Kasha Ely: [00:00:01] Hi there. My name is Kasha Ely from the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina, and you are joining us for our very first episode of Data Night, and with me today is our very first guest: Tyler Steelman.

Tyler Steelman: Hi everyone!

Kasha Ely: Tyler, can you tell me a little bit about your role at Odum?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so I currently serve as the Qualtrics Consultant for the Odum Institute, and essentially, my role is hosting walk-in hours for people on [00:00:31] campus who want to come and troubleshoot survey design using the Qualtrics platform, and so we typically work with students, staff, and faculty, at all levels, who are either programming surveys for their master's theses or honors thesis, occasionally we'll get people from departments who are looking to implement some sort of workflow using the Qualtrics system, and we also run the Qualtrics email for campus, which is one of the busiest access points for our feature, [00:01:01] and we also teach short courses on Introduction to Qualtrics and Advanced Topics in using the survey platform.

Kasha Ely: Okay, and you yourself are in a Ph.D program at the moment.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so I'm in my fourth year in the doctoral program in political science, so I study American politics as my subfield, and then I also specialize in political psychology and representation.

Kasha Ely: And that goes right into the project that we want to talk about today. Can you tell me a little bit [00:01:31] about that?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so an ongoing project I've been working on with my co-author John Curiel looks at redistricting and gerrymandering in American politics and specifically at the ability and the impact of gerrymandering to inhibit the connection between legislators and their constituents, so we've been working on this project for about 2 years now, I think, and it's sort of gone through several versions and iterations, and we have a piece [00:02:01] out in the Election Law Journal that sort of sets the stage for the the research agenda. We have something coming out any moment now in the next month or two as a follow-up companion piece to that, but we have an ongoing research agenda looking into this question of: can district design inhibit the connection, this very, I guess, American ideal that constituents should know their legislators and should be able to contact them and communicate with them? [00:02:31] So, that's sort of the broad overview of the project.

Kasha Ely: And just to get a little background, how did you come to this project?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so it's a like an interesting, I guess, path that brought John and I together to do this. It started as in my master's thesis here at Chapel Hill. I study this thing called surrogate representation, which looks at the connection between a constituent and a legislator who don't share a district, so sort of the other side of this coin, [00:03:01] and one way I look at engagement across district is using campaign contribution data, and anyone who's worked with campaign contribution data might know that the most specific information you get as to the location of the contributors is their ZIP code, and so I reached out to John to talk to him about ways that we could think about matching donors to congressional districts using only their ZIP code, and we really started diving into what ZIP codes are and their purpose [00:03:31] and their history, and we found that sort of the main driver behind the creation of ZIP codes was communication, between groups, and so they were used as an organizing tool to help the Postal Service initially distribute mail to Americans, and we started to see these overlaps between ZIP codes and the earliest sort of conceptions of what congressional districts meant and sort of the organizing principles of those. We started to see this overlap between these two that was very stark. We were very [00:04:01] surprised to sort of find in ZIP code something that was mentioned in like early American political development, and so it was sort of an accident. We sort of found this from sort of combining my substantive interests and his technical skills at the time in ArcGIS and just GIS research, and so once we get together, it's sort of blossomed from there.

Kasha Ely: And real quickly, can you just tell me what GIS is?

Tyler Steelman: [00:04:31] Yeah, yeah, so GIS stands for geographic information systems, and hopefully I can do this justice. John is probably... hopefully he'll be fine with my read of it, but broadly, GIS is just geography and using geography to answer research questions that may have been previously unanswerable or just difficult to get at, but just thinking of things spatially and sort of the relationship between things in terms of where they're placed and where [00:05:01] people live and how they commute and those sorts of things, yeah.

