



Jessica Mundt, Kelly Brown, and Shannon Johnson

Jessica Mundt: [00:00:00] We're always changing, we're always adapting, we're just a really kind of unique program in that way, and that's just the managers that are constantly looking for new ways to meet the needs of the veterans.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:15] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:50] So, today on Learning Unboxed, I am super excited because we're going to be talking about a program that I've been hearing about for years and have been quasi-arm-wrestling a colleague to say, hey, let's talk about this crazy thing called the Veterans Curation Program. What the heck that has to do with future of work, with education, and with society in general, so I'm really super excited to be able to have that conversation today. And joining us, we have three wonderful participants, leaders, actors in the program, and they're going to sort of explain all their roles as we go along.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:27] So, very quickly, we have Jessica Mundt, who has worked with the Veterans Curation Program, or VCP, as they refer to it internally since 2014. And she currently serves as a project manager for the program, where she provides quality assurance, guidance, and support for the VCP facilities. So, Jessica, welcome. And joining Jessica is Shannon Johnson, who is an Archaeological Laboratory Technician for the program, and she's in Augusta, Georgia. And Shannon processes prehistoric US Army Corps of Engineers archaeological and archival collections. And how cool is that?

Shannon Johnson: [00:02:08] It is awesome. And thank you for having me.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:12] Excellent. Excellent. And I should also add that Shannon is a veteran. She served with the US Air Force. So, that's pretty exciting. And I'm sure we'll talk about that connection as well. And then, joining both Jessica and Shannon is Kelly Brown, who has been part of the Veterans Curation Program team since 2015. And she is currently the Archives Laboratory Manager at the Augusta Laboratory, where she's responsible for the rehabilitation of documents associated with archaeological investigations. And I know everybody wants to know what the heck does that mean, Kelly? So, we'll talk about that. Welcome to the program.

Kelly Brown: [00:02:47] I'm glad to be here. Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:49] So, as I said right at the beginning, this is a program I've heard inklings about over the course of a number of years, and I've had some generalized sort of explanations. And so, Jessica, I'm really hoping that you can give us the sort of 100,000-foot view of what the heck is the Veterans Curation Program.

Jessica Mundt: [00:03:10] Yeah, I'd be happy to. So, the VCP started to open their first lab in 2009, and it was really the idea of Dr. Sonny Trimble. At the time, he was the head of the Mandatory Center for Expertise for the Curation and management of archaeological collections. That's in St. Louis, and that's part of the St. Louis district for the Army Corps of Engineers. So, he was asked to lead the mass grave's excavations in Iraq. And it was kind of through that work that they got enough evidence to really hold Saddam Hussein responsible for war crimes.

Jessica Mundt: [00:03:45] So, hugely important work. But as part of that work, he also worked alongside service members. They kind of protected him and his team of experts while they were in Iraq. So, when he got back to the US, he started to see that it was difficult for a lot of service members to transition into the civilian world. So, he wanted to do something about that. He also had a second problem, and that was that he had all of these archaeological collections and he needed to ensure that they were up to federal standards.

Jessica Mundt: [00:04:16] So, he needed to be sure that they were all in a plastic bag, in their house, in the right way, so that they would be in good shape so that future researchers could access them and use them. So, he created the VCP to hire veterans to curate archaeological collections. And here we are over a decade later and we have four flagship labs. We've got one in St. Louis, one in Alexandria, Virginia, Augusta, Georgia, and then we also have one in San Mateo, California. And as you mentioned, we teach veterans to rehabilitate archaeological collections and also the archives that go along with those excavations.

