Meet Princeton Podcast, Season 2, Novogratz Bridge Year

Vivian (host) ([00:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=LXl5AgcypFH8WbN5qkAwzlTacGyMAJB75QSmVKMoyKsIfdRH0i61YX7CpofJp_KKHiJYXzIdSrLXC_g5f_Sv93sAawk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5.59)):

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Meet Princeton, a podcast to introduce prospective students and their families to Princeton University, brought to you from the office of admission at Princeton. My name is Vivian Slee, and I'm a senior assistant dean in the office of admission. And I'm so happy that you've tuned in to join us, to hear from current student voices and others about our community and about what it's like to be a student at Princeton just now.

Vivian (host) ([00:37](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=QJiX2c8XxP5RKH6MbnKLIt5afhkGyzAQnJMNOdyz36Ze0gufw-iaQ6MhSJVL_6Os3OT7ane3yRUZDaLWWLJDZeXq-SQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=37.53)):

Welcome Bryant, good to see you. So there was some big news earlier this spring that I wanted to share with our listeners about the Pyne Prize. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that is and what that means?

Bryant (co-host) ([00:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=P38f8WkMqoPahr1zMa8YirUOgvCkwK6Zy0mzu9YA3U4ikaT0vBYqdJ0xMBnSfC-f8lf6BLhKazf4kclW0rVzI8xWGsY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=50.74)):

The Taylor Moses Pyne Prize is really the highest award that can be conferred upon a Prince undergraduate. It's largely academic, but it also really acknowledges contributors in other meaningful areas of Princeton undergraduate life. I'm pleased and proud to say that two of the students that we've interviewed on this great podcast actually were shared co-winners this year. So it won't be the first, but a hearty congratulations again to Christian Potter and Claire Wayner. If you haven't already, you should go back and listen to those episodes with some stellar Princeton students, again, who have now been recognized with an incredible honor here as in their senior year.

Vivian (host) ([01:29](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=rIWwP67m8izbQFUj8WySwweujrtSBFjTRYQtvjGrdP-9oDN8CArCPYyMPjAXfxmNAaVCUdqZeCeyr0FuBL9gdmFrLa8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=89.79)):

Oh, that's great. So to be a good student academically, and then to also contribute to your community, that's pretty significant. It's great to see them do two awards for the Pyne Prize this year, which I guess has happened in the past.

Bryant (co-host) ([01:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=0vuKm8rVR4eEe51K4v9bEGs2nsEYgMd9-FuzKK4xVb19PSQOkAAbcTbyFWnDEwkT7ScGPYr9FcgTLS88oxyMkPLBwBk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=102.61)):

Yeah, for I would say probably about the past decade. I mean, again, the student body has expanded several times. I think we have another one on the horizon, but also frankly, again, the success and power of Princeton's endowment manifesting other ways, we are able to recognize and support multiple honorees with this award now.

Vivian (host) ([02:00](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=XoCDB5pj0JiXM9Aqbr0OMGaoJXw2XQtmXcuJjcfwA3ssXA4qamJFfn2vdlgKOze1maitea0f6B4f9BJjZV2A1IMSt6U&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=120.37)):

That's fantastic….Novogratz Bridge Year. We've got two students on the program today, Leila Owens and Nicole Williams. And they're going to be telling us a little bit about their experiences on Bridge Year. And I think for our listeners, it'd be great to hear a little bit more about what the Novogratz Bridge Year is.

Bryant (co-host) ([02:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=u9MUNFrorZufcwwGk3dk1S13cIzG9v9ONKfnPCUKnapuyEhvH-BvdH0SvRefs45P4iDX4Stk3zQzXvKwCXR96w37eow&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=139.09)):

Sure. So the Novogratz Bridge Year program, locally called Bridge Year, is just that right? It's time between when a student is accepted to Princeton, and when they begin as first year students, right? So in the summer between their admittance and when they might come to Princeton, they could apply for admission to this experience, which is an international service project, essentially.

Vivian (host) ([02:42](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=qKQDvWpuFe5LsEFPojYiuPU2rLOq6lzLirKcihjuCV-eBhqqHbDSZNW7kRHwA0Yls2ptrMDRN3Hl1jd1LR7k9EPVLzY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=162.51)):

Basically a gap year. Right?

Bryant (co-host) ([02:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=gDU9BWLsFBkQilYCjMiKDEsBHP-w8ufialw4QbCtDAQTOvRn91Wc2qNopk3H2v_0w5lZw-NqN8tPmgxBb8Cyh5gcmdw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=164)):

Exactly, exactly. And so students will spend this year, again, not as a Princeton student, but with this Princeton program and engage, as I said, typically in a service project, oftentimes around education or public health and lives with a host family, sort of immersed in a culture. And really again, gets this great experience to spend time with other Princeton students to develop their values and to have, again, this sort of worldly touch point before they begin their studies.