Kasha Ely: And have you--is gerrymandering something that were interested in before coming to school? Is it something that you developed an academic interest in? Is it something that you're passionate about outside of academia?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so I remember... so I'm from North Carolina, and I used to live, when I grew up, in North Carolina's 6th Congressional District, which was represented by this man named Howard Coble, [00:05:31] and in 2010, so I guess when the Census was completed, and we were drawing new lines, I was placed in a new congressional district. I was placed in North Carolina's 12th, which is, when people think of gerrymandering, it's one of the districts that comes to mind. It starts in Charlotte, and it runs up Interstate 85 through Salisbury and my hometown of Thomasville, up into High Point, Greensboro, and Winston, and so there's this running joke that if you drove down Interstate 85 with both [00:06:01] car doors open, you would hit everyone in the 12th district because it's so narrow at times, and so that was sort of my first, I guess, experience with gerrymandering. I was in a heavily gerrymandered congressional district, and then, you know, over the last decade or so, North Carolina has been party to several lawsuits and cases about the districts and about how they're drawn, and so just as just being a voter and someone who lives in North Carolina, it's always been sort of on the forefront of North Carolina politics, and so [00:06:31] I would say it's largely remained in sort of an outside of academia passion up until the last two years, where my interests in representation have sort of been married with John's interests in gerrymandering, which is what he studies, what his dissertation was on, and so now it's sort of this outside passion that's spilling over into my academic work.

Kasha Ely: The way that our lines are drawn right now, you mentioned in your paper that it can cause problems for when someone's trying to contact their representative. Can [00:07:01] you tell me a little bit more about the implications there?

Tyler Steelman: Yes, so, you know people listening, you could sort of follow along with this. If you were to go to congress.gov and use the Find My Representative tool, the thing it will ask you for is your ZIP code, and so if you were to type in your ZIP code for for, you know, a lot of Americans you would type that would be given one member. So, just from that single piece of information, you could find out who represents you in Congress, but for many [00:07:31] Americans, it would give you several choices, two, three, sometimes four members of Congress that could represent you. You're then asked to give your address so that you could get a more precise location, but we actually find that a lot of people don't go through that next step to find out who their member is, which is made evident by member websites saying, if you put a ZIP code in on their website, it will tell you this is split between multiple districts. If you send us mail, and we find out you're outside of our district, we'll just throw [00:08:01] it away. We won't forward it to your member or anything like that. We just don't have the capacity to do that, and so for an individual who either is using their ZIP code on the website to find their member and potentially sending mail to the wrong person or that organizer who, you know, their neighbor is in their ZIP code is in there, you know, right next door in some cases, but is in another district. If they don't recognize that these lines are being crossed in this way, then they're potentially sending their mail into a void, [00:08:31] or they're contacting the wrong person. They're organizing people to vote for someone that may not show up on their ballot, and so there are implications for representation because of this because people are sort of using these tools that are meant to help them identify these people that represent them in Congress, but these tools are failing them either because they're imprecise, or these lines are being drawn in such a way that it sort of carves them up and out of neighboring districts.

Kasha Ely: And also [00:09:01] in your paper you discuss a lot about the history of congressional districts, and you call on the original purpose of them a lot in your writing. Can you touch on that just a little bit -- what the purpose was originally?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so congressional districts, in their earliest form, were intended to sort of facilitate the mutual communication between legislators and their constituents, and so if you go back to Massachusetts, which is actually where we get gerrymandering from. [00:09:31] It's the sort of the first gerrymander. Massachusetts congressional districts were designed in such a way that a single member could visit all parts of their district as efficiently as possible, and so they were largely drawn around counties, and counties were largely designed so that at the center of the county was the county seat, where official business would take part on behalf of the county, and people living at the outskirts and around the county could access that central point to do their business efficiently, so roads were [00:10:01] built to sort of connect people from all parts of the county to the central location. So, a legislator could just visit each of these county seats that make up their congressional district and easily sort of meet the people they represent and then sort of the opposite, so individuals can meet the representative. The first gerrymander, they drew the district in such a way is it carved up these sort of natural lines of communication, so it went through counties, and it didn't necessarily preserve entire [00:10:31] counties, so someone living at the outskirts of the county, their road system was designed so that they could get to that center point, but now that center point of the county was no longer their representative, so they'd have to go to another county, and so the roads weren't necessarily designed to facilitate this cross-county communication and travel, and so a lot of the burden of this first gerrymander was that people just couldn't get to their member as efficiently as they once were able to, which is where we sort of see ZIP codes being the overlap, [00:11:01] as they're designed for efficient communication. They're designed so that people can talk to one another and send information to one another, and so when the lines are split up in a ZIP code across multiple districts, what we see is people are just less able to know who their member is and sort of these downstream consequences of then not being able to contact that member and sort of perceiving greater ideological distance from that member, even if that's not true, are really hindering their ability to engage and interact with their government.