Jessica Mundt: [00:04:57] And through this, the veterans gain transferable skills. So, a lot of database management, we photograph the percentage of every collection so they get photography training and we also do professional work and development. And that's where we give them a little bit of time each week to really work on that kind of next goal in their life, whatever that might be. It could be a school, or a job, or whatever it is they want to move on to. Most of the veterans in the program cannot-

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:26] Yeah. As the archaeologist to this, we're like, we need more archaeologists. Yeah, we totally understand. So, I appreciate that very much. So, one of the things that really appealed to me about being able to have this conversation granted the linkage back to my own background and passion as an anthropologist and archaeologist, but more to the point, as we at PAST Foundation and the work that we do around helping a lot of young people figure out and find careers, but as part of that, we interface with a lot of industry partners.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:02] So, lots and lots of companies. And one of the common things that I've heard over the years repeatedly is companies talking about that trying to figure out how can they meaningfully either employ veterans or help veterans find meaningful, like you said, that transition back into the civilian society. And so, what does that all mean and sort of what are the needs? And I think there's a lot of fear, quite frankly, from companies about what does that really mean, what am I getting into?

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:31] And so, Shannon, as you know, before we turn the program on, we were just talking very briefly about, you were excited to get to be part of this program. Not sure that it was going to be able to continue on, whether there be a spot and all those sorts of pieces. And so, I really would love for you to share with our listeners sort of what was the appeal about this for you? And what are you getting out of that? And what does that sort of typical veteran experience, I guess, coming out of this program?

Shannon Johnson: [00:07:00] Before being a part of this program, I attended SCAD, Savannah College of Art and Design for my graduate degree in arts administration. What attracted me to that program was because, was that, of course, I have a banking and finance background, I'm a full advocate for culture preservation, and anything that's historical, whether it be a building, any type of excavations that may be done, that can be seen in a museum or in any capacity. So, it was just ironic that I ran across this program that I had no idea existed. So, I said, why not give it a try? And then, of course, especially during a pandemic, it worked out. I was able to be a part of it.

Shannon Johnson: [00:07:46] And not only that, when I actually was selected and actually doing the work, I was amazed at what I was touching. I was touching history. I was touching the history of those people who can't tell their own stories themselves. And not only that, we get to see those archeologists that excavated these artifacts, and bones, and animals over 50, 60 years ago that are, let's say, a few thousand years old. And I was just amazed at what I was seeing, so I was like, well, maybe one day, the things that we touch and we use will be artifacts as well. So, if we're able to pay it forward, should I say, I think it will continue to cycle.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:31] Yeah. No, absolutely. And I want to circle back around just a little bit more before we transition over to Kelly, Shannon. So, tell us, because I'm sure our listeners are really wondering, so it's awesome because you were so jazzed about what it is that you're doing. And again, just hearing some of the folks that have been involved with the program over the years, the group of participants that come in, you have fairly varied backgrounds and experiences in how you grew up, where you came from, what your experiences were prior to the military, and then a wide range of experiences, I assume, in your service as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:09] And so then, how does that then translate back into sort of the day-to-day actions or activities within the program as they relate to that piece that Jessica was mentioning about that rehabilitation or the reentry, is, I think, probably a more appropriate way to think it? So, help us understand that from the veteran perspective.

Shannon Johnson: [00:09:31] No matter what branch of the military that you come from, the first thing they teach us is paying attention to detail. And with dealing with archaeological artifacts or whether the archival documents, they must be handled a certain kind of way, you have to be very analytical in exactly what you're looking at. One thing could look like a stone or a rock, once you clean it off, that could be a bone. You have no idea. So, by taking that extra step into what you're doing and taking pride into knowing that this is someone else's history, you're taking a lot of pride into what you're doing, just as when you served in the military.

Shannon Johnson: [00:10:07] But at the same time, while being a part of this program, we have great leaders at the Augusta location that got us into how to do things properly. Whether we have an archaeological background or have done this type of work or not, we still have to hone those same skills that we utilize within the military to do this job, because this is their story and we don't want to ruin or destroy and compromise anything that we touch. Because once we're done with it, it goes to another person's hands to present it to the public if need be. So, why not get some of the best leaders, and then who were part of the military to be a part of the archaeological process of preserving these artifacts and archival documents as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:53] Sounds like a perfect fit, actually.