Vivian (host) ([03:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=GPGprsifD329Ott90ILMo5kXPuUe-gqQQxeucnWg0q4R8W31sNziof2p1q0u5yysuZRWHc08ElRRQ2pdzsMWWk2J2bE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=196.52)):

And what would you say to those parents- because we get these questions from time to time from parents, but also from students, what would you say to those students and parents who are worried about taking a gap year? You know, the whole idea of gap year, I think especially in this country, is fairly recent still that students are doing this. That they're deferring their entrance to college or university after high school by one year, sometimes by two years. What do you say to the listeners who are a little bit worried about doing something like that?

Bryant (co-host) ([03:48](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=B_ZJpYr1TB3B8AEaRRsictzbY4n5X2YsG8vQKTVLFy4SawRZ2T7GK7B7F9vJ4O5HBorQhNXy2HZuSvMOmmT66pjidI8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=228.92)):

Well, I'll say a number of things and I'll start with maybe the brief story when I was a undergraduate. I remember I came into my Z group as a first year student with someone who had taken a gap year and done work in South America, something, in fact, it sounded very much like what Bridge Year is today. But again, that was self-directed, it was informal. But she had lived internationally, and nevermind how she placed out of Spanish language. She had the ability, I think, to really conduct herself in worldly ways and with a maturity. It helps you develop and grow in interesting ways. And what I would say flashing forward to now is that there is a whole program and infrastructure around that. So it's safe, right? Princeton again has a full-time staff and the support of alumni like Mike Novogratz and his family have allowed Princeton to really focus on expanding that program, to offer the opportunity to more students, as well as to again, partner with international organizations and be regularly connecting with these students. It's a really intentional experience. It actually is not even just the year before they come to Princeton as first years, but indoors during their time at Princeton. And after the cohort is really strong, and the alumni network is growing every year. I think it's been really, really meaningful to people's experiences.

Vivian (host) ([05:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=YyaUpwQLOoOZYdxt4vaOm9azNi_Wj3fIG3tDPwAUpSYsRl_8wDhH-2z2ZwWWsqO111DS1U1mCpUVf8DQZPvwjiZK6FM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=304.89)):

Yeah, I think Leila and Nicole actually talk about that, about meeting up with other Bridge Year students on campus during their conversation. So with that, why don't we hand it over to them? Let's hear about their Novogratz Bridge Year experiences. And thanks so much, Bryant, look forward to seeing you again next time.

Bryant (co-host) ([05:22](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=TpXr71PQqepByx5Ey0cr8hAus81Si2bcAO8mEvTDdcOK0OIqKTla-6SiLadMCQFuCWr6hgyqQgb-uzrcZj0ZXdjMTps&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=322.82)):

Yep, take care.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([05:34](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=YU9w2S1Z9vmCgG5N7yw1ioo3vKoEa3-sWgFp8OerTXoM_R3lCHGsFiKMi1pJR1xwcp_gcSIB183L03VWTvLCkCpxiLA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=334.89)):

Hi Leila.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([05:36](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ZNQ1k3HIUSAcufWck6UmqqecuSc4ZNObBjCpQErr2sMUKe_ZAIJHRz-T86Y_xVjOPcmffxxz6bFAFVcvQ4-UriU87J0&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=336.91)):

Hi Nicole. How are you?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([05:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=VPeMEqKEJ2vGm4GjVotNnHhXEw51a8Flb6c9s9u6ojlUkDKx1kur6VsvCo3c9be_SAXMZPPgwUEcedmL2qRDTUMWVXc&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=338.82)):

I'm good. How are you? Where are you from? And what year did you do Bridge Year?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([05:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=NLTxUE9pXEiyPNopVDM7kdYakU3XvSJVgqZmZYcjRaCI_4KJFb0xlUYqepNy3zaQ5szgtbOssTCIopfVCoL9INBnXyQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=344.48)):

I'm from Michigan. I grew up in a suburb of Detroit and I did Bridge Year a few years ago in India. Coming out of high school, I had a lot of interest in going abroad. I knew I wanted to do some sort of study abroad. And honestly, I thought when else in my lifetime am I going to have this opportunity to spend a year fully funded in another country. Not even studying, but getting to really know the culture. But what about you? What drew you to Bridge Year?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([06:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=gtzs-IiE5_cAOXa_W8PvNzFm8-pyD40BTR9T_pQDXXIX1urG7GCsiBo4xiXq0yqeiM0029cUGCE3SkvV3UmJ5PXMbSQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=374.8)):

