**#HFNT 2: Earth and Taxes**

**Episode Transcript**

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas! I'm Scott.

Alicia: And I'm Alicia.

Scott: And today is Friday, April 12th. And we have a great show lined up for you. Isn't that right, Alicia?

Alicia: Yes, we do. First up, it's everybody's favorite time of the year with Tax Day coming up on April 15th. So, we have some last-minute tax tips for students and parents. And then a week later, we get to celebrate Earth Day on April 22nd. So, in honor of that, we'll have a story about some bee boxes that have recently popped up on campus and a new Zero Waste Textile Initiative out of the College of Merchandizing, Hospitality and Tourism.

Scott: Yes, the Mean Green loves on Earth Day. Be sure to check the show notes to learn more about our annual EarthFest celebration coming up a few days after Earth Day on April 25th.

Alicia: Absolutely. I love that for us. But first, I think we need to catch up.

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Alicia: Scott, there was an eclipse this week.

Scott: Yeah, there was. It was so amazing. How was it for you?

Alicia: It was pretty good. I got to see a lot of it. But, you know, with the glasses, of course, you can only see so much. But it was really cool.

Scott: Yeah, it was unbelievable. I think I might have cried a little bit.

Alicia: Honestly. Me too.

Scott: So cool.

Alicia: But, Scott, you know, I've always said the only thing more exciting than a total eclipse is doing your taxes.

Scott: You know what, Alicia? You do say that a lot. And this is the first time it's ever even remotely made sense. But we know tax season can be a stressful time. And with Tax Day just a few days away, our intrepid reporter Chelsey Gilbert spoke to Dr. Peggy Jimenez, who is a clinical assistant professor of accounting in the G. Brint Ryan College of Business. They talked about some tips for students and parents to help them get the most out of their tax returns.

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Chelsey: What I was wanting to ask you about is if you know of any tax credits that students should be aware of or parents as well as faculty or even the general public, or if there's anything specific to this year that people might want to be aware of or even post-COVID if there’s something people might be missing out on.

Peggy: For students, the big thing that they need to figure out is whether their parents are claiming them as a dependent or not and so that's probably the first thing that they want to find out, and that's a conversation that they need to have with their parents. They can use some flow charts on the IRS website, but it's probably a conversation that they just need to make sure they're on the same page. Because if they claim themselves as a dependent, their parents can't claim them as a dependent. So, it can only be claimed in one place. The impact of that is not as large as it used to be because in 2017, they got rid of the personal exemption. So, claiming someone as a dependent used to result in several thousand dollars of tax deduction and that's not the case anymore. But there are other implications. So, one of the very first things that you need to figure out is “Are my parents claiming me as a dependent or am I my own?” I mean, you're not claiming yourself as a dependent, but really just are your parents claiming you as a dependent? So then in terms of like specific education items, some of them might be interested in claiming a student loan interest deduction. Many of them probably are not paying on student loans yet. But it's something that they want to keep in the back of their head for if they have student loans when they start paying on them, and then there are some tax credits for tuition and there's the lifetime learning credit, which really, it can apply to any education, and then there's the American Opportunity Tax credit, which only applies to your first four years of education. So, most of our undergraduate students would want to claim that American Opportunity Tax credit. But if they’re maybe coming back for a second degree or they're working on a master's degree or something other than our traditional undergraduate students, then there's the lifetime learning credit that they can look at. They want to be careful to make sure, so we have some students who have like a gig on the side. Maybe they're designing websites? Maybe they're, we have a lot of music students who are performing, especially around the holidays. They're performing and they're getting paid for those performances, and so, these side jobs, they may have received a 1099 for that or they may not have. But all of that income is considered taxable and so, they need to keep track of all their income from side jobs or you could call it gigs. Anything they're earning money but not receiving a traditional paycheck. I know for sure 100% that this applies to any of our College of Music students. I've talked to several of them in the past, and this is a major, a major concern for them if we're thinking like specific to College of Music. But the concepts apply anywhere they want to keep track of the income that they made, but they also want to keep track of their related expenses. So, if they're driving to perform at a recital or a concert or something that they're getting paid for. They want to keep track of the miles driving to and from any kind of business-related expenses associated with that, they can also deduct. They just want to make sure that they keep really good records of those deductions so that if they're audited by the IRS, they can prove that, yes, this deduction was specifically related to earning of that money. So that applies to really anyone who has this kind of gig income. It could apply also if you're driving for a delivery service or something like that. If you're not receiving a traditional W-2, then you want to keep track of all of those. You want to keep track of all that income and related expenses, and you'll actually have to file on schedule, see if they have any of that gig type income. That will show all the income from that business and then all the deductions from that business.