Shannon Johnson: [00:10:54] Oh, absolutely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:56] In many ways. Yeah, absolutely. That is awesome. So, Kelly, I want to talk with you a little bit about helping our listeners understand this whole notion of rehabilitation of documents for

starters, because I thought that that was an awesome way to sort of describe the work that you do and sort of what that looks like. But help us understand sort of the role that you have within this program, and then how that translates back in across the work that happens with these four sites.

Kelly Brown: [00:11:25] Yeah. So, like Shannon was saying, one of the first things that I think my role kind of plays into is we get a lot of veteran technicians that have absolutely no background in archaeology. And so, we only get five months with our technicians. So, one of the first things we have to do when we get them in is kind of an expansive hike, here's what anthropology is, here's what we're about to dive into, this is what the archaeology is, this is why it's important. And so, we kind of have to go through sort of the ethical things, how to handle artifacts, what to do if you do find a bone, how to handle important provenience, which is often a concept that a lot of people have a hard time wrapping their mind around.

Kelly Brown: [00:12:10] So, we go through all that kind of stuff before we even get to the concept of like archives and artifacts. They don't get to touch those things until we get through a lot of PowerPoints. Yeah. So then, once we do get through, if you survive the death by PowerPoint week, we do get to the actual artifacts and documents. That sort of rehabilitating documents, to me as archives manager, is there's a lot of things like cleaning and mending. It turns out archaeologists are not the best at storing their documents.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:43] Yeah, we're kind of terrible at that. Sometimes, I have to admit, your field notebook comes back, and then you kick a mud in the middle of it, you just toss it in the file, right?

Kelly Brown: [00:12:54] Exactly. Sometimes, you open a box that's been on a shelf for 40 years and it's a mess. So, a lot of it goes into the figuring out what archaeologist from 40 years ago were thinking, and then trying to establish some kind of order back into this file so that our researchers of today can access those files, and then use it so that they can make sense of the artifacts that go along with that.

Kelly Brown: [00:13:21] So, it's working with the technicians to have their help, to look at all these boxes full of documents, and getting those things cleaned, mended, put into new folders, getting photographs cleaned, and put into new sides and new sleeves, so that they last a lot longer on the shelves. And then, ultimately, getting the stuff into a new database that's searchable and usable. And we kind of do all of that with artifacts as well. They get new bags, they get a new database. They get stored a lot better.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:55] Yeah. And then, ultimately, where does the stuff go, Kelly? Because our listeners are going to some of them are going to say, hey, that is really amazingly cool. And especially our listeners who are teachers or in schools, always looking for very authentic things for students to do. And quite frankly, I always argue, archives and collections of no matter what it's about, that's real data, data that needs people to work with it. So, where does this stuff go? And can people ultimately get access to it?

Kelly Brown: [00:14:31] So, our ultimate goal is to get this stuff uploaded onto the digital archaeological record, which, it's called TDAR. But all of this belong to the Army Corps of Engineers. So, ultimately, you'll have to ask for permission to access some of the stuff. Some of it does have sensitive information in it. It's an archaeological site after all. But we do want to get this stuff into the hands of the public ultimately, I think. We had a tribal member that used to come to our meet and greet, Specter Charles Coleman of the Thlophlocco tribe.

Kelly Brown: [00:15:06] And he always said, he had a saying that he wants to get this stuff out of the shed and into people's heads. And I just thought that was a greatest, off the shelves and into people's hands. So, I do think ultimately, it goes from our labs back to the repository that we got it from. But I do think that the