Kasha Ely: [00:11:31] So, it sounds like it almost has a cooling effect.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah. Yeah, you know, in the paper we talked about how when a ZIP code is split between two or more congressional districts, an individual living in that ZIP code is less likely to know the name of their member. They're less likely to contact that member, and they perceive greater ideological distance from that member, even, and we control in the paper for whether or not you're in the same party and the same race as you remember, so two things that [00:12:01] should help you know who you remember is and actually should sort of signal to you some overlap and interests. Even when you match on those very important demographic characteristics, you're still experiencing this, and so by dividing these ZIP codes up people are just sort of losing these very fundamental aspects of what representation is supposed to look like in the United States.

Kasha Ely: So, I just want to dig a little deeper into your methodology here. Can you tell me a little bit about [00:12:31] what you used in your paper to collect your data and analyze it?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so, I guess the principal data we use in the papers from something called the CCES, the Congressional Cooperative Election Study, I believe is what it's called, and so they run surveys very frequently on topics of interest to American politics. So, in that survey, they actually asked the question: do you know the name of your member? Do you recognize their name? Do you recognize [00:13:01] their race? They ask if you ever contacted that member, and in a few surveys, they asked the, I guess, the respondent of the survey to place themselves on an ideological scale and to also place their member on that same ideological scale, and so that's how we construct that measure of ideological distances from this self placement of the individual on a liberal to conservative spectrum and then placing their own member on that same spectrum. So, and this survey is really great because it has a decent sample [00:13:31] across all congressional districts, so not all surveys will sample across all 435 districts. Maybe they'll just pick up, let's say, half or a third in some cases of districts, but this one gives us a pretty good snapshot across the United States, and so there are several thousand respondents. So, that survey forms the basis of our analysis, and we also use data from the Postal Service for the ZIP codes to get the boundaries of the ZIP codes. We use data from [00:14:01] some researchers, I believe, out at UCLA who have gathered the congressional district shapefiles historically, and so we use those two to determine whether someone lives in a ZIP code that’s split between multiple districts or not. We developed a script that runs those pairings for us to let us know how split up a zip code is across congressional districts, and then we rely on methods that we've learned in our courses and the political science department, and we supplemented with courses here at Odum [00:14:31] to run the regression analysis to be able to predict whether someone knows who their member is based on these characteristics of where they live.

Kasha Ely: I want to come back to the resources Odum in just a second, but what is your argument, you and John's argument, with this research?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so at the end of the paper, we sort of make this suggestion that when individuals in the capacity to draw [00:15:01] districts are going to redraw maps for the every 10 years redrawing our maps, that they do so with respect to preserving ZIP code boundaries, so as much as possible, preserve that ZIP code inside of a single congressional district so that when an individual logs onto congress.gov, they only see one member when they type their zip code in, and then for the purposes of communication, from the member to their constituents, when they go to send out mass communications, if they're doing that by ZIP code or if someone's [00:15:31] campaigning, and they're sending out mass mail by ZIP code and organizing it -- bulk mail is as you typically do by ZIP code, that they can identify what ZIP codes are in their district, and they can effectively communicate out to those people that need to get that information. For challengers, this is really useful. They often don't have the resources that legislators in office have, and so, for them, if they're only mailing out to ZIP codes they know are fully preserved inside their district, they're not wasting mail going [00:16:01] to people who can't vote for them, and then, you know, if let's say they were to just not send mail to ZIP codes they know or split, well they're also not connecting and contacting people who could vote for them, and so one of the features of American politics is that challengers can come up and can sort of hold members accountable for their actions while they're serving, but if a challenger is having a difficult time knowing who to contact, then It's sort of depressing this process that we have held very dear [00:16:31] in American politics, so as much as possible don't split ZIP codes. That's sort of our takeaway message.