Chelsey: Okay.

Peggy: And it's just attached to their form 1040. Also, if they e-file, if they're expecting a refund, they'll get it a lot faster. They want to make sure that if they e-file, that they actually check on the status of the return to make sure that it's been accepted by the IRS. So, if they use like H&R BLOCK or TurboTax or Tax ACT and they should be able to opt in to receive an email or a text message with a code that will tell them when their return has been accepted by the IRS and a portal where they can check their refund status if they're expecting a refund. If they use a tax professional, then they want to make sure that they follow up with that tax professional and request verification that the return was accepted by the IRS. Because there have been instances in the recent past where taxpayers have used a tax professional. The tax professional says that they e-file, but the tax professional forgot to hit the e-file button. And so now the taxpayer has penalties that will be assessed on them. And so you just want to make sure that you, whether you use a program or you use a tax expert, that you receive that e-file, that you received notification that the return was accepted by the IRS and there should be a code that you can use to track the status on the IRS website. Of course, if they want to do paper-based, a lot of the libraries still have those tax forms. I know my local library still has the paper-based tax returns that you can use. You can also download the forms for free on the IRS website. No one should be paying for tax forms, and then you just fill it out and mail it in. But just make sure you get verification that the IRS has received it. So usually that's using like certified mail. It will be delayed that way, though, if you are expecting a refund and you mail in your return, it could be a couple of months before you get the refund versus just a few weeks if you e-file. So, especially if you're expecting a refund, you really want to e-file. There's been lots of bad press about tax professionals not hitting the button to say e-file and then there's all these penalties, like some really severe penalties, like they thought they changed the business status, and the business status didn't change. So now we've got thousands of dollars of penalties.

Chelsey: Oh jeez

Peggy: So, I mean, for what we're focusing on in this article, the penalties are not that big, but still, they just want to make sure. I think that's kind of the big things for students. Most of them are going to claim the standard deduction, so they're not going to have a lot of other income or deductions aside from if they have like a side gig. Now, if they are a parent, well, some of our students might be eligible for the earned income tax credit if they're older, but in order to get that you have to be like, you have to be working, you have to have earned income. Then if they're a parent and they have some earned income, then they want to look at that, make sure they claim the child tax credit if they qualify as well as the child independent care credit. So, they want to look at if they qualify for that. And most of our students with children will qualify for that. There's an income limitation. So, if you make too much money, you don't qualify. But it's a fairly high income limitation. Those are the big things for parents.

Chelsey: What about parents of students?

Peggy: For parents of students, they want to look at these tax credits as well, that lifetime learning credit and the American Opportunity Tax credit. So, they'll want to if their child who is a student, who is their dependent, then they are the ones that's eligible for these education credits, the Lifetime Learning credit and the American Opportunity Tax credit. So, if the student is their dependent, then they want to keep track of the tuition that's been paid. So, they should receive a 1098 from the university that will report the tuition that they paid and then they can use that to see if they qualify. Yeah, I mean, and then there's other common things. But I think in terms of students, the big things are those education credits. And then once they graduate and start paying on student loans, that student loan interest deduction. But a lot of that's really straightforward. You just need to figure out who gets that. Is it the parent or the child? And that comes down to if they're a dependent or not. There's also some volunteer sites where they can go to and get help on their tax return. So, through the volunteer income tax assistance, the VITA program, the United Way runs a VITA program and I was involved with it several years ago, and it's just been growing as far as I know, and they have some based in Denton. So, students or even parents of children could go there and get help with that also. So that's a really useful resource for someone who's not comfortable doing their own taxes.

Chelsey: That is a useful resource, even for me.

Peggy: Yeah, no for sure. I have students all the time, so I like I have a little tax practice on the side, But I would never do students’ taxes because just that's just too much personal information that they have to give and so I have them all the time and they're like “hey do you think you'd… ?” I'm like, I can't help you but go to VITA because you're under the income limitation. They will absolutely be able to answer all your questions and prepare your tax return for you and it's free. So yeah, I think it's a really good resource.