ultimate goal is for people to know about these collections and to ask about them so that they can have access to them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:38] Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And I love that out of the shed and into your heads. And so, Jessica, I want to sort of piggyback on that. And also, something that Shannon was talking about, the fact that part of this work is immersing yourselves, whether you're the technicians, you're the veterans that come and participate in the program, or you're sort of the other folks over a long history, quite frankly, in many cases, it sounds like that had been involved with the various projects that you're working on, you are telling stories, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:13] You are telling the stories of a very diverse group of archaeological sites generally that fall under the purview of the US Army Corps of Engineers, means all kinds of sites from all over the country. And one of the things that folks are always wrestling with is, how do you, and I'm just curious, this is really more of a curiosity that I think that folks would be wondering, so you guys provide me a great opportunity to be able to ask this question, how do you, in your work today of going, and re-cataloging, and sort of rehabbing, if you will, a variety of different components of these projects sort of help understand the story from the context in which it was excavated by whoever it was that excavated in their own internal mindsets, and their own backgrounds, and their understanding, and their interpretations, and then translate that into some what are, hopefully, a lot better, more robust understanding.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:15] So, back to out of the shed and into the heads, so I truly love the fact that gentleman is saying, hey, this is our story, we want to be able to tell the story, but we need to put it both into the context of the moment in which the excavation happened, but also into the appropriate context in the moment of today. How on earth do you do that?

Jessica Mundt: [00:17:37] Yeah, I think the rehabilitation part is intentional, but there are other things that happen that aren't necessarily intentional. So, yes, going into the box is getting everything in good order, and saying, what does this number mean? Oh, those are test units. We need to be sure that that test unit number is represented in every description that we have for all of these related documents or related artifacts.

Jessica Mundt: [00:18:02] So, just sorting out what the information means, and getting it in kind of a digestible format is really the first and one of the most—obviously, a very important step, but there's other connections that happen that we can't anticipate. I was a lab manager in the Alexandria lab for a few years, and we had a technician that ended up working on a collection that was excavated just miles away from where she grew up. And it was that connection that I made, you can see the revelation come through her.

Jessica Mundt: [00:18:39] She had this better sense of place and a better sense of where she grew up, and she was working with her hands on things that came from that land that she went to as a recreation area when she was a kid. So, helping individuals who don't necessarily have any background in archaeology or may not have had the opportunity to visit a lot of these historic sites. And just finding a connection is something that we hope will happen. And a lot of times, it does. And we hope that even after they leave the VCP, that that kind of special connection with location and place continues, and that they continue to take their families to different kind of public areas.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:32] Yeah. I can tell you that in my career as an archaeologist, the projects that are probably most near and dear to me as an individual are always the ones where we had either local folks either participating or somebody who shows up at the site and they have some connection to it. And sometimes, they're very tenuous connections. But just watching them actively engaged in what's going on, and just being part of it, and asking questions, and oftentimes, adding new context and new clues, because lots of these folks

bring something, they bring their own historical story to the project, and they are as much teacher as they are students in the right setting and the right opportunity.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:26] So, I appreciate that very much. Shannon, one of the things that you had mentioned earlier was about the excitement around the discovery. And so, I want to dig into that a little bit as the non-purposely, I guess, trained archaeologists in this group, so you're coming to this, but you have a background that lends itself in many ways to the work that you're doing, and certainly, through your experience, but share with us a little bit about a moment, I guess, if you will, or a piece of the work that you're doing that just truly gets you excited in a way that you might not have thought about before, since this wasn't necessarily the particular path that you started out on.

Shannon Johnson: [00:21:10] Absolutely. Right now, I'm working on a box that has a number of different types of fragmented glass, and also, bottles, and bottoms, and bases. And some of them are still together. And I'm thinking about it, I'm looking at, and I'm wondering, okay, is this from the last 50, 60, 100, 200 years? And I wonder, whose bottle is this? Whose plate is this? Okay. This button, where did this button come from? And there was something that we saw that we didn't know what it was.

Shannon Johnson: [00:21:44] And we asked one of the managers and they had to go do research on finding out what it was. And all of us in the office, we stop. Whenever it's something that none of us have experienced or saw before, and only one of my colleagues, he has an undergrad in archaeology. Basically, he's the only archaeologist outside of our managers and archivers. So, of course, he's just as interesting as everyone else. So, it piques my interest each and every time we find something, but I also build an appreciation more and more for those things that are excavated, but also, more for archaeologists as a whole.