I am from Morristown New Jersey, and I did Bridge Year in Senegal in 2017, 18. What drew me to Bridge Year? I think similar to you, I definitely wanted to travel and study abroad, especially being a fully funded opportunity. It was a really awesome opportunity. I mean, how many colleges have that? I don't know. And then also coming out of high school, I was so burnt out. And so I kind of really liked the idea of getting to take time off from school, but still having that structure. And then it did actually work towards life goals that I did have, so it kind of was a on both end things. I don't think I would've taken a gap year if it wasn't for the structure of the Bridge Year program.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([07:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=cy2t_MeRB8Bq5yHwvoXTk7KxO9abnhs0RwFjxvf0YFlZemeom4t3F1DFf3X1fHsdI2ltV0f3LQzRMSVzo2cD2xfQ3Z4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=423.7)):

I'm curious, were your parents worried about you going abroad and then specifically certain program locations?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([07:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=4mxZ60Q20LGgDNDq3Ey-PtCgPFMEKsSlKEGPEZkaNU5Tx4MUhUXC18hKpGgjgo98TRfiEenWOTc0r7kJwmIbqcRtBlY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=431.08)):

I think that what you were saying about this being a structured program really helped with convincing my parents. Just like the fact that Princeton is sponsoring this and has done it for years, you know? And I did it, it was the 10th year of the program in India. And so at that point I didn't have too many concerns. I was kind of intimidated about just taking a gap year on my own. I don't think I could have planned anything myself, but this is a structured program, and so I think that really helped persuade my parents.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([07:46](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=3ouFqgGdVnAdKmcfO36MHrV0it3nqAb2ojpx-ByCkXjmKVzJ4kRFZcgZ1e39g94I8o6sHvbNbcaruhfLsu6LcacIE60&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=466.33)):

Yeah. I definitely felt the same way. Well, I felt that way, but also my parents. My dad is a bit, kind of more conservative, overprotective. So he was really paranoid, but he was really huge about exposure to other cultures. So even though he had his nerves, he still was like, "you should do it."

Leila Owens (student guest) ([08:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=8o7aJ5H_u32z5F4gxf9APulV2bGzZYUeSwtfwvvq99fnb0ETFBTJN7QUJYcS9wgNzBvUlpq6SzIhKohprjHNUNhzsBU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=485.27)):

So what made you choose Senegal as your program location?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([08:08](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=wWWBI_iJWjD6qFfzyHn5ARaqKwlPHSUeBPfjlZWUbe2wkcyzZmY8476ZO4izhr9v9GC3HnulIAKBQwEmDr5vna7T_70&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=488.18)):

I feel like upon meeting other Bridge Year students, this was like an unpopular thing, but I only applied to Senegal. Apparently the popular ones are China, India, whatever. I grew up, not for long, but I lived in Cape town, South Africa for a little over a year because my dad became a pastor missionary. So he took our whole family. But after that experience, I really wanted to go to West Africa specifically. So Senegal was the only program I applied to because I was like, if I'm not going to Senegal, I'm just going to go to Princeton. How about you?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([08:40](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ZkP85u3FZRCb669DsOOf284OfTt2coyJHNKvZoRb1oWyK9cNkkb3CriqGNvWQoQxwgcoNeIAdXdbEqdTyi-YgfQLCs8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=520.77)):

I fall into the other category of, you're able to rank all of them. And then I ranked them and I put India as my number one choice and then in the comments I said, "but I would go anywhere." I wanted to do India. I just had a lot of Indian American friends or friends that had grown up in India. In high school, I had been a part of an Indian dance club because some of my friends were choreographers, and I wanted to support them. And I just wanted to learn more about the culture, but I would've been very happy with any of the locations.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([09:16](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=PafG48zWXV3ExaTHU-YF424Lhs5idu52xG3sUPjFYRumpXgYFBnRUr3gdIfgL_OZhHmqKFzasjJCT7NBwqHGL_O1kb4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=556.8)):

That's super awesome.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([09:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=L5fv3FFyzr52SnAGO5QSa1bxrQt0We-lggwG9qb5wk0JYOb5jD6a-oLm4dNdGQZdqujQTHs28iFAR747qTs6BTA_vvw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=558.04)):

Yeah, totally. And I don't know, moving into the day to day, what was your typical day in the life of what you did on Bridge Year?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([09:27](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=nFagXeGx3aquajwsnmnDqlEZlUnCHViK0ZkWi1J0UaFuMNP0cMyPANMYC2-FZ9i4gMZGIY5v4TnapIg61syl53ejUeg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=567.6)):

