

Grad Life: A Radford University Podcast

Episode Transcription: Fatima Gadiaga: Graduate Diversity
COMS 365: Fall 2019



Speaker Key:

Voice Over: (VO)
Interviewer: Chris Hull (CH)
Interviewee: Fatima Gadiaga (FG)

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VO: This is Grad Life. A podcast produced by the Radford University School of Communication.

CH: Welcome to Grad Life. I am your host, Chris Hull.

CH: This edition features a second-year graduate student in the School of Communication, Fatima Gadiaga. Welcome.

FG: Thanks for having me Chris.

CH: Fatima, if you could please take a few moments and share your entire life story, your entire life story before coming to Radford University.

FG: I was born into a family of immigrants coming from Senegal located in West Africa. Born into a family of five. We moved all across the country a number of times and we finally settled in Northern Virginia, Alexandria, where I grew up there, went to high school, and did my final couple years of high school. I figured out what I wanted to do and why I wanted to go into communications.

CH: Please expand a little on the culture in which you were raised.

FG: Well, like I said, my parents migrated from Senegal. So, we are Senegalese-African tradition 96% Muslim in the country. So, my family is Muslim. I was born and raised Muslim. So, there's a combination of the African culture and also the Islamic beliefs as well. But I was the first generation to be born in America. Well the first child, the last of the siblings, the first one to be born in America and go to college. So, I always tell people I grew up bi-culturally because going to schools and meeting my friends, I blended in with the African-American culture. So that's mainly who I identified with, but I would go home and then there's a Senegalese culture and, on the weekends, I would go to Koranic school and there is my Islamic background. So very intertwined.

CH: Can you talk a little bit about the challenges or strength that you have drawn from your faith and culture?

- FG:** As a kid growing up, you're trying to figure out where you fit in and when you fall under so many categories it's a little bit difficult to do that. But after I reached a level of maturity, I realize that was an advantage to me because I can connect with every person and I don't have to fit in one group of people. I can fit in with all
- CH:** What set you upon your path of discovery toward communications?
- FG:** I would say that in terms of electives I was very interested in theater and chorus. And academically, I would say English courses were my favorite and I did have a little bit of a passion for history.
- CH:** In terms of history, what era do you find most fascinating?
- FG:** I would have to say the Civil Rights era, 1960's.
- CH:** What was the reasoning behind this passion?
- FG:** I just think that era had such a huge impact on the era we are living now. My lifetime. It's just started this momentum of change that I'm glad occurred so that I could have all the things that I have now to make that next step and change and growth.
- CH:** Do you have any personal heroes from that era?
- FG:** Definitely Martin Luther King, [Jr.], Elijah Muhammad, and, with that I'd have to say, Malcolm X.
- CH:** Alright, so you graduate from high school and the time has come to choose a university. How did you come about selecting Radford?
- FG:** Well, if I'm being honest, my cousin and I were best friends. We grew up together and out of a few schools that we decided to apply to Radford was one of the ones that we both got into. And you know, it was a small school. We knew that we would be able to succeed because the classes wouldn't be too big, and we could do it together. So that was the main reason.
- CH:** Please tell us a little bit about your undergraduate experience.
- FG:** I had a decent experience as an undergraduate here at Radford. I pretty much came in as a freshman. Once I had that orientation, I had some counselors to help me decide exactly what department I would fit into and that ended up being Communications. And ever since then I stuck to it and it's grown my passion for it even more.
- CH:** Did you find that to be a difficult transition being "away from home" as a freshman?
- FG:** Not necessarily. [Laugh] Umm, growing up in my culture and traditions, I was excited to have that much freedom. I didn't take advantage of it because I did still have those core values, but it was, it was nice to have that freedom and be away from home and actually miss my cousins and nieces and nephews.

- CH:** Let us talk a little bit about the transition from undergraduate to graduate studies. How did that begin for you?
- FG:** In my undergraduate years it would cross my mind that I want to go to grad school. But my junior-senior year I was very focused on going to Peace Corps. I really wanted to go to Morocco and teach and help children there. I applied, I got an interview, but I did not get sent there. It was kind of coincidence because that same night that I got that email, I also got an email from one of my professors, Dr. Dunn, and he was telling me that he remembers a conversation we had where I was asking questions about grad school, and he wanted to see if I was still interested and I said well, I guess this is a good time. Maybe I should give it a shot. I think it might have been, might have been destiny, fate.
- CH:** What have been the principal differences between undergraduate and graduate studies in communications?
- FG:** I would say the applied aspect of it. In your undergraduate years you're writing a lot of papers, you're doing presentations, you may do a few conferences. You may do some research for [a] few professors, but the actual courses are not always as applied as they could be. So, when you get into those graduate years, it's nice because they offer classes that are so applied and hands-on you know, where you may be working with real clients and your presentation may be really to be pitching a company or fishing an organization. So, I think that would be the biggest difference.
- CH:** I think we can agree that in this day and age, there is no such thing as a traditional graduate student. However, you are truly unique. You are female... of color... and of the Muslim faith. Has that combination created greater opportunities or obstacles for you?
- FG:** I would say that it did create more opportunities. And with that, also opportunities to teach people about my backgrounds, and where I come from, and what makes me so diverse, or so different.
- CH:** Have you experienced a friend or classmate turning away as a result of this difference in faith, in race, in culture?
- FG:** You know, I like to give people the benefit of the doubt and, maybe, sometimes the underlying reason for why you and a friend can't see eye-to-eye, or can no longer be as close as he once were, could be due to reasons of that cultural barrier, I guess, or the cultural differences. I will say that as far as faith goes, I don't know what it is about seeing a colored Muslim that kind of makes people... I don't know. Maybe it's just me and my individual experiences. But I am a very social person and I will say, that at times, I can be mutable, but I have experienced some situations where going along with friends, I'm doing things, I'm having fun. And then there's a point where I understand that I have certain things that I want to work on and improve as a person with my personal faith and my beliefs. However being raised in that culture and those beliefs, I do have very founded principles that, when in certain situations, when they get to a certain point people are alarmed or shocked because there's a perception of "oh, she's so great and she's so cool," but I still have...
- CH:** How do address that internally? How do you respond?

FG: I'm over analytical so I immediately turn to myself and think of what were the things that I did wrong, or what did I do to cause it, or what could I have done to change the outcome?

CH: Why do you assume that it is automatically you?

FG: Well, it's kind of like what you stated. I wrote a paper kind of about this in my undergrad years. I fall under every misrepresented category. So, I automatically have this... I'm easily triggered. Therefore, I fall into defense mode. Then I always feel as if I have to defend myself

CH: What have you found to be the greatest gift you have drawn from your faith?

FG: I would say, "still working on it." But my sense of discipline, and morals, and just not forgetting where I came from.

CH: Looking forward, what professional path do you intend to follow?

FG: I would say that I am going to go into the realm of business development. Radford and this graduate program [have] offered me an amazing opportunity with the Impact Lab, so I'm kind of getting my foot in the door now doing some business development and learning the ropes. So, I think I have found my niche.

CH: Fatima, I wish to thank you for the generosity of your time and wish you well.

FG: Thanks for having me, Chris.

CH: And to our listeners, we thank you. And invite you to join us for other editions of Grad Life.

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VO: This has been Grad Life, a podcast produced by the Radford University School of Communication.