Shannon Johnson: [00:22:20] So, just like with any job you do, I'm taking it a lot more personal now, because I'm touching it now as a part of me. I'm touching what ancestors have touched. So, I sometimes feel the energy from it, and I go, wow, so you made this from hand. And I said, well, how did this break or where did this come from? Where did you come from? So, of course, with all of us, we're all interested, and that's the energy within our lab and that's how we interact with each other. That's whether it be the managers or my colleagues. And it's almost like we're all equals, but we all learn from one another and experiencing everything new all at the same time. And I love it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:00] Yeah, I can tell that you love it. And that's really exciting. So, I will tell students all the time when they ask me, so what is it you do? And I sort of explained to them, as an archaeologist or as an anthropologist, and I can sort of see them still thinking about it. And then, I'll always say, well, we are the scientists of humanity. And suddenly, their eyes get really big. And no, that's not a formal definition. My colleagues give me grief about it all the time, so I own that one.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:27] But the reality of it is, if you think about that sort of day-to-day interaction that an archaeologist is having with society as a whole, we are often the element that is telling that story. We're providing the connection. We're making it culturally relevant in any given moment based on the work that we're doing. And so, my perspective is that, yes, so we are, in fact, the scientists of humanity. And so, that sort of gives me the lens through which I get excited about it and sort of jazzed about it as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:01] So, Kelly, can you share with us a little bit about the structure of the program? You mentioned that you only get five months with the Shannons of the world. So, how exactly is this program structured? So, in other words, there are four sites. We heard that from Jessica, but how many participants. And this has been going on since 2009, and what's happened to these folks after the fact? What do we know about these things?

Kelly Brown: [00:24:25] So, like I said, we get about five months per session with our technicians. Typically, our class size is a little bigger than they usually are right now. Because of COVID, we have some restrictions on how many people we can have. But our average size of technician class sizes are about, I say, 10. We usually have about 10 people in there. And when we get our technicians in, like I said, the first thing we usually do is our end up week of training with the big overall scope of what is anthropology, what is archaeology. And then, we start to zoom in a bit.

Kelly Brown: [00:25:03] And we're going to start with, here's an overview of archaeology and the collection that you're going to be working with on the artifacts side of the house. And we spend the first month of the program, having the technicians to process the artifacts, helps them get kind of a good handle on what proveniences, what a site number looks like. And they get really familiar sort of with the specific collection they're going to be working with. And then, about a month or two into the program, they will get trained on digital photography to learn how to take photos of artifacts and they'll also get their archives training at that point. Archives training can be a little more intense than the artifacts training, takes about a week, and can be a little boring.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:52] Shannon's shaking her head for my guests who are just listening.

Kelly Brown: [00:25:59] As the archives lab manager, I have expected that it's not as fun as artifacts training. I've tried to make it a little more fun. I've done things like Archives Jeopardy, which you've got to be fun where you can, but we try to start some games into training and stuff. So, after that, that we can throw that kind of—you're fully trained once you've had your artifacts, your photography, and your art training.

Kelly Brown: [00:26:24] And then, halfway through the program, which is usually about two-and-a-half, three months into the program, we start what we call professional growth and development, which is where the technicians really get a chance to work on their resume, sort of translating all their military skills and lingo into the civilian vocabulary for the resumes so that they can start sending it out to jobs. They can also start looking at things like, if they're more interested in going back to school or getting their veteran disabilities or catching up with that kind of stuff. We can help with that kind of thing as well. We also try to get guest speakers.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:04] So, very full service in terms of the way you think about the experience. These five months is, A, you're going to have this grand appreciation for archaeological and archival collections. That's a bonus. You all become advocates and stewards of our cultural heritage. So, that's awesome. But then, also, to sort of help with some of the other other components that might be necessary as folks move on to whatever the next thing can be after that five months. That's pretty awesome. Yeah. So, Jessica, the 10 per class-ish, is that at each site or is that in total? And then, these folks are distributed around the country to do the five or more? Sort of help us understand that component of it a little bit.

