

# Fordham Footsteps: Will Corrigan, FCRH '07 Interview Transcript

Sara:

Welcome to Fordham Footsteps, the podcast that features Fordham alumni and discusses their path from their time as a student to their current career.

Matt:

Some will have a direct correlation to the majors and others will describe other took some unexpected turns. Either way expect an insider's guide to certain industries, and some great stories from our esteemed alumni. I'm Matt Burns, Associate Director for Young Alumni and Student Engagement.

Sara:

And I'm Sara Hunt Munoz, Senior Director for Strategic Initiatives. With us today is Will Corrigan, Fordham College at Rose Hill class of '07. Welcome Will!

Matt:

Hi, thanks Matt. Thanks Sara.

Sara:

So you have a really interesting trajectory. You had a BA in Physics, correct?

Matt:

That's right. That's right.

Sara:

And how did you fall into physics? Were you a math guy in high school? What were you thinking?

Will:

Yeah, I was definitely a math guy in high school, I did enjoy physics back in high school. I did not plan on doing physics when I first came to Fordham, I was planning to go into law. So I started out as communications major and I changed my major at the start of junior year to physics, which was an unusual choice, as I had to meet with both the dean and the chair of the department, because most physics majors start on day one. There was a lot of physics requirements. So definitely an interesting choice.

Sara:

What drove you to choose out? Did you have a certain professor that inspired you or why did you go in that direction?

Will:

Yeah, I was really active back in high school in the mock trial club, and I always envisioned myself in the courtroom. One of my primary drivers to actually attend Fordham was the law school, and the potential to get in there after graduation. Through some of the networking events that were offered at Fordham, I was able to speak with a lot of recent law school graduates, as well as more seasoned lawyers. They took the gleam off that career, and really opened my eyes to the sheer grind that it could be in the beginning. And I definitely got the sense that, from a few of the folks that I spoke with... It made me realize, hey, this might not be what I want to do.

Will:

I took a pause, reevaluated my decision, and thought about what else I enjoyed, what else I could be good at doing, what I could envision myself doing. I realized that I really liked math. I really liked physics because physics took that math and applied it and made it more real. One of my high school teachers was really good at engaging the students, engaging me. I thought, hey, this is something I could see myself doing and changed my major with the intention of being a teacher.

Matt:

Oh, wow.

Sara:

A physics teacher?

Will:

Yeah.

Sara:

That's the dot I wanted connected, I wasn't sure where you were going with the physics degree. Ok.

Will:

Gotcha. Yeah. So physics degree. All along I thought when I changed my major to physics, I wasn't thinking about going in and being a physicist or working in applied science, whether at a pharmaceutical company, a chemical company, or even Con Edison. I wasn't thinking about that. I was really thinking about teaching, being a physics educator and applying those skills as a teacher.

Sara:

How far did you get down the path of teaching? Did you do any internships in that area?

Will:

I did not start any internships in teaching. I started with all my classes. There were a lot of classes to get through, just to get through the physics side of the degree, with no room on my schedule for education classes. I had a business administration minor, which I was able to maintain, which I'm very grateful that I was able to maintain. After graduation, I looked at the [New York City] Teaching Fellows. I looked at a few of the different programs that way. I was fortunate enough to have a summer internship while, I was making this decision, that I was able to parlay into a job after graduation.

Sara:

Mm-hmm.

Will:

When I got that offer, they had agreed, we know you want to be a teacher, so we're willing to help you with night school for your master's, while you work for us during the day. I did attend some of the masters classes at Fordham, the graduate school, but ultimately probably about two or three semesters in, I realized I like what I'm doing and maybe I don't want to be a teacher anymore. So again, within a couple of years, I had gone from lawyer, to physics teacher, to HR professional and no regrets so far.

Matt:

Can you talk a bit more about that? How are you applying what you studied as an undergrad to this current role?

Will:

Right now I am currently the vice president of total rewards at a bank. What that means, there's a lot of analytics that go into how people get paid, how you are able to motivate employees. What I was able to do is take all of the critical thinking skills I've learned at Fordham, or that I honed at Fordham, all of the mathematical skills, really digging in from a statistics perspective in order to understand how we're paying people, where their motivations are, how do we retain our talent and how do we attract new talent? That's really a lot of what I learned in the physics class. Physics is largely driven by math, and a lot of those skills I still use on a day-to-day basis.

Matt:

Vice president of total rewards is a pretty cool job title. I'm sure most students don't even know to aspire to that.