I remember vividly landing in Senegal. I did not expect all of the sand, which I kind of felt dumb for not expecting that because everybody else in my program didn't seem surprised. So the first month of Bridge Year was definitely the most intense because they took us to the most rural areas of Senegal. And then after that, we transitioned to the city Dakar, the main city. So it was a little bit more what I was used to relatively speaking. And my “the day in the life,” once I got my service program, was I would wake up. I would do my devotions. I would sometimes get breakfast with my family though, depending on their work schedules, I'd just go get breakfast by myself and then I'd take the 40 minute bus ride to work. Sometimes the bus would not get there. I remember one day I waited for an hour for the bus and I gave up. And as soon as I crossed the street, the bus came.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([10:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=xkm06lCv_QXbuy2g6YzFzydt7FRFlJcDHF8Pjk5uXJN8fiDyu21aM3vi1oTLTVY6qtGjOPSfPBsqFVbYkrhsD9sdYJ4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=619.29)):

No.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([10:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=VdkSHjKWoLNKUnuMVgrclewYnP9Mn5VsKXuFdzx0JCxdfQzxN62IttJsijrgu1tQdnz2FftgLthfhcVGXLzt1PDz4ew&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=619.41)):

I just didn't go to work that day. So then I'd go to work, and then I taught English at the YMCA, which is not a gym in Senegal. It's a full blown Christian school. And so I taught in the fourth grade class, the preschool, the third grade and the second grade if I remember correctly. And I would just go in and do my lessons. I had a lot of freedom there and then I would come home and then early on in the program we had language lessons. So I'd go to the program house, which is the house for students on the program. It's like a little apartment. And so we'd have our Wolof lessons, cultural lessons, and then I'd go home, hang out, fellowship with my family and then have dinner. And then I also got plugged in with the local church there. So I would also go and commute to those programs throughout the week too. So it was pretty chill, after the first two or three months, I'd say I got a rhythm for myself.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([11:12](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=2wWjkpnKkBXzuzPY-OT1IOYQ6WX_TJeyUSpPQiXchM8ZI21Qe3I8N4zu08ApsMPrh7_x9SgnadjB9esVbCfrIotzzpM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=672.94)):

And then a little while after just being there for a couple months, the kids knew me really well. I learned a lot of the kids' names. I knew who the more stubborn kids were and then the more goody two shoe kids were. And I just kind of really got comfortable with the classroom dynamics and getting kids to engage, which was a really challenging thing, cause it was like 40 or 50 students in a classroom. And then with the preschool, I remember I got to just create a lot of different, fun resources for them. So those are really fun times. How about you, I'm curious, what was your day in the life as well?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([11:44](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Xu2Br3H1HvGX_J645J2nTzcbXKEn8dnIxhw54obUqqzXxmD7eg4W_uCxvvAY7aXVxGzCplsbPvoju-lM0W-znKvrKBw&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=704.63)):

Sure. I had a pretty different experience than you obviously. Different countries, different routines and things. I guess all the programs are set up similarly though. So we had the first month, which was traveling. Rather than sand and hiking to remote villages that way, we were in Uttarakhand which is a more mountainous region of India. So I was there looking at the Himalayas, hiking in the mountains. That was just surreal. But I think that the most special part is, as you mentioned, the longer stay in the city. So we were in the city of Udaipur. If I woke up early enough, I would get to have breakfast with my homestay family. But sometimes I was in a bit of a rush because we had Hindi lessons in the morning at the program house all together, after which we would all have breakfast together. Food India was all amazing. My work experience on Bridge Year was working with a grassroots NGO on a menstrual health campaign. And so I started off working in sort of like the main office of this NGO, and then I later moved to a more production area where they had women sewing reusable menstrual pads. So that was very cool too. I didn't really know how to sew before then. And here we are on these old machines with the foot pedal, learning how to sew a reusable sanitary pad.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([13:15](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=iN6csrS7K2hZuvApRW_5GWWWOKtq6SeiXUNjbsrfrlpU9IBQTRM_uVOE2jsRMynZ51YdXaEIFeNQnY_J1PdA8s_pONs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=795.83)):

Wait, tell me about the food. Did you have any favorite meals?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([13:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=LuZULnzLuiOgxUbq-p54Q4bWoxQUbm29ZxK7Gb5bCpjEuzVAUS4XoaynXtZ-86KuOVuzH94aeh-LGJknVNAtHIlekRU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=799.87)):