Jessica Mundt: [00:27:55] Yeah, sure. Ideally, it's about 10 per location. The San Mateo lab is a little bit smaller. They're a newer lab and they're still growing a bit. So, we have had kind of when we're in full operation and not mid-pandemic, we've had up to around 40 veterans in the program per session and we're hoping to get back to that at some point soon. We'll see. Our next session will begin in May. So, we're starting the applications now.

Jessica Mundt: [00:28:29] So, if anybody's interested, you can get on to the veteranscurationprogram.org website and see the application there. Fill up the application, submit your DD214. And there's an email address at the bottom of the application. And so, yeah, we encourage all veterans to apply. There is kind of a priority for

post-9/11 veterans. That's kind of how the language in the public look for the Veterans Curation, the language in the public law. So, they have priority, although we accept applications for all veterans.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:01] And anybody can just jump right in on this one. I'm really, really curious sort of if there is overlap with the participants. So, as Shannon comes in, does she work with folks that participated before? That was one of my questions. And then, the other question is sort of as folks then transitioned out of the program, so do folks just end up in lots and lots, I would assume, million different places, different careers, different options and aspirations, I would assume, as diverse as the participants? Right? So, I'm just curious about those two things.

Jessica Mundt: [00:29:39] Yeah.

Kelly Brown: [00:29:41] Yeah.

Jessica Mundt: [00:29:42] Sure. Yeah, it's really diverse. I mean, everything from dental technician to administrators, the federal government, I mean, it runs the gamut. We do, however, I would say in each lab, maybe each session, there's maybe one or two veterans that do have an interest in museum studies, archaeology, anthropology, something related, and we do try to hire graduates of the program on to be lab managers because they know the program best and they know how to take advantage of the program in the best way. So, we do have a few graduates that are currently lab managers and that's definitely the goal.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:21] Excellent. That's a fabulous aspiration for the program. That's awesome. So, Shannon, I want to circle back with you just a little bit and sort of—so, at what stage are you in this? So, you're pretty early on in the program. I mean, the next class starts in May. So, midway through?

Shannon Johnson: [00:30:39] We're almost at the tail end because we were a special group because of the pandemic. And what's been amazing is that although I have the arts administration graduate degree, the majority of my resumé is banking and finance. So, of course, they're one and the same.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:57] I saw that in the materials you sent over, yeah, I was like, wow, check that out.

Shannon Johnson: [00:31:02] So, I have to admit that being a part of this program has done wonders with shifting my resume into the direction that I want to go. And therefore, it pushed me more so in a museum studies aspect, or should I say just within working for different museums around the country. And I looked at my resume and I started getting more and more hits because of this organization. But also, I had the guidance and the leadership of, of course, my managers here, and also, everybody else above them providing assistance with whomever is specialized at work in, let's say, a very prominent museum, they worked there before, hey, you got time to meet up, we can talk about it, I can give you what my experience was when I was there.

Shannon Johnson: [00:31:45] Okay. Let's do some mock interviews. And they are awesome at that. And especially if you haven't—let's say, with a lot of military personnel, they've never had a job outside of the military. So, doing a resume, trying to take their proper classes. I mean, if anything, you're like, well, let me go get an education. So, yeah, I've got an education, so what do I do next because I've never done this before? The leadership here, they've been guiding us with resume critiquing, making sure that we get the proper training. If there are some other courses that we can take that could be a reference to archaeology that are free, we take them. If there any organization to be a part of, they recommend those as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:25] Yeah, absolutely. That is so awesome. I'm so excited for you. I can't wait to find out where you land.

Shannon Johnson: [00:32:30] Me too.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:31] I know. I'm sure. But any museum or organization that gets you, they'll be lucky to have you. So, that's really, really exciting, Shannon. I do really want to hear what happens. So, Kelly, as you get ready for the next group to come in, in May, what's that going to look like? I mean, the week of PowerPoint, they'll survive that, they'll learn of the photography, the other pieces.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:01] Do you know sort of what collections are coming your way and sort of have that scaffolded or is it always just going to be this sort of big surprise? So, I guess I'm just really curious if you're going to be part of this class that is going to be flying, because I'm sure you'll have folks that will hear like, oh, I should do that, right? What is it that they're going to be getting in the middle of?