Kasha Ely: And we talked earlier -- you've actually reached out to policymakers with this already. Can you tell me a little bit about the response?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so when we talk about ZIP codes, it's not a topic people often think of when they think of redistricting and representation, and so after you get through sort of the initial "What?" then as we explained sort of the foundation for [00:17:01] American congressional districts and sort of the modern the modern role ZIP codes can play and sort of preserving that initial, I guess, that initial goal for what district-based representation meant people, really start to see it as a net positive for drawing districts, and so part of what we do--so in the the original piece was a part of a competition with Common Cause which is an organization that works in these cases. We had submitted the article [00:17:31] to them, and we placed in that original competition, and so one of the great things about that is it sort of places us inside of both an academic setting and in this policy-making setting so that we have the ability to talk to both groups about this, so one of our ongoing goals is continuing to show this to policymakers with the goal that what we're really trying to do is improve representation. That's our goal at the end of the day. We believe that district-based representation has a place in American politics. It's foundational to really what we do, and so we want [00:18:01] to help improve that as much as we can so that in between elections people are able to really engage with their government and do so in a way that's not impeded by these boundaries that we really could preserve if we tried.

Kasha Ely: And just to expand on it a little bit--

Tyler Steelman: Yeah.

Kasha Ely: How do you define representation?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, that is... you like, that's like the the the big question, I guess, for really anyone and everyone. How do [00:18:31] I define representation might be a better way to answer it. So, I like to think of representation as sort of the ability to do something, so it's not necessarily that a member represents my interests exactly. I don't think that will ever happen even if we're the same party, and we share some of these common goals and traits, it's not fair to think that I'm going to get 100% percent overlap in everything, but what I do have is the ability to talk to that person and the ability to work with that person and the ability [00:19:01] to engage with those who represent me in a way that I can sort of advocate for my own interests and do so freely. I can go to Washington and speak to a member of Congress. I can go to Raleigh and speak to my legislator. I can go on campus to, you know, the admin here and speak to them, and so I think representation is about keeping that channel open and keeping that channel accessible for all people, and yeah, I think that's how I would answer that question. It's sort of a moving [00:19:31] target. Representation means something different to all sorts of people, and there are different types of representation that could exist out there, but I think fundamentally it's about access and sort of the ability to communicate with the people that we elect.

Kasha Ely: This is a really hot topic in this state in particular, of course.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, absolutely.

Kasha Ely: What are some of the challenges of working in this space?

Tyler Steelman: So, as with many things in American politics right now, partisanship [00:20:01] plays a big role in this entire conversation because gerrymandering is often talked about, and redistricting is often talked about in terms of: what's the outcome? So, how many Republicans will we elect? How many Democrats will we elect? How many safe Republican seats are there? How many safe Democratic seats are there? And so, for I guess a process that ends up being zero some, you know, they're only 435 seats in Congress. We can't just draw more seats to give it one party, [00:20:31] you know, I guess greater access to the number of representatives we can elect. This becomes a challenging conversation because of how entrenched the two parties are in it, and so for every Democratic seat you draw, that's one fewer Republican see that is available, and then and vice versa and so in North Carolina, this comes up quite a bit. I guess, before 2010, we had a relatively equal number of Democrats and Republicans representing us in Congress. When we sort of leave 2010, and we have our [00:21:01] new maps in 2012, I believe it went from almost even to ten Republicans and three Democrats, and so a dramatic shift in the number of seats given to each party, despite sort of the electorate underneath that's staying relatively constant, and so gerrymandering and elections have implications for what policies get passed, for what's on the agenda, and so when you walk into a room, and say, we hand over this this proposal of ZIP codes, in our work, [00:21:31] when we constrain districting to ZIP codes, we actually see, in North Carolina at least, more sort of equality in the number of Republican seats and Democratic seats, and so, if I walk into a room, in this case Democrats will say great, this means more seats for us. Republicans will see it: okay, this means fewer seats for us. Now, we've sort of entrenched ourselves back into partisan politics, and so we try to stress that what we're doing here is making it easier for constituents and representatives to know each other and engage with one another, [00:22:02] that it's not just about the politics, but it's politics, so of course it's about the politics.

Kasha Ely: If you could, like best case scenario, just exactly how you want it to turn out--

Tyler Steelman: Yeah.

Kasha Ely: It goes that way, what would you like to see done with your work?