Chelsey: That is, that's awesome. When I got to college, I was kind of on my own and didn't really have anyone to spout off those little tips to, and I kind of just did my taxes to do them and get them over with and really feel like I missed out on a lot of deductions.

Peggy: So yeah, if when they're doing the current year tax return, if they find a deduction that they wish they would have claimed last year, they can file an amended tax return to claim that deduction and get that money back. So, I think that's something that a lot of people don't know.

Chelsey: That's perfect. I did not know that. That's awesome.

Peggy: Well, yeah, you can go back. You can go back three years. The statute of limitations is three.

Chelsey: Oh wow. Gosh. Okay, that's awesome. Well, perfect. Thank you so much, Peggy. I really appreciated this and really enjoyed it, and this is actually a lot of learning for me, too. Thank you so much. I hope you have a great rest of your day.

Peggy: Okay, thanks. Good luck. Bye.

[TRANSITION SOUND EFFECT]

Alicia: Wow. I wish I had known half of that when I was still in school. Every dollar you can get back on your tax refund makes a difference when you're living that college student life. I want to give Chelsey a big thank you for bringing us that interview. You can also check out the show notes for a link to her tax tip story on our news site.

Scott: Absolutely. So much good information there. But Alicia, now that we're done with our A segment, what do we have coming up for our “Bee” segment?

Alicia: Of course, you had to do that.

Scott: I'm just excited about this story. I think it's going to generate a lot of buzz.

Alicia: Okay. New rule on the pod. Let's keep the dad jokes to a minimum. And by that, I mean none at all.

Scott: Wow. Okay. You know what, Alicia? That hurts. That hurts my heart. I want you to know that that really stings.

Alicia: Are you done?

Scott: May-beeeee.

Alicia: Okay. Moving on. Back in 2016, UNT became the first university in Texas to be named a Bee Campus USA. Bee Campus USA is a sustainability organization focused on supporting pollinator species populations. I recently spoke to a group of students about how they're taking our relationship with bees to the next level this semester with support from the We Mean Green Fund.

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Ethan: Hello, I'm Ethan Phillips. I am an ecology major and I'm also the vice chair of the We Mean Green Fund.

Tristen: My name is Tristen Wheeler. I'm the associate director of the Diamond Eagle Student Resource Center, which includes the Bee Campus Committee. So, I'm one of the advisors for the Bee Campus Committee.

Bree: My name is Bree. I am a psychology major, and I am the chair of the UNT Bee Campus Committee.

Caitlin: Hi, I am Caitlin and I'm the secretary for Bee Campus.

Ben: My name is Ben Copeland. I'm an ecology senior and together with Bree and Caitlin, author of the grant to make this possible.

Alicia: So, can you give us some background on what this is and how it came about?

Ethan: Of course. So, the background of the Bee Boxes project and how it came about. So, it started off as a concept in 2021, as I was volunteering at the Pollinative Prairie next to Discovery Park, and I was helping install several bee boxes at the Pollinative Prairie. I didn't know what they were, so I did some research on them, and I got super enthralled by them and so, I did more research and then at the same time, I was on the We Mean Green Fund. So, I used the We Mean Green Fund Committee knowledge to create a project, propose it to the committee, and then I got funding for it. So recently I've been able to put it on campus, but I started the project back in 2021.

Alicia: And why is this so important? What will the benefit be for campus?

Ben: Yeah, so a big thing, just like ecologically speaking, is supporting nativity, right? Like when people think of bees, we think of European honeybees, and most people don't know that they're invasive. They are what is known as generalists. So, they'll just swoop in an area, take up all the resources and mess with whatever native populations are there. So, this project specifically is supporting native species because they're more adapted to helping out native plants, and that just goes up the line to a more healthy ecosystem.

Alicia: So where will this be located?

Ben: Yeah, we're working on really building on Ethan's work. We're going to be doing it here at the Library Wall. Our football stadium, DATCU Stadium, we've got one installed there, there will be another, and we have a little pocket prairie. A little biodiversity hotspot here on campus, the Parking Lot Prairie, throw a box there, and then we're going to support some of the work that's already going on there at the Pollinative Prairie, which is like an awesome biodiversity hotspot. We're going to have one there as well. Also, the Environmental Science Building as well.

Alicia: What research are you hoping to gain from this?