Will:

When I started, I didn't know anything about HR. I was working in the tax department as an intern and the head of HR was like, "You're good at Excel. We need someone who's good at Excel. You want to be compensation?" What's compensation? How do you do the bonuses? It'll be fun. And I was like ok. It was a good way, I think, for a lot of the folks that go into compensation, they're doing HR undergrad stuff and maybe getting their master's. They're so focused on this little piece. I didn't have any of that. I just went in with eyes wide open. What do you need me to do? Okay. I'll work on that.

Sara:

What about that business administration minor? Does that kick in at some point?

Will:

Oh yeah, that kicks in for sure. So, that was one of the things most physics majors end up having, a major in physics with a concentration within a part of physics, whether that's electrical engineering or applied engineering or nuclear physics. Because of when I switched my major, there wasn't going to be enough time for me to have a concentration. So I worked with the chair, I worked with the dean, in order to maintain that business administration minor. That has absolutely helped me in my career because it wasn't just the physics perspective. It was also the accounting perspective, the economics perspective, all of those classes that were the core requirements of that minor absolutely helped me

understand what I was looking at, from business results in order to help articulate why we should be paying a holiday bonus, why we should be increasing our bonus pool based on the revenue, why we should be increasing our base pay salaries based on the market conditions. So absolutely the business minor was a huge, huge part of that.

Sara:

I think that's great advice to anybody. Sometimes you just arbitrarily pick a minor without giving it much thought, but I feel like if you're a little bit more thoughtful and pick something that's counter to your major then you have a more well-rounded experience.

Will:

Yeah, absolutely. One of the things I've found just joining the workforce is, you're so focused in college on what your major is, what your minor is, you're not necessarily thinking about what do you want to do later in life. Having that wide bandwidth in order to understand, not just physics, or not just communications, but also how do you apply that to the real world? How do you set yourself up for success in a career? I absolutely think having that balance, and that opposite almost, right? You wouldn't think physics and business go hand in hand, but one of the things I've learned is, I'm not the only physics major out there working in HR. One of the very close colleagues on my team was also a physics major. I realized, hey, what businesses are looking for is critical thinkers. They're looking for people who can think outside the box, but also apply what they've learned in a real way. When you think about your minor, when you think about your major, that's definitely a big consideration.

Matt:

It's really just building a skill set that can be used in a variety of ways. I thought it was really interesting-- when you think of skills compared to experience, you really went out of your way to make sure that you were using the alumni network, at events, wherever it was, to talk about, hey, what's it like to be a lawyer? I think a lot of people end up going to law school thinking they want to be a lawyer, but not actually wanting to do the day-to-day work of an attorney.

Will:

Right.

Matt:

You went through that and you talked to people to find out what it would be like.

Will:

There were a few alumni I spoke with that scared me, they were like, "don't do it".

Sara:

Okay.

Will:

"I'm 55 years old. I still have these crazy loans. I barely see my kids".

Sara:

Nevermind.

Will:

Wait a second, this isn't for me.

Matt:

You went to the area of study that's so much easier, physics.

Will:

If you watch my GPA it started to drop off when I switched to physics. It took me a full month to realize that one of my professors was just writing formulas out of the textbook, right? As he's talking, I'm scribbling down, what is going on? I don't understand anything, but oh, he's just writing this crazy formula every day. Yeah, it was a lot of fun though. No regrets.

Matt:

I'm curious just in a similar vein, how has the alumni network been relevant for you professionally?

Will:

Professionally, I think especially earlier in my career, when I would attend the alumni events, obviously you would try and meet people, talk to them to understand, what do they do? Where do they work? How does that relate? I think that definitely helped me hone my networking skills, my ability to talk to people, complete strangers at work, in order to bridge the gap between different teams, right? I work on a human resources team, but you work very closely with folks from the finance group, the legal group, from the risk group, the compliance group, where at those networking events, you're able to meet people from all these different industries. That definitely helps you when you're in your career, when you're working in an office, to be able to relate to those other folks and be able to understand their perspective, and that might help you in your career.

Sara:

You were really involved in some extracurriculars when you were a student, you were part of FUEL, Fordham University Emerging Leaders, you were an acapella singer. How did your club activity helped prepare you for real-world career life?

Will:

That's a great question with the club activity, it's a balance, it's finding time for your clubs, finding time to do things outside of the core reason why you're at school. That's a critical component to being successful in any field, time management skills. So, working on those clubs, taking a leadership position in those clubs, was able to help me work on my time management, help me develop some of the leadership skills that I use now, in terms of helping us steer the group, what are we trying to accomplish? Let's set some goals and move forward with that. Those are things where no matter what field you're in, you're going to need time management. You're going to need to have a focus on your goals, what your goals are, and those clubs help practice a little bit for the real world.

