

Tell me about yourself?

Right now, I'm a sophomore at Rice, and I'm originally from Somerset, Texas, and I went to Somerset High School. I was lucky enough to graduate as valedictorian, and during high school, I was a part of the dance team for four years. And after my rookie year, I had been in a leadership position. And then my final year, I was the head officer as Colonel, and that allowed me to apply for the Valero Alamo Bowl scholarship. So, that's how I was able to get the student-athlete scholarship, which for that, for me, was a little surprising, because I love dance, and dance was always a big part of my experience in high school, and I feel like it really did teach me discipline, which helped me academically as well. So, receiving a scholarship was really important because it felt like my work was acknowledged in terms of the balance that I was doing with school, and the balance that I was doing with my team and trying to be a good leader for my team. I love dance a lot because of the community aspect, and my passion for community. I love how sports can bring people together and kind of serve as a catalyst for a positive impact on the community. What drove me to sport management was that I could be a part of something that could bring people together from all walks of life. And the Valero Alamo Bowl was crazy because I got the scholarship, and then I was like, "okay, this would be so cool [to work here]". I started [the Sport Management major] at Rice, saw the opportunities here, loved it all. Then I had gone home that break and I had started seeing the Valero Alamo Bowl signs and I was like that'd be so cool if I could use sport management in this. Then, luckily, my professor had a connect with Julie and kind of got me situated, and I was able to go in and intern [in 2023]. And that week was so fun, it was such a great experience, from setting up Christmas trees in the hotel rooms, to doing Sea World and then the actual game was crazy. So, that was really fun. And going back the next year and seeing the differences, it was crazy. It was always a large-scale event, but with last year having a Heisman Trophy winner there, it was a whole different thing, but I loved it. And it kind of inspired my career in sport management, and [so did] leaders like [VP of Operations Julie Baker]. I've reached out to Julie for interviews, for my classes here in sport management on leadership, just because to me she really is a great role model in that aspect. And for women in sports, she really does have all those traits and she just gives really great advice.

How did it feel to be selected as a recipient of the scholarship in 2022?

It felt really great. I was actually in the locker room getting ready for practice when I got a phone call. And I never answer random phone calls, like ever, and something about it I was just like "Okay, let me answer", and I answer the call. They're like "*Hi, is this Stacy?*" And I was like "Oh yes!" And they're like "*Oh, we've been trying to reach you. Congratulations, you are a recipient of the scholarship!*" And I think it was two days before the deadline to accept or decline to go to the luncheon and everything. And I was like "Oh my gosh, I

accept! Thank you so much!” I was so excited. As a first-generation student as well, that whole [scholarship] application process was so new to me, so not hearing back I never really understood it. They had been sending me emails but it had gone to my spam. Now I check my spam emails. So, I was really excited and my parents were really proud of me as well. I walked out of the locker room and told my teammates at practice and we were all just really happy.

How did receiving the scholarship impact your college journey?

I think Rice was always my dream school, and I had actually prepared my application, and then my parents had told me *“I don’t know if you should go, it’s kind of far”* And then one of my friends was just like *“Why don’t you just submit your application? If you don’t get in, they’ll never find out. You’ll be fine.”* So, I submitted my application the day before it was due, and then I was like *“Okay, I’m never gonna hear back. It’s gonna be fine.”* And then the day the application decisions came out, he’s texting me, *Stacy look at your email, check if you got in.* And I was *“Okay.”* Again, I was at dance practice, and in dance you’re not supposed to have your phone. So, since I was leading the routine I had the phone for music. And I was like, *“Okay guys, everyone get a break.”* And then I open my phone, I open my email, I see the confetti, and I was like *“I don’t think this for rejections.”* So, it was another experience where I was just with my friends, and I’m like *“Guys, I just got into Rice!”* We’re all just cheering. Now that I look back at it, a lot of my accomplishments were shared with my dance team, so that was really fun.