Tyler Steelman: I think the best case scenario, and this is an outside, this reflects me. John may have slightly different goals in mind further work. but what I want [00:22:32] our work to really do is influence the conversation and bring it back to: what is best for American voters? What is best for those who are trying to petition their government and engage with their government? We often talk about gerrymandering in terms of outcomes, in terms of who wins seats, and that's important. It's certainly important, but I think equally, if not more important in this process, is what happens the day after the election What happens when I have a serious concern about [00:23:02] the direction of the country, but I can't figure out easily who my representative is, or my neighbor's can't, or my friends can't or, you know, really anyone, and so best-case scenario, I hope that this moves the conversation into sort of what happens in the day-to-day going on of American government and sort of moves us a little further away from just focusing on who wins seats and how many.

Kasha Ely: This is moving [00:23:32] a little bit away from the hard research,

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, sure.

Kasha Ely: But I personally feel like there are a lot of people here who are now in our society, who maybe think there's no point in even trying to contact their representatives or just feel may be discouraged. Do you think that that's common?

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, I mean, I I do think so, and and this is I guess pulling from personal experience, you know, we're going through a pretty [00:24:02] tumultuous time in American politics and, you know, you can almost predict the outcome of a vote before it even takes place, and so people see that, and they recognize this, and because you can do that, you know, what role do I play calling my member of Congress, if I if I basically predict how they're going to vote before they even do it, and so, you know, I see that. I see that with students. I see that with friends. I see that with family. I see that reflected on the news, [00:24:35] and what I'll say to that is it doesn't have to be the case. You know, is this a chicken or the egg? You know, so like, we know this is going to happen, so we don't do anything about it. Well, if we were to do something about it, would that change? You know, our members sort of and legislators and representatives, are they making these decisions because they know that we won't do anything, that we won't come and speak to them? We won't talk to them? Maybe, and so, you know, what happens if we do start to communicate more, and we do start to engage [00:25:05] more? Do we see changes? Do we see our members reflect something different back to us because of that engagement? I would like to think yes. I would like to think that you know American voters and American citizens can petition their government and can see change happen when they engage with the process, but it's making sure people engage that is really, I think, the part of this conversation. It's important because once we get people mobilized and get people out there and doing this thing, that's when I think [00:25:35] we would see change. Yeah.

Kasha Ely: So, in this part of the conversation, to wrap up, I want to talk about you, specifically, and your Ph.D, Odum journey, so can you tell me a little bit -- how did you wind up at Carolina?

Tyler Steelman: So, I went to undergrad. I've lived in North Carolina my whole life. I think 20, 28 years strong in North Carolina, so I grew up in the High Point area. [00:26:05] I went to High Point University for undergrad. I was actually a music performance major and political science major there, not exactly sure what I wanted to do, and there are lots of stories I could tell about sort of how I ended up in political science, but my senior year, my advisor looked at me and said, what do you want to do? Like, why political... like is political science what you want to do for the rest of your life? And I think I said, I don't know, and so the next week, we met and she handed [00:26:35] me a list of schools and sort of programs, and she was like, I know you're not sure. I know you don't know exactly what you want to do, but here are some schools that have M.A. programs in political science, and so the one I selected from that list as the best fit was actually Appalachian State University in Boone, so I enrolled at App. I went to App. I was doing my master's in political science and getting a taste for the research process, and while there, I actually found out that there were several people who had sort of come from these small liberal arts schools in North [00:27:05] Carolina, gone to Appalachian, and then come to UNC to finish their Ph.D, and so, growing up in North Carolina, UNC is sort of... it's the school, you know. It's a school people want to go to. In my family, we're actually NC State fans, so it was a little hard convincing them that Chapel Hill was the right fit, but Chapel Hill had the right program; it had the right people. The first person I actually met when I came to Chapel Hill was the former director of the Odum Institute, Tom Carsey, [00:27:35] and we spent a lot of time, more time than I thought we would, two or three hours, just talking about UNC, the program, if I would fit in here, what UNC had to offer, and that was my very first time on campus, my very first experience with the political science department, with Odum, and it just it blew me away -- just the amount of care and time that someone would take to speak to someone who wasn't even enrolled who had only just applied. It was incredible to me, and it sort of [00:28:05] continued on as I went through the application process, was accepted, and then eventually enrolled.

Kasha Ely: And when did you enroll?

