:54.46

Amy Szczepanski

Um, this is um.

39:55.39

Sarah Slack

Um.

40:01.47

Samantha Willsey

It really brings me joy I Guess that's the teacher in me when other people experience joy for the oh.

40:07.63

michaelholtz

Yeah I like that Sarah how about for you.

40:11.71

Sarah Slack

A lot of things do I have 2 fantastic dogs and getting to spend time with them here I used to bring them into my my classroom with me a couple days a week as our school's therapy dogs and just watching kids interact with. Dogs and and um, like Samantha said I got joy from watching them be joyful around the dogs. But now I get to do that more because I'm here with them during the day um, being outside and appreciating our environment no matter where I am it's harder to do in Brooklyn.

40:47.56

michaelholtz

Boom.

40:49.38

Sarah Slack

It is easier to do here but that is something that I really value in exploring new places. The chances to travel either as a working professional or in my free time is is so valuable to me. And in that seeing new places and and thinking about different communities and and ah different parts of our country and of our globe is really valuable too and it brings me a lot of joy.

41:15.50

michaelholtz

Awesome and Amy have up for you.

41:19.97

Amy Szczepanski

So last time I gave a very um I don't know. Nice response. So I feel like I'm gonna counteract that one this time. Um this week. What is bringing me joy is. This is not sponsored but arepas from Arepazone on Massachusetts. That is again not sponsored not getting any money for this but that is what is bringing me joy this week.

41:37.94

michaelholtz

Ah.

41:43.70

Samantha Willsey

Um, I second that that is that place is dangerously good. Um.

41:45.41

Sarah Slack

Um I sell Amy said you? ah.

41:46.41

michaelholtz

Um, so if you're in DCAh look for Arepazone and tell them Amy sent you. I love it. Well.

41:58.31

Amy Szczepanski

Um, exactly exactly.

42:03.33

michaelholtz

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. Take your advice and apply and be be who they are to get to experience the fellowship as well. Thank you so much all right I'm going to hit stop.

42:32.50

Samantha Willsey

Thank you for having us. Thank.

42:33.46

Amy Szczepanski

Um, yeah, thank you so much.

42:33.50

Sarah Slack

Thank you.