Ethan: So, a big thing about learning about native bees are about the risks and the threats that they face. So, my research is looking at the validity of bee boxes. So, do bees actually use them and to what extent do they use them? So, what kind of native bee species preferred this location versus, you know, the other locations or what kind of parasites might be encountered while putting up the bee boxes or if any of them get infected by fungi. So, chalkbrood is a big example of a fungal infection that is known to kill native solitary bees. So, I'm trying to look into how many bees use it, if they're using it properly, if they're using it successfully, or if they are, I guess, suffering from mortality because of chalkbrood or parasites or other environmental pressures.

Alicia: Do you have outside funding for this effort?

Tristen: So the primary funding for this project comes from the UNT We Mean Green Fund. It's a $5 environmental service fee that every student pays into. And we have a student-led committee who determines the allocation of that funding. And so currently all of our funding is from the We Meand Green Fund, and we don't have external from UNT funding.

Alicia: So, people hear bees and immediately feel a certain way. Why is there nothing to fear with these boxes?

Bree: So, the reputation that bees have is totally understandable from a lot of people whose only experience with bees and their concept of bees is the honeybee. Honeybees are a group species and they have a queen, they have a hive, and so they have a very strong evolutionary drive to protect their hive. And this is what gives them a more aggressive and territorial reputation. However, the native bees species that we are supporting with this initiative, with these boxes, they are solitary species. So that means that they do not have this same evolutionary drive to protect a queen or even their hive. They are much more likely to fly away, to leave a space, and they are also not the type to sting in retaliation, and they actually are usually a lot smaller than honeybees, too. So, you're pretty likely to not even realize that you have seen one of these native bees. So, we're really hoping to increase education about native bees here, and we would love to change your concept of what a bee is.

Alicia: So now for a fun question. Why do wasps have bad PR?

Ethan: Wasps get so much unnecessary hate. And it's understandable from the same reason that that Bree mentions where sometimes we have perceptions of things and it's sometimes rooted in one aspect. But as you learn more and more about wasps, you realize how broad of a category it is, and with wasps especially, there are a lot that are not super aggressive and a lot that are extremely docile, and there are wasps that are even pollinators as well. So, wasps tends to get the short end of the stick because people see them and they typically expect a bad reaction with their sting when in reality they're just defending themselves at the very last possible second. It's a last resort, and most of the time they're not doing it because they want to. They're doing it because they have to. And there's a lot of other wasp species out there that a lot of people aren't aware of, like fairy wasps and mnemonics and a bunch of other wasps that do a bunch of different things in the environment. So, there's more than just wasps that sting people, there's wasps that pollinate, there's wasps that parasitize. There are wasps that do a bunch of different stuff. There are solitary wasps, there is communal wasps. There's a lot of different varieties. Same with bees.

Alicia: Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

Ben: If your house has a lawn, you should kill it. Grab native seeds, throw them out, stop mowing. Let the wild take over your lawn. Do it. The world will be better.

Ethan: I'm also going to have to agree with Ben. Native vegetation is the best way to support native wildlife. These animals and these creatures and even these plants have evolved for millions of years to benefit from each other, and by taking away that relationship and disrupting it, you're causing a lot more environmental harm than you are doing for good.

Bree: We also have a lot of opportunities and will be having more opportunities for students to get involved in this, and so, looking into UNT's Bee Campus USA. That will give opportunities for students to volunteer and get involved in the actual planting and maintaining of native plants and potentially further opportunities moving forward as we keep expanding our native pollinator support here on campus.

Tristen: So yes, Bee Campus USA is part of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, and UNT was actually the first school in Texas to adopt this kind of certification and we've kept it since then. We also have led a lot of other, we’ve lead a lot of other universities in Texas on these kinds of initiatives supporting native bees. So, yes, get involved and learn more at beecampususa.unt.edu.

Alicia: Thank you for that plug and thank you all for everything.

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Scott: That is so cool. I love to see those stories of students who have a vested interest in making campus better and seeing the work of the We Mean Green Fund.

Alicia: Oh yeah, for sure. It was so great to talk to them about this bee-utiful story. Dang it! Now you got me doing it! Anyways, go check out those show notes again to learn more about the Women Green Fund and how you can get involved with campus sustainability projects.

Scott: And Alicia, I just want to say I'm sorry for all the bad jokes earlier. I promise for the rest of the episode I'll be on my best… bee hive-ior.

Alicia: I'm so mad at us right now.