Yeah, so that's a funny story actually. My favorite food, it was either like a breakfast or lunch food. For me, I would start eating it at breakfast and eat through lunch. It's called an aloo paratha. So it's basically a potato pancake kind of a thing, but it's got dough on the outside. And so that was my absolute favorite food. And then my favorite snack is called aloo bhujia. And so aloo means potato. So it's like a little potato. I don't know, how do I describe it? Like noodles, I guess, but tiny. That's my favorite snack food, and I'd get really excited whenever we found this snack or anyone made this breakfast food for us. And so the other students on my trip noticed my love for aloo paratha and aloo bhujia, and they got to thinking, "hmm, what's the connection between these foods? Oh, potatoes. Leila must really like potatoes." When April came around, which is when my birthday is, I found myself at a potato themed birthday party. Which I mean, potatoes are fine. Are they my favorite vegetable? No.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([14:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=JTq1iK6sRl-tnVJVaTJ8UFwNl9JA0DyR0g4TZJASa3iNKsbyguKp3IavDbN6At-cnxRBLhxCsnpo-PDg_yCDHLHmfBU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=868.01)):

That's really funny. I feel like that was one of the challenges with the Bridge Year community. I don't know if you felt this, but at least for me, I felt really close to everyone after, especially after the first month or two, because we're all going through this culture shock. But that was definitely really fun because even the Bridge Year students I connect with now in my program, we still think back to all of those creative ways we really tried to support each other and make each other feel like family.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([14:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=NGE2tg8xj0JofSgXYCZVLxBSzapIuJqH4fa9mVngjbFFeXDv14vj8XaBqruvKu6x6BCZLzcpzF3Ge0juB9-Q6DfIvJI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=893.05)):

For sure, that was a super important part of the program is the support from the other students.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([14:58](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=qUiQt7U-N8nOjC8kW3lRdEO8rqhjLgM8DBW9HgyLfhBXFYm8zc993hpKl35QeBBXzTSDVhKm8ujOU3oDGBzFIzfvNOI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=898.5)):

Yeah.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([15:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=-DsblOUclLPzZsFV9Z-KLFTPl4wAboj6zra6qTghAJtaSsXLK6-7vMWnAl6nl4088xSGiZTZZtQO-rs1cw7yky9jJZs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=911.44)):

So how was your transition back to Princeton?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([15:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=2szk-lZMpLFOGMChc1x5sEDq91hm44NTPdc-bMIKD51mmMFZBxmxp2KEp3J_tFqxgq3dxI7gpJw_iPoJjmgl1VnQdBM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=914.08)):

I honestly don't feel like it was as bad as I thought it would be, because the transition first was coming back home. So I did not go directly to Princeton after Bridge Year. I went back to my home in Morristown, New Jersey and I would definitely say that was pretty challenging. And we talked about that during transference, which was kind of the last week or two of the program where we talk about that reverse culture shock, because that's very real. And so coming back, I definitely grieved, missing my homestay family. I still connected with them via WhatsApp and tried to message, but it's hard because you don't have that same bond of just being in the same location, getting to eat meals together. So I just definitely felt that. And then going to Princeton honestly, because all of the freshmen are all coming from different backgrounds. I didn't actually feel as much as an outsider as I kind of thought I would initially. And I know a huge thing that a lot of us stressed about, especially the math majors, which I'm most definitely not, but they were really stressed about forgetting their math and stuff. But yeah, I think overall the transition wasn't too bad. And I didn't realize how helpful it would be, but having the Bridge Year community, whether you actually go to the events or not, knowing that there are people there that have also been through this very unique experience for me was very comforting.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([16:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=z8inxVQmUQBzlhGXu-c1dGo19xjkKYtPShMNMVTnIXMZHRApYuxH-Pg-uXqILxIeRmQcK2scA_q-QrSdRGbHa2rY5po&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=991.47)):

Yeah, totally. I second basically everything you said. I am actually an engineering student, so I did have this fear about the math. And to be honest, Princeton math is hard, no matter what you're coming from. I struggled right along people that had been doing it all throughout high school and then didn't do Bridge Year. So I don't think it made much of a difference.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([16:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Z-Mx82igAr3VhSp1DYReXZHGWBIc21KPQw7XSWgClHOaI450r5z-RAHHdRZWCLfNKWFdVLZdk1OeSRxDeqAi7Iozk4M&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1019.36)):

Yeah. So for you, did your time on Bridge Year impact your choice of studies or did you kind of just keep the same trajectory you had coming out of high school?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([17:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=TsusfcbYVYSOXbYZ6draZlruq8UhhxMCGj-sGqcm5Jl0n5YJA00Yig2YB3V-5TETKQTiK8RMxpWEYoCYUqWfausCHOk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1031.6)):