Kelly Brown: [00:33:19] So, we currently, in Augusta, are working on some pretty big collections that we'll probably still going to be working on for several more months. So, we have a collection from North Georgia that we're working on, and it's prehistoric, has lots of prehistoric materials. And we have another collection from Mississippi that has a lot of historic materials in it. But usually, we kind of know in advance what like collections we're going to have.

Kelly Brown: [00:33:47] Some labs go with smaller collections that come in and out pretty fast. So, you don't know kind of what you're going to get. It's kind of up to the Corps what's going to get sent to your lab. So, all we get is a, hey, you've got a new collection coming your way, you just sent one out, so we're sending another one to you, and you never know what's going to be in the box until you kind of open it up.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:11] And that's sort of the fun, isn't it?

Kelly Brown: [00:34:13] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:15] It is indeed. Excellent. So, Jessica, as we wrap the program up then, what does the future of this program look like? And in addition to the fact that more collections and boxes keep coming, which is really, really awesome, when you're, sort of having been in this program for such a long time, sort of think about the iterations that I assume that it's gone over, what's next for this program?

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:40] Is it more of the same or is there something that you see coming along? Because I'm kind of curious about the modifications because of the pandemic and how much of a virtual experience. And is there some tieback into some of the positive impacts that have come from the pandemic, forcing us all to live, work, and think differently? And then, how does that perhaps translate back into this program?

Jessica Mundt: [00:35:05] Yeah. So, the pandemic allowed us to take a pause for a little bit and work on a lot that we weren't keeping up with. What we're doing at the VCP, like I look at it almost as a template that could be applied elsewhere. I mean, other groups could be processing documents from a lot of different agencies or other organizations. So, it gives us a chance to look at it again, and also, kind of get in writing what we do here because we did a lot of work with our supervisor manual.

Jessica Mundt: [00:35:43] And that is a big thanks to all of the managers that put a lot of time into it, and also to the core who gave us that time to be able to do that and to work on that ability. And hopefully, in the next couple of months, we're gonna have a supervisor manual ready that we'll be able to use, and help record, and

kind of allow us to share what we do here at the VCP. That was a really important step. Other than that, I have to say that every session is kind of new because we get a new group, the interesting people in the labs.

Jessica Mundt: [00:36:14] So, we are constantly shifting. The managers are amazing at identifying the needs of each group, and saying, uh-oh, we need a new PowerPoint for this specific thing or it doesn't have to be a PowerPoint, but just a new training tool or a new whatever that group needs. We also have a lot of guest speakers in. So, if we identify a group that maybe really wants, I don't know, to improve, say, their nutrition goals or help like that, maybe we'll have a new guest speaker that can speak to that. So, I think the VCP is kind of getting bigger and changing, but we're always changing, we're always adapting, we're just a really kind of unique program in that way. And that's just the managers that are constantly looking for new ways to meet the needs of the veterans.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:06] What a very exciting program. I've enjoyed this conversation so very much. And so, I want to thank you, ladies, for joining us today. And thank you for the work that you do, because it's very much needed. It's absolutely intriguing and exciting. And I can see so many correlations between the work that you're doing with veterans, the work that you're doing on collections, collections management, and data, quite frankly, data management tied to that. And then, hopefully, a lot of the communities, our listeners, our teachers, and professionals can say, hey, we could do that, too, and we could bring elements of that into our classroom and maybe get folks even younger thinking about the potential of these types of careers. So, I appreciate that very much. Thank you for joining me today.

Shannon Johnson: [00:37:51] Thank you.

Jessica Mundt: [00:37:52] Thanks for having us.

Kelly Brown: [00:37:52] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:56] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media @Annalies Corbin and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.