Scott: All right. Well, before Alicia throws something at me, let's get to our last story. In addition to the bee boxes popping up around campus, students, faculty and staff may have noticed some new big pink waste bins in a few buildings. These are not for trash or your typical recycling items, but part of the new Zero Waste Textile Initiative at UNT.

Scott: The project is being led by Dr. Iva Jestratijevic, assistant professor in the College of Merchandizing, Hospitality and Tourism, in an effort to make fashion a little more sustainable. Our very own Lisa Sciortino has the story for us.

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Lisa: What can you tell me about this initiative? Why did you decide to go ahead and start this?

Iva: Yeah, thank you, Lisa, for this opportunity to talk a little bit about our Zero Waste Textile Initiative at the CMHT and not just CMHT, we plan to engage entire campus, so I hope we will see this kind of initiative growing in the future.

Iva: So, my research area is textile recycling and we are really focused here in CMHT on sustainability and you know, when I say sustainability, I really think broadly sustainability in the event industry, sustainability in the hospitality, tourism and merchandising and retail. So, it was really a logical continuation of what we are doing here at CMHT, and also it was logical continuation for my personal endeavors. I do research solutions for textile waste management and how we can close the loop in order to reach our circularity goals. It means reducing waste in our communities, creating healthier surrounding, cleaner air, and of course, create less polluting environments. So, I think that this initiative is really nice continuation of that story, and I'm really happy to see it come to life.

Lisa: So, you applied for a grant and got it. Tell me a little bit about that process.

Iva: Yes, actually I applied for Textile Recycling Association Smart, and we got it. It was just to purchase bins and start the recycling, to start collection and we got the green light to start as something new and innovative here at our campus, and I think this is really a positive sign that this story is inspiring. It does have a lot of potential to get us more funds, and I think that now doing anything aligned with sustainable development goals opens many doors for funds, external funds especially. So, I do hope that we will really get large amounts of money in the future because I think about this one bin costs around $100. So, if you want to have at least one bin in each building or to have enough bins for our dorms. We do need more finances to support that and not even to mention potential hiring of students who are really needed to help us sort, collect, and decide how we can divert each of the collected piles because not all of them have the same purpose. Some of them can, may be reused for the same purpose, meaning they can be worn again. But others, if they're damaged, they need to be recycled or reused in other ways. So I really hope that, as I said previously, this is something that can be really funded in the future and that can bring more money to the university and support this important initiative, I would say.

Lisa: And the first of its kind at a university in the United States, correct?

Iva: Exactly. To my knowledge, there are many independent initiatives. Meaning that students are forcing circular strategies or solutions, and even we have here at our college students that are supporting, for example, one NGO and then they are bringing their bin to collect certain items like shoes or accessories. But this is not organized, and here when we are talking about our Zero Textile Waste Initiative, we are really talking about very organized, systematic and strategic solution to textile-based reduction in our community. So, it should be a really collective effort, not just one faculty member, one department or one college. It should be our university-wide initiative because we have everything we need to recycle, collect, divert, reuse and repurpose. We have so many young talents. I was really impressed to see even students from other colleges coming to the first sorting event and just by invitation, and it was really spontaneous invitation. I would say even at talking with the each students, and then they informed their peers and their colleagues from other colleges. So, it was like a snowball almost method of organizing this group of volunteers for the first sorting event and I really expect to see more this kind of efforts in the future.

Lisa: Right. Would it surprise people to learn how many piles and pounds of textiles get disposed of here on campus?

Iva: Yes, but you know what was the funniest part for me? I was asking, I don't want to name the colleges or people that I know in my network and, you know, I don't want to sound judgmental in any way, but I just want to say people don't think about textile waste at all. When I ask them, do you collect any kind of textile waste in your department? The first answer is no, we don't research textiles, we don't have any textiles here, so we don't need bins. Right? Then when I ask them the second question, like follow-up, I just ask them, do you have promotional activities? Do you have events or open doors where you are wearing shirts with a college name or department name? Let’s say the first day when you are meeting students and they say, yes, we do have them. So what? How do you manage this promotional material after that particular promotion? Because as you know, usually we have the name of that particular event that is really temporary thing, right? And then we have particular year and since the time is never stopping. Right? That means what you going to do with your shirts from 2021 or 2017? So, there must be some kind of way to track those kind of waste within departments and to report them in a certain way so that they can make our job easier. In that way, we can just contact the individual in one department, then get information, and send someone who can collect those materials from them. I know some departments are sending those materials to UNT Surplus. I did visit UNT surplus a couple of times, and yes, that's true. There are a lot of piles of promotional materials we have there, like textiles and athletic merch, and I'm sure that we can find appropriate usage for those materials as well. So, I just want to bring this up because I think it's important for us to understand that we do generate textile waste very often within departments that not necessarily teach anything related to the textiles or clothing. But since clothing is really used very often in promotional purposes, this is also something that can be considered as a textile waste in this particular case.