So I came in applying to Princeton as an environmental engineer and that is what I'm doing. That's just what I'm very passionate about and I'm not quite sure anything could change that, but Bridge Year did sort of influence my classes outside of my major a bit. So for example, I took Hindi for the first year. And so that was really fun, a way to sort of feel like I was still connected to the culture that I was no longer a part of. And then another thing was on Bridge Year, you can pick an independent study. And so a lot of people picked Indian cooking, or dancing or something like that. I decided to go with stone carving because I thought that it was really cool. And when else am I going to be able to learn stone carving in India? So I really got really into it. I'd go every day after work. The highlight of my day was going to meet with my stone carving mentor. And so at Princeton I was able to take a sculptor class. Not working with stone, but I still thought that was a nice way to connect back to something that had been a big passion of mine while on Bridge Year.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([18:25](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=XhXmfImfM-VQ2F6l30Oy2gNCy59vAowH1WfPB4kCiBIKNBd9HvWKOIpGCukoj42la3v9KTn1GT63wl38vA0E3IYcBuE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1105.52)):

That's super awesome. I'm just curious about the stone carving. What kind of tools do you use to carve a stone?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([18:33](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=J6PetbPb1DJZg2cy2Qd5buIZkvV9gYJcmzyjXUXTH6ohp8P3DhCo9FPYrM3klZCHTImjiNwciOF8lOO0l6EMSTuGf7o&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1113.94)):

Yeah, so there's a progression, you have to earn your way up. And so when I first got there, I was like, "oh, I'm ready for my stone carving." And my method was here and first we shall make clay. We started by literally taking mud and breaking it up and mixing it in water to make the clay. And then I had to master using clay to recreate objects. And then after that I was given a hammer and a chisel and then I had to master carving stone with that. And then I got power tools. So it was a progression

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([19:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ety3Uog_Dw9eIxDb730uJvZlpDVulMC3X7ORD1Bv5shL0TWVfCciZ_msvOJLN7qZkqT2JExpjv3sQVVvfoIqEYRoeZg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1151.98)):

That's so cool. That's so awesome. I feel like for me initially, I was similar to you in that Bridge Year did not change the trajectory of what I felt like I would do academically at Princeton. But then come my end of my sophomore year, it actually did. I didn't realize how much being in Senegal and living in Senegal, it like shifted my worldview. So coming into Princeton, I was a EB major, ecology and evolutionary biology. And then I actually declared EB. And then the day after declaration, the declaring day, I went to my advisor and I was like, "no, no, no, I want major in sociology." But I really, really knew that environmental sociology was something I wanted to study and pursue, which I still am now. So I was really grateful for my advisor for letting me do that.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([20:11](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=1EXGMFc2S-MRFj1TkH7M-g7Mtvgpn-_nkQNSSm4_V9Ov2oJp-qbrYqYJSX7cGVXy7-Lja9zJuueb5fChOf6WTKomKPg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1211.91)):

I definitely feel like Bridge Year, for me, solidified my passions, completely shifted my worldview, and just how I think about things as an African American woman. I really identify as a black woman more than I do as an American. And then when I got to Senegal, I'm lighter skinned, but there's an ethnic group called Pulaar, that are also lighter skinned. And so once I learned the language and I started to dress in a Senegalese way, people would just think I was Pulaar or that I just had mixed parents, that my dad was Senegalese and my mom was white or vice versa. So that was really interesting to just experience. Even like the privilege, if you will, of being able to blend in there versus my white peers on the program. Even though my Welsh friend had much better Wolof than me, because they thought I was Senegalese, they would just always talk to me and I would be like, "talk to him." He was better, I don't even know what you were saying. So that was a fun, really funny experience. I remember at the airport, especially, they were showing so much favoritism to me and was completely disregarding my Welsh friend. I was like, "is this reverse privilege? This is so interesting."

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([21:24](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=tN4iwnNb0IZvoOX6o6lt5HqLQNniukr4LpbsdcXslt3oxavkhp_dhW0PDf61AkZDCBzdWwFjn61DvbZLkqDcQo8Su40&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1284.16)):

Before all of that assimilation happened, the people there really just saw us as American. It didn't matter whether you were black or white, to be American was to be wealthy and therefore you were white basically and you were American. So that was just really, really interesting to experience when I first got there. Cause I was like, "no, like I'm black American." It just didn't have any weight. So that was just very, very interesting racial, ethnic and political dynamics, being navigated on Bridge Year, which I didn't necessarily expect when I got there, but definitely completely challenged the way I thought about race and national identity, both there and leaving Senegal.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([22:03](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=QfKPsrFtHHNEhJrrMCZodALBOA4gVl-BScBnvab7I5rQ77Qx3tmuvyqBCJc9wfwvR9mP3Ik3NvD9wUQtFZ4DDRq8rsI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1323.26)):

That's very interesting. Were there any other challenges that you faced on Bridge Year? And I guess how did you overcome them or what lessons did you take away from the experience?