Sara:

Anybody in your Fordham experience that really mentored you or gave you direction, any professors or administrators that you want to shout out?

Will:

Yeah. I'll shout out to Professor Fessatidis, back at Rose Hill. One of the challenges for me switching my major so late in the year, was I might not graduate on time. He was able to work with me on a one-on-one basis over the summer. I would go to my internship a couple of days a week, but I would leave halfway, go meet with him. I think it was three days a week, and I got through three classes worth of credits with him on a one-on-one basis. I would not have been able to graduate on time without his help. I forget the chair and the dean's name, but again, this was a big decision. This was a hard decision for me to make, and everyone at Rose Hill was very accommodating to, what are you trying to accomplish? How can we help you accomplish that, if you're willing to put in the work?

Matt:

Jumping back to the student experience for a second, I know you were a VP of operations for USG, right?

Will:

That's right.

Matt:

Any tips for current USG members, thinking about the kinds of things you worked on and the kind of stuff that they might be struggling with now?

Will:

One of the biggest pieces while I was at USG was, how do you spend your budget, right? How do you approve different activities and thinking outside the box? I would say have an open mind. Things have changed a lot since I was at Fordham, at the same time, things are very much the same, in terms of there still being some turmoil in our society. How do you pick projects to support? How do you focus your energies on projects that will be meaningful, not just to the students with a pizza party or a free t-shirt, but how are we going to enable our fellow students to become the best they can be?

Matt:

Well, any advice you might have for physics majors who may want to follow in your footsteps, or for any students who want to follow any part of your path there?

Will:

Yeah. I would say don't be afraid to hit the pause button. You're not locked in and don't be afraid to speak up. Don't be afraid to speak with your professors, to speak with your chairperson, to speak with the dean, right? Everyone on campus wants to see the students be successful. If you're open and honest, if you're willing to put in the hard work, they're going to be willing to help you. Whether that's giving up some of their time, for a summer class, giving up some of their time to meet with you after class, in order to figure out how are you going to do intro to physics at the same time, you need to take nuclear physics, right? So don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to think outside the box, right? Don't be afraid to network, to take those opportunities as they come.

Sara:

Don't be afraid to change your mind. It sounds like you say-

Will:

Don't be afraid to change your mind. Absolutely.

Matt:

Speaking of supporting students, if I remember correctly, you were a Founder's Scholar, right?

Will:

That's right.

Matt:

Can you talk a bit about what it meant having support for your education, and why it is you might give back to support current students?

Will:

Absolutely. The Founder's Scholarship had just started when I was a freshmen and I didn't understand at the time how important that was and what that really meant. As I grew over the years at Fordham, and attended, they have an annual dinner where they raise a lot of money, as I met with those alumni who were very big supporters of our program, I realized how important this program was to enable your students to focus on their degree, to focus on being successful, and hopefully giving back to the community as a thank you for all of that support. I try every year to give back to the Fordham community. When I can, I'll attend that dinner as well. It's just such an important part, showing how strong our alumni network is, and how many people, as they leave Fordham, continue to think back on their time there and give credit to Fordham for helping them become successful and wanting to help out the next generation.

Sara:

What do you think is next? Do you think this is it for you, or is there another branch of HR that you would want to explore?

Will:

That's a good point, I'm not sure. I definitely want to continue to grow into a leadership position, grow my team. I'm now managing a small team, which is great. I want to grow the team bigger and maybe I can be the head of [compensation] somewhere, head of total rewards, maybe head of HR one day, I need to try different areas. I've worked a little bit on the systems side, it's good, but it's too regular for me, right? I like a little bit of the unknown, a little bit of that challenge to keep me on my toes.

Sara:

Do you see yourself staying in the financial world? Everybody has a human resources department. Do you see yourself moving into a media company or some other world?

Will:

Yeah, maybe. I think it really depends on just what opportunities come my way, or I hear about. I think a lot of the financial world is moving into a financial technology world. So I think technology is one place where I could see myself. I've been working really closely with the technology group at my bank, as we go through a pretty big transformation. Still, understanding how modern technology works has been a real plus, but it really depends.

Sara:

Well great, Will thank you so much for being with us today. We really learned a lot about how you leaned on your different Fordham resources and how you have really become successful based on your Fordham experience. So thank you so much for your time today.

Will:

Yeah. Thanks for having me. This was great.

Matt:

Well that's another edition of Fordham Footsteps.

Sara:

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Matt:

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