Lisa: Can you explain how the process is going to work? You do the sorting, well, you collect the items, you do the sorting event, and then what happens to the textiles and/or clothing from there?

Iva: Yes. So, we have a couple of solutions for that particular collected item. So, one of our main goals is to keep items in circulation and we prioritize donations to our own UNT-based, let's say store. And now we are collaborating with the UNT Diamond Eagle store. I apologize if I didn't say the name for it, because I know they rebranded or are rebranding now. So, this is our first outlet to donate to one store that rents the items for free. So, it means that not just that the item keeps circulating for the same purpose, but it's also free for our students. And that's why we are thinking about our initiative being something that is substituting clothing pantry. Because our initiative doesn't have any kind of commercial purpose. It is really based on making some kind of positive social impact. So, our first goal is really to prolong the life of each garment and to keep it in circulation, meaning donating that item to the place where it might be needed in the future. Right? So, the first and logical source to me is the UNT-based store and that's why we are collaborating with UNT’s Diamond Eagle Services as well. So, the second way that we can think about diversion in this case is our Recycling Initiative again here locally. There are a couple of ways. There is a great store that is reusing items, they are located in Denton’s community and they're really focused on reusing textiles and scraps. It is really nice to cut pieces of the items that might be broken or damaged, but they can be used in another way. So, we have students from CVAD that are volunteering and help us, cutting items that cannot be used for primarily purposes, meaning for the wear. Right? So, they will be donated to that particular store, and then also we have 11 textile and recycling containers located here on campus. This is NGO that is already one of the partners of UNT. So, whatever cannot be worn again, but can be recycled, we will divert there and basically, that money is coming back to us again. Because they are paying back money to the university and that the money goes to scholarships. So, in that way we also didn't create any kind of waste, but we close the loop by giving those piles of items that cannot be reused for primarily or secondary purpose via donating to those bins, and one of the solutions is also external solutions. This is not feasible yet, but I hope to see the first donation to go there, somewhere in the fall semester. Then we generate enough donations for them. This is resale center in Oklahoma for Chickasaw Nation and they are partners and I think also this is nice collaboration because we also have a Native American Association here at campus, and we do plan to strengthen that kind of relationship with other community members that might need clothing that can be reused. So with the center that’s in Oklahoma, we spoke couple of times, and we listed all the items that we are collecting here based on our first sorting experience and they said that they need everything and also, they have a principal on not selling anything but they are donating to their local community. So, this really supports our main idea that we will not generate a profit, but we will basically create a positive social impact. So, I think that both these main initiatives, meaning giving items back to UNT community or giving items to Chickasaw Nation, are basically the same initiative with the same goals. Which are, as I said, keeping items in circulation as much as possible for the primary purpose. But also, I don't mind recycling something if it doesn't have any wearable meaning.

Lisa: That first recycling, I'm sorry, sorting event in March. Pretty successful. Sounds like you and your team diverted quite a large number of items. Tell me about that.

Iva: Yes, thank you for asking this. I was honestly very much surprised to see that data and to see those piles in our college, and actually, for that sorting event, we use our Consumer Center for Insights and Innovation. We have a really nice lab in the Chilton building. So, we use that space for the sorting event and honestly, it was for two reasons. First, because the center officially supported this initiative and within the center, we have students that would like to improve their research skills. So, for them, this is really a practice of data collection and analysis, if you like, because I literally needed the students who will sit and just track and record what we are getting in our bins and what we are finding. Then also data about, let's say, brands that are most often discarded in this case or brands that are in the wearable condition that have a good quality condition. Then of course, to record the ingredients for each item because, based on the ingredients, we can determine if the item can be recycled and if it can be recycled, that can be for mechanical or chemical and look, that information is very critical for retail and merchandising students and their own data analysis skills. So, that was also nice to combine students from these maybe more analytical areas and then students who are interested in end of the loop solutions for textiles. We didn't predict that big piles in that Research Center. So, it was really small for us because we have around ten big boxes and in total we collected 228 items. It was 60 pounds and the most of the items were completely new with labels. I just want to say that thanks to our Merchandising Advisory board members and their sample donations to our department. That was really feasible to happen. We didn't advertise this particular initiative, but we did organize our famous sample sales and basically the items that we got, many of the items were donated from that sample sale. So, we have a large donations also that were included in this, and that's why this explains why the majority of the items were in really new condition with the label.