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([22:14](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=JS79PzQEeeKzhCTiHINd3xoruaN0iEZIryA8I1_Ox6FfdontY2Mo2aaKaV89QPUlGkK1ynXOtVIkv6erqy2cKdkbIW0&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1334.79)):

Yeah, so I experienced actually a lot of sexual harassment during my time in Senegal, which I did not anticipate. During the orientation, they talk about SHARE and they talk about the possibility of experiencing sexual harassment and stuff like that. But in my mind during orientation, I took it in, I took notes cause that's what you do, but I just didn't actually think that it would apply to me. And so when I got there and I started experiencing that in the first couple months of the program, it really, really threw me off. I did start talking to friends and then the people on the program about it, which was very helpful. I waited longer than I should have to share that it was bothering me because I kind of just felt like I had to put up with it in order to just make the most of the experience. But suppressing it, not wisdom.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([23:04](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=DuiD442H1dJL2ZoTHpu1X-TnyUzM0ec7vTdoQF8DSB_Vk4kN4purDohorzhHaoayatqveroo6p1qh4e2twAzXTI6i04&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1384.86)):

But once I talked to my homestay family about it, there were two guys specifically on my way to work that would just harass me every day. And it was very, very stressful. And so I finally talked to my homestay family about it, and then they went and talked to them, which I was really stressed about. I was like, "no, I don't want to cause problems." But they went and talked to them, and they stopped. They never did it again. And I was just like, "oh my God, why didn't I talk to you sooner?" But dealing with the emotional trauma of that as well, I had to get connected to SHARE, and that was very, very helpful. So I was really grateful for that resource and I'm really grateful that they talked about the resource even though at the time, I didn't think I would need it. I feel like for me personally, it's like you can prepare as much as possible, but ultimately everybody's experience is so individual and you don't actually know what is going to stress you out, like what is going to be something that you're going to need to process. It can be overwhelming to get, I feel like for me it was overwhelming to get all those resources at first, but then as the program unfolded, I was like, "oh, okay. In this moment, this resource would be great." And then having the program directors to help navigate that was really helpful.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([24:13](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=3HKY0-f2jiPhPKdFWsxqfdGmZzXORj7qhxuSXWU4hM6D5S7-otV2DdmXCBSOu_JnBlQk1bBydWobxKxfyu4mud_-BHU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1453.52)):

Yeah, totally. And I think that's a very valid experience that I know a lot of people have faced on Bridge Year. India as well, they have very different gender dynamics and cultural norms surrounding that. I'd never been cat called before I went to India. That was definitely a new experience, but something that you learned to live with or find the resources, like you said, that's super impressive that you were able to get it to stop. More power to you.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([24:45](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=cJk3kfyfjnSAWugomFa8Pv_w2bIZ2nZ3MtuEhhzpv33oK5uH-zTejtPSnKc8YPDyYRDaVSgtu1EC7m6RizWBBkbj9bk&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1485.58)):

At that location, yes. At least there. At least in my daily commute and stuff.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([24:51](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=MUyiECKtrupcbZjT0JNKuRByyEDiM0hhJmBdi9StcXmrCySyefwnQ-b832-qhKDjjonALQ_ArK5Clcl5GiC_Pzx2IE4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1491.69)):

Yeah. Totally.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([24:53](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=IAWEgMbpppaUxBcpiy4OMcchkaBFKzMh2Rdgr7afYe9_abusXDQCgSSA-4sFigKwlD12nqg8oQvTss3mf5Ttn-vEwRs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1493.26)):

Okay. So what was your favorite memory on Bridge Year, or greatest takeaway from the experience?

Leila Owens (student guest) ([25:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=xBa09mEwx8SAhFseLUXZSFhoeabhqfikarnaHgRi9UWmap4Prp7wjnjnSqZo7Rx5WjZGQl26sLqhsv5iW6VCOW0XZY8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1501.54)):

That's a really hard question because in nine months you make a lot of memories. And while the traveling and stuff was really exciting and I had never been backpack hiking before, that was an incredible experience. I think that what really was the most important thing to me was the relationships I built, long term, while I was living in Udaipur, going to work with my homestay family. And in particular, something I wasn't expecting was I had made a really strong friendship with this older woman who, while I was there became a grandmother actually. And so she was at my work site, but she wasn't one of the employees working on the same thing I was. She was more the caretaker, I guess, of the building.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([25:55](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=X93jsodiQ5uMYQ3A4MLANtqBF0sp27fR-LwAIOBR-Nb3X7mClp5OX356RRdwkjFrst-7oUr6dvGJhtGwP_gOrruwotE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1555.5)):