The scholarship really made me feel that I was acknowledged for my efforts, and that I had the leadership abilities to stand out in the fact that I knew that I could do it. Then going to events like [the scholarship luncheon] and hearing the speakers, it just shows the community that the Alamo Bowl fosters, and they really do care about the San Antonio community. And again, everything was just clicking up like *“Okay, this is what I want to do with my life, events like these.”* You’re a company that’s for a football game, but it means so much more than a game. The community is a big part of the Alamo Bowl. In coming to Rice, at first I was a little worried about fitting in, just because it is a smaller school. As a first generation scholarship student, [I have] very different backgrounds from my peers. But then starting sport management I was like, *“This is what I love to do, and if me being involved in any way can help someone else feel included, I’m going to do that.”* So, I started this freshman year, and it’s started coming together this year: I became the founder and president of the Rice Sport Management Society to try to foster that community among students at Rice and get us more opportunities for each other. Because I think sports, it’s very isolating sometimes, and when you don’t grow up with those connections, then it’s kind of hard to get into it. I know that we’re all networking and going to these events and

trying to meet other people, but let's also network within our community. Let's start as friends. Before it's, *"Oh, I saw you do this internship, can help me get in?"*, let's actually be friends. We all like sports, so we have something to talk about, and we're all coming from stressful days. So, if we have a general body meeting where we can invite a speaker we're all going to feel inspired, we're all going to learn something, and we're also able to make friends at the same time.

How and why did you come back to be a micro-intern in 2023 after receiving the scholarship?

I think a big part of it was I wanted to explore opportunities within sport management and see the different avenues that there were, because I knew that for me and the kind of person I am, some form of operations would work best for me. I love planning. I love doing all that. I love how during operations you're able to be very hands-on. The craziness of running around and figuring stuff out keeps it interesting. So, that year, my freshman year, I had interviewed for a position at Rice for the Rice baseball team to be an intern there. I was able to start my first day at Rice, and the semester before I started the Alamo Bowl I had been working baseball operations. It was the day to day, as small as *"What are the meals?"* to we're booking travel to go to Hawai'i. So, I had grown in my experience in operations, and I felt like I was a little worried about being inexperienced going to the Alamo Bowl just because I was a semester into college. But I felt like I had the tools of what I had learned within the semester, and I had really spent so much time at Rice baseball that I was like "I feel like I really do like this and I'm able to keep up with it." Growing up, I didn't grow up in house of sports, like my parents don't watch any sports. So, sometimes sports is new to me. Sometimes I worry that my background knowledge isn't super strong, but the difference is that I'm willing to put in the work to learn these new things. I might not be able to name every player on a certain team, but I'll research it. I'll learn what I need to learn, and I'll prepare myself so that way I show up to these environments and I'm able to keep up beyond the operations part. But I think that first semester gaining experience with my first internship was like "I really like this. I want to keep going, and I want to explore another area."

What was your role during the internship and what were some of the key takeaways from that 2023 experience?

I was on a really good team. I think that was a big part of my experience, that I was surrounded by peers from other universities, so I was able to work with new people and build a relationship. I still talk with a lot of them today. [I got to] break out of my comfort zone where we had shared experiences but we weren't identical people, and I think that's a big part of a new working environment is adjusting to, "Okay, what are the cultural norms

here? What are my expectations and how do I make sure that I meet these?" Then at such a larger scale [event], I felt like it was really important for me that I present myself properly and not be afraid to take initiative during events like these. That year I was 18, so I was surrounded by peers who were seniors, juniors, and I was a first semester freshman, so I walked in with the intention of, I might be the youngest one here, but I can still contribute, and I will prove myself that I can help my peers, and that I'm always willing to do something else. If we're in an event and I got a role, but something comes up, I will get it done and I'll figure it out.

Was there an area that you took a specialty in?