Lisa: With the data that you and the students collect through these sorting events, what do you plan to do with it that will help further this initiative going forward?

Iva: Yes. In the past I did conduct research called Clothing Mountains, and it was really experimental activity in the classroom where we asked students to measure the sizes of their mountains within their closets that are generated through the years. And then, of course, at the end of the semester, we were combining all these mountains into one huge mountain that we measured in an indirect way. It was really shocking to find out that, let's say one class during one semester was able to generate, approximately, 10,000 items, meaning to purchase them. So, think about this if around let's say 500 students are buying 11,000 items on three months level, what it means for general trends. Right? Now I don't have exact numbers, but I would say that average is really high. So, it means that students are increasingly buying more items that are cheaper and their quality is lower. So, they are discarding those items quickly or even sometimes they just discard the items afer one wear, because they don't appreciate that item because they didn't pay the high price to get it in the first place. So, it means that our mountains are becoming taller and taller, wider and wider, and we don't have that much landfill to discard those textiles and this is the obvious problem. Even in Denton’s community, the landfill is oversaturated so most of the textiles are incinerated. So, it creates emissions of greenhouse gases and creates pollution in the community. So, this is really a serious problem, even for the health of people living in these communities where landfill is located. So, textile waste is a serious problem and coming back to this clothing mountain project. The idea for that sorting event was really to create the mountain and to see how that mountain is really tall, how much is told, how much it’s wide and how many items are in the mountain itself. So, our mountain was like I said, it weighed around 60 pounds, but it did consist mostly of new items, so it was really easy to divert those items. I don't know what we're going to get or what we're going to find in our bins next time, so I'll keep you updated. But I hope that our community members will donate things that they don't need necessarily any longer. So, they will take items maybe from their inactive wardrobes, so meaning items that they don't need, they don't wear very often, so maybe someone else will find use of those items for their primary purpose.

Lisa: Absolutely and the information that you collect. You're going to be using it to help build your case for future funding and additional grants?

Iva: Yes, absolutely. We want to use this information to support our future funding applications and also to inform our community about what we are doing, how much we are discarding, and how we can reuse those textiles. If we just inspire maybe a couple of students or groups of students or other faculty members to do something in the same arena then we are creating even bigger positive impact in the community, and it can be like I said, like a snowball. So, you can start from here, but it might inspire other institutions as well because I think that this is really becoming a huge problem and not just in America. I think this is a global problem.

Lisa: So, is there an overriding theme or something you'd like to make sure that folks know about the initiative here? A takeaway message for them?

Iva: A couple of messages I would like to mention. First, I would like to ask community members not to move our pink bins around because it was hard to get money to buy them. They are not cheap. I know they look sweet because they are pink in color and they do have a logo that supports the Society for Breast Cancer. That was intentional because we wanted to invest in bins that are also having some kind of purpose. So, it means that each purchase of the bins, the certain amount of the money went to support those research centers that research cure for cancer. So not moving our bins around, and then not discarding cans or food remains in those bins because if they discard any liquid or any food, they can contaminate the textiles and then it creates problems. So, let's say if we have jeans in the same bin with food ingredients, we need to send that jeans to the recycling station instead of giving it new life for donation. So currently here at the university, we don't have resources to wash and dry the items. So, it means we cannot clean the donated garments in any way and currently this is a problem. That's why we really need to ask our community to support us in the best way we can. Maybe they can bag their donations. They can try to clean them prior to discarding them in one of the bins. This is really a small effort that they can do to support our initiative. Currently, we have one bin in the front entrance of the Willis Library. We have a couple of bins in front of Chilton Hall, inside of Chilton Hall, and we have two bins in the central area of CVAD outside, and we do plan to move bins around the campus depending on the initiative, schedules, and support we get from each facility. So, I really want to invite community members to support us through their donations and to check all our informational campaigns, because we will be organizing, probably a Community Closet Events for Earth Day. So, at this event, we plan to donate items to people who will attend the event and I hope to see many UNT students at the event.