We had gotten really close because she's very good at teaching. She would teach the younger kids at the school, across the street. At the time my Hindi level was about at the same point as some of those kids, or probably a bit worse. So she took it upon herself to really help me with that. And towards the end of the program, she had stopped coming to work because she was spending time with her family and this newborn child. And so I wanted to visit before I left. So I went to her home and I brought these mittens for the baby. Of course the ones I got, way too big. This baby is a newborn and here I have some... I mean, they were meant for a child, but anyways, it was pretty humorous. It was just one of the sweetest things, because here I am meeting my good friend's grandchild, and I had never had that experience of making friends outside of my age range really, let alone different culture and age. So I thought that was a really special moment for me.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([26:59](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=TTBkrjQZSqK--OwvBr1p_gWh5Qfm5qo4XKZ5OUIVlQ2AppFiUe_JulQEZWO3tfw-Z8jtsypfwwm0iCTDKvWDGQtkHSo&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1619.64)):

That's so beautiful. I feel like that kind of made me think of the relationship I cultivated with my program director, the onsite program director, Babokar, that man was so wise. And I just loved having conversations with him. And he's a Muslim, I'm Christian, but our conversations about God and spirituality really, really impacted me heavily. And he would be a man of few words, but the words were powerful. He would say something and then you'd have to really chew on it. Like what did that mean? And that was really, really helpful and challenging for me. And I remember one vivid memory, which I think I'll always really take away and it still comes back to me every now and then, especially in seasons of transition in my life, but we were climbing up one of the two mountains in Senegal. I'd say mountain because it's not that big. But to me who was relatively out of shape, that was the biggest mountain in the whole world. So we were climbing it and I was climbing it with him, and I was just basically complaining about the whole thing. And I don't remember, I'm paraphrasing what he said, cause I can't say as profound as he said it, but he said "one of the gifts of life are challenges because through those challenges, you get to see from a more elevated view or perspective." Because we were going up there, but there was something at the top for us. There was this beautiful view that was only possible through that difficulty. And he was basically just saying there are some things in life, and really the good quality things in life, only come through challenge and through really pressing through.

Nicole Williams (student guest) ([28:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=t73z2sugv-HF6dlRZv6_pHNg6s-B6j79PYjbC1cvqx16ODZzZdlVCBb_mde2BggQ2iynATAcnPf6O2HSGFAIZUn_9xU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1706.79)):

And you know, I still could barely breathe all the way up that mountain, but I just had a whole new perspective. I wasn't complaining anymore. And I carry that. Whenever I'm in a season of transition or something, I'm going through something really difficult, I really think about that moment where I couldn't breathe, but I got it. You know, I got through it and it was so life-giving. Like there was this little waterfall up there, it was so beautiful. There was a whole other community living up there we got to connect with and meet. And so I definitely think that was one of my favorite memories and most meaningful memories.

Leila Owens (student guest) ([29:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=WW3vsnyFAWhxdd7uk1r9AZh9JkNwX5lIs0fDyJkxms-hwRmRm753e6OcODaDVNB9459M6Bqlz_0IU50U2FKLwY5-X7c&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1741.57)):

Oh my God. What a powerful takeaway. I think that really encompasses a lot of, not only what we went through on Bridge Year, but what we've been going through since the pandemic and Princeton in general. I think that's an amazing takeaway.

Vivian (host) ([29:22](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=cB-p3snyifzg9jegJaQ6wgJi7t1B3W6ZVuq_-7efhz2XNF06KkjfNNW4E27yoTOBLtzsssV9-KqdosdxTNZ3qQME8aE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1762.89)):

A year abroad with Princeton, powerful takeaway indeed. We hope you enjoyed hearing about Nicole and Leila's Novogratz Bridge Year experiences. And if you'd like to learn more about the program, have a look at the office of international programs website at oip.princeton.edu. As I said earlier, this podcast was created with prospective students and their families in mind. And with that, I'd like to direct all of our listeners to our admission website at admission.princeton.edu. There you can watch, read, engage virtually and learn more about Princeton university.

Vivian (host) ([30:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Tz64udcWcqDK55w_jy_lz4rTZZLDeGXBQq9W1EqxNAVdxDBy-1ZRJwrgrcexuXSoQ3nHdloOgK97fAcELzgrm_hQQUg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1805.61)):

Meet Princeton's audio engineer is Nick Donnoli of Orange Box Pictures, Mary Buckley and I, Vivian Slee, are executive producers. Bryant Blount is our co-host and consultant, and original music was composed by Molly Truman from the class of 2024 with additional music licensed by Sound Stripe. We'd like to give a special thanks to Nicole Williams and Leila Owens for their fantastic contributions to this episode and a big thank you, especially to our listeners for tuning in. We hope you'll join us next time on Meet Princeton.