I think event set up with [Events Coordinator Kenzi Howton] was a little bit bigger, like we did Ricos River Rally, and then I was in Fan Zone for the beginning of the game, and then for the scholarship luncheon as well. That was really special. I remember I was helping out with sign-in during the event, and then a student came in that was from Somerset, and I was like "Oh my gosh, that's so cool, I just graduated from there!" Seeing it on the other side and seeing how proud the parents are at the scholarship luncheon, you can see it in their face because that's the emotion that these types of events foster. As they're walking in, you're checking them in and you can see their parents' faces and they just love talking about their student. It's "*Oh yeah, he wants to go here, she wants to do this.*" And it's just so exciting. It's very refreshing, because I feel like sometimes, at least in school, I would get so overwhelmed with all these things. Going back [to the Bowl] after being [at Rice] for a semester, it was like "I used to be this person, and I used to want to go to this school." So, I appreciate the stress because I knew I wanted this for a long time and I know after I graduate I'm going to appreciate the stress I put in now. The stress is worth it. I'm lucky that my stresses in life are a case study that I have to get done versus so many other things. So, it just kind of put things into perspective.

Can you share any standout moments or favorite memories from volunteering in either the 2023 game or this year's game?

I think for the first year it was the scholarship luncheon for sure, and that whole experience of seeing the parents and seeing the students and being on the other side of that. And again, every single time I do internships or interviews in sport management, I'm just like, "This is what I want to do with my life." There's never a moment of doubt of if I ever made the wrong decision or did I choose the wrong career? I'm like no, I love this stuff, I live for these things. Then I think last year, I think the actual game itself. Because I was busy, but I wasn't as busy as whenever I was a micro-intern. I had certain roles, and I was just meeting those roles. So, I was able to take it all in. And that was a really crazy experience, because you look around and there's so many people, so many people that

come to these games, and then I got to take a picture with the Heisman Trophy, which is crazy. Never thought that that would happen, but so, so cool. Got to revisit my friends during the game, that was really, really fun. Then seeing [Events Intern Evelyn Rodriguez] now being in a higher role I was like, "This is so, so cool." Having seen her and worked with her as a micro-intern, to now being a year-long intern, I was so, so proud of her, and I felt like she did a really good job. So, I think the actual game was my biggest highlight for last year, it was like revisiting everything.

Do you have any goals or aspirations, in the short-term or long-term? How do you want to use this as a jump start to the rest of your career?

It's actually crazy, because my end goal when I reach the point I want to in my career, I would want to be a director of a bowl game. Which is really, really high, but I love the bowl game atmosphere. I had just done the Frisco Bowl last year, so it was a different experience, a bit of a smaller bowl game, but it was again, very hands-on. And I love, love, love the Alamo Bowl every year that I do it. To be a leader in an organization like that is my ultimate goal. Ideally, San Antonio would be perfect because I'm from San Antonio, so my mom would love that. Moving forward, I want to continue to work events like the Alamo Bowl, and I'll possibly be going back to Frisco as well. So, between now and my end goal, working in operations, possibly getting experience in stadium and events/venue operations, just to prepare myself for a position and make myself more competitive. I'm just trying to grow as much as possible and gain very broad operations experience, so that way I can go back and apply to whatever positions become available. Any way into an organization would be great, to learn about how I can best prepare myself. At least in the beginning of my career, I want to explore any opportunities that become available for me in operations that move towards that end goal. I actually just got approved in my first round of applications, so I have one more left, next semester I want to be studying abroad in London. Hopefully I will be interning with a professional team over there, since my university is located near Arsenal and Chelsea. I'm really hoping that works out, because the program I applied for specifically offers an internship credit class. Just taking advantage of any opportunities that are available, doing internships whenever and wherever I can to make myself more competitive.

If you could describe the Valero Alamo Bowl in three words, what would those words be?

I think the first one would probably be community. I would say innovative – I think every year there's something new. There's always a new element, it's always growing. I think the attendance last year reflects that. It's like, "*We're gonna keep growing, new stuff is gonna come into Fan Zone, new sponsors, etc.*" so I think they do a really good job of keeping up

with the new trends. Let's see. I'd probably say memorable, because I feel like it creates a very lasting experience. So, community driven, innovative, and memorable.