[TRANSITION SOUND EFFECT]

Alicia: Oh my gosh, I love that this is happening on our campus. Such a good idea to be more mindful and sustainable.

Scott: Yeah, it definitely seems like one of those things that comes along and your like, this is great. How have we never thought of this before? Big thanks to Lisa for that interview. Be sure to check the show notes for a link to her full story.

Alicia All right. We're almost done. But Scott, you know, we got to end the show with a little Q&A.

Scott: That's right. We always do. This is where we would normally drop in a prerecorded Q&A, but Alicia, we got our first listener question and it was a good one, so we wanted to go ahead and answer that.

Alicia: Yes, we got an email from Lesley, and we won't say the last name because, not trying to expose anybody over here, but Lesley asks, can you tell stories about how you made friends on campus and which on campus social resources and clubs are good for that?

Scott: Yeah. So, this is a great question, and I am probably the worst person to ask for personal advice on it because I'm super introverted and bad at reaching out and networking and stuff. But I was very lucky when I was a student. I minored in German and took a couple classes and made some pretty good friends in there. Shout out to Jon and Brett and Emily, made good friends in those classes. And we did a study abroad trip, and so that just really strengthened our bond and we are still friends with them to this day. What about you?

Alicia: Well, mine's not, as you know, extensive as that. I joined the UNT running club. It is a student org on campus not only to stay fit, but I wanted to expand my social horizons, you know, start chatting it up with everybody.

Scott: Easy to talk on a run, right?

Alicia: Definitely! Sarcasm intended, definitely not easy to talk and run. But afterwards, you know, you get to chat a little bit with everybody. You get to know each other better after you just, you know, broke the heaviest sweat of your life after four miles. But other than that, it was it was a great experience for me. I got the worst shin splints of my life, but hey, at least I got to meet some high-quality people in the process.

Scott: Yeah, that's great. But beyond our own personal experiences as students here, now that we both work here, we know a lot more about the resources UNT offers, including the Succeed at UNT campaign, which is all about highlighting everything students have at their disposal to make the most of their college experience. The campaign is designed to streamline resources for student success and support outside the classroom. It features the faces of UNT students who share their UNT journey in these testimonial videos.

Alicia: That's right. The campaign has seven key steps of what to do to be successful at UNT. No matter if you're at the Denton and Discovery Park campuses, UNT at Frisco or online. One of the steps is to get involved, and a great way to do that is to join a student organization. UNT has more than 400 student orgs, so no matter what you're into, there's a student organization for you. And if you don't find one that lines up with your hobbies or interests you can start a new one, that's how we continue to have more and more student orgs every year.

Scott: Yeah, in fact, we want to have a segment on the show eventually where we talk to the various student orgs to highlight all the different options there are and what they do so students like Lesley can learn more about them and kind of help them find their flock. So, we're hoping to start featuring those soon. But in the meantime, students can check the show notes for a link or visit succeed.unt.edu for more resources.

Alicia: And thank you for being our first listener. Email Lesley.

Scott: Yes, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. If you want to be as cool as Lesley and get a shout out on the show, email us at podcast@unt.edu, or call and leave us a message at 940-565-4341.

Alicia: Or call or email us to tell us how you made friends at UNT because we want to share your stories, too.

Scott: Absolutely. Give us a shout. That's going to do it for our show today. We'll be back in a couple of weeks. But until then, we hope you have a Happy Friday, North Texas!

Alicia: And Go Mean Green.

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas! is a production of the University of North Texas. Today's show was produced and edited by Scott Brown with original reporting by Chelsey Gilbert, Alicia Zartman and Lisa Sciortino. For more information, visit unt.edu/podcast.

[BLOOPERS]

Alicia: I got a full $5.

Scott: On your tax return?

Alicia: Yep.

Scott: That's it?

Alicia: $5.

Scott: Five bucks. Holy smokes. You need to talk to Dr. Jimenez!

[TRANSITION SOUND EFFECT]

Scott: Yo, that was so good! Supporting pollinator species populations. Impressive.

Alicia: I was like. I was like, I know I'm going to mess up. I could feel my essence going out.

Scott: You just blacked out.

Alicia: I was like hold on.

Scott: You just woke up and were like, what happened?

[TRANSITION SOUND EFFECT]

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas! is a production of the University of North Texas. Today's show was produced and edited…. You’re just like bouncing.

Alicia: I'm just excited!