Career Counseling and Support Services Practicum student Ben Rottersman recently sat down with Dr. Jackie Blount, Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio State.

Informational Interview:  
Jackie Blount, PhD in Social Foundations of Education,  
Master of Arts in Teaching (Physics Education)  
Bachelor of Music Education  
Title: Professor, Department of Educational Studies  
Program Area: Philosophy and History of Education

Can you tell me about your current position? As a professor of Educational Studies, I conduct research on and teach about the history of schools, higher education, and educational leadership. I served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Education and Human Ecology from 2009-14.

Can you please provide some background information about your different degrees and positions? My undergraduate degree is in music education. I studied to be a band director. My master’s degree is in physics education and my doctoral degree is in the social foundations of education, specifically the history of education.

Can you tell me about your different degrees and how you use the knowledge from all three of them with your current position? I originally wanted to be a high school band director. When it came time to get a job, though, the state was cutting music programs and there were no women high school band directors in my state. I understood this, but I thought that I would be the first, that I would break through that barrier. However, ultimately I didn’t break that barrier. I had taken some physics classes as an undergraduate that I had loved and thought I would explore that interest more fully. I then got the equivalent of a B.A. in physics and a physics teaching certification. I quickly got a high school teaching job. In my last year of teaching physics, we got a new superintendent who in one short year purged several of our African American faculty members, several of our women administrators, and people he thought seemed queer whether they were or not. So, at that point, I was a lesbian and read the writing on the wall. I decided to leave. I had taken a history of education course during my master’s degree and thought it was phenomenal, completely eye opening! I decided to enter a doctoral program to study the history of education, particularly to understand how schools could allow such discriminatory purges. Ever since then I have been systematically addressing some of the questions that came up in my teaching career by publishing books on the histories of these issues.

What personal qualities did you find very helpful as you transferred from the high school setting to the university? I would say that as a doctoral student and as a professor, the most important thing is having deep, burning questions that are of great interest, but that also may have broader social importance. If a person does not have such burning questions, if there are not matters that are important to them or injustices that they want to remedy or areas that are just intriguing, then academic work may not be a good fit. I also think it is useful to be inventive and creative. A lot of times we are not just following strict, formulaic approaches to problems. In many of our disciplines, we must be flexible and inventive to figure out appropriate ways of solving problems. When we hit obstacles, sometimes we invent new methodologies that become significant to other people.
What do you find most satisfying about your job?
There are a couple of things. One is that, as I mentioned before, I like to answer questions that are important to me. When I have worked on a problem for a long time and reached the point when the pieces come together, it feels almost like magic. Don’t get me wrong, though. It’s very difficult to find all the pieces, put them together, and make sense of them. When I do, though, I have a miraculous sense that I’ve accomplished something that may be useful to others. Another piece that I truly enjoy is interacting in rich and complex ways with students in my classes and with my colleagues here and around the country. I do not have to go far before I find myself in a conversation that grips me and might lead me to some question that I want to pursue.

What advice would you give to someone who is interested in similar fields?
I would say be willing to explore and take courses that are outside the norm of your discipline. If something is interesting to you, consider exploring it further.

What advice would you give to current and future students here at Ohio State?
The path that I have now, I didn’t even know it existed when I was younger. I didn’t know that historians of education even existed until my late 20s. It would never have occurred to me. I would urge people to consider pursuing the studies that are of the greatest interest to them even if they do not understand how it will be workable. But always, always, always have a practical Plan B and Plan C in mind just in case. I can’t stress how important this is. I think people are happiest if they can pursue ideas and paths that are interesting to them rather than just trying to please someone else.

If you could, would you do it all over again?
Given what I know now -- that it was going to be tough to get a band directing job and that I would run into problems in my school district -- I think I would do the same thing again. I love music and studying it opened up new ways of being and thinking that I couldn’t have imagined otherwise. It made me a better person. The same was true for physics. It opened up different parts of my mind and I thought there were connections between the two disciplines. The same was true as well of studying the history of education. I wouldn’t have wanted to miss any of these expansive experiences. I found an unconventional that makes me a happier person than I would have been otherwise. My approaches to research and teaching are unique because of that unusual path. Ultimately, I think this is for the larger good.