Tyler Steelman: Fall of 2016. Yeah, yeah, yeah. At the start of the last presidential election. Yeah, full circle.

Kasha Ely: And you have, how far are you through?

Tyler Steelman: So, I mean year four, so I have finished my master's degree here at Chapel Hill. I have defended my dissertation prospectus, and so now, I'm sort of in the dissertation [00:28:35] writing phase, and I presently work with the department administering our subject pool, so we actually have students here that take surveys for our faculty and grad students. We've recently expanded the pool. We've added new participants to it. We've sort of professionalized the process, and so my current role, outside of writing my dissertation, is helping administer that pool with Professor Anna Bassi in the department and making sure that we sort of have this service available to our faculty and grad students to ask [00:29:05] these important questions in American politics and give them a chance to sort of engage with respondents right here on campus.

Kasha Ely: Interesting, and is that something that is available to everyone on campus?

Tyler Steelman: So, we've talked about it because, you know, the the sort of the size of the pool is growing, and sort of our bandwidth to accept proposals from outside is growing. We currently only field studies for political science faculty and grad students, but a personal [00:29:35] dream is that this would be a place people can come to field, particularly grad students, who may not have the resources or funding to field a survey from another organization or nationally, like they can come to us, and we can help them pilot their study get answers to questions, have them test things in an environment that is either low or no cost and certainly hopefully less stress to them. Yeah, so it's a goal, maybe one day. Yeah.

Kasha Ely: Perfect, and [00:30:05] for our UNC poli-sci listeners, we will definitely include more information on that.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, absolutely. Our website is pssp.web.unc.edu, so yeah.

Kasha Ely: Tell me a little bit about your time at Odum because you have filled a lot of different roles here.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so I guess my first semester on campus, I saw a job posting for the Qualtrics Consultant position. Applied, was brought on as a temporary worker, just filling [00:30:35] in as needed, and then I started full-time that next summer, taking over the walk-in hours completely that period, and then last fall took over full time during the year as well, so I've been doing the Qualtrics consulting position for quite some time now. I've also been a stats desk consultant. I did that, I believe, for a year, which was a very different experience, a very different audience, very different set of questions, but I guess very, very challenging [00:31:05] for me. It was a new experience in sort of talking to students and faculty and staff and a new way, and then in the fall, I was brought on as a verifier for the journal verification team, working with data from researchers that deal with ArcGIS and GIS problems in replicating their data, so I've had many hats. I've been a Qualtrics consultant the whole time, and then sort of a few things here and there, just sort of stepping up and filling in as needed. [00:31:35] yeah.

Kasha Ely: What would you say your favorite role has been?

Tyler Steelman: Oh, it's Qualtrics. Qualtrics is definitely my favorite role. It's, I'll say, the other two are tied for second, but I love Qualtrics and working with people on their surveys because people will come in with these very sort of very niche issues with a survey, and sometimes I know exactly what's going on; other times, I have no idea exactly what's wrong with the survey, but what I usually tell people that [00:32:05] sets me apart from them is that I just know where to look. I know where to go and find answers that I can sort of provide them that they can overcome these problems, so I end up learning a lot and doing this position that influences my own work and makes my own surveys better, and so, I sort of a mass this collection of tips and tricks from just people coming in, and I also get to meet a lot of people, and I have a lot of sort of, I guess, I'll call them repeat customers, and so I see people on campus in other departments whether that's students or faculty [00:32:35] or staff, I know who they are. They know who I am. We chat. We talk about things, so I formed a lot of relationships on campus from this role that I don't think I otherwise would have had access to had I not been the Qualtrics consultant. Yeah.

Kasha Ely: And really quickly, for our listeners who might not know, what is Qualtrics?

Tyler Steelman: So, Qualtrics is an online survey platform designed to facilitate surveys, so I've been using it for years. I used it in undergrad, when I was at Appalachian, and now here at Chapel Hill, but it's [00:33:05] an online platform designed to help users Implement and field surveys, so, you know, if you ever take a survey, look at the bottom, sometimes you'll see “Powered by Qualtrics” on the bottom of it. If you see that, then you're working with the exact software that I help consult with every day on campus.

Kasha Ely: And an interesting tidbit, of course, is that Odum actually brought Qualtrics to UNC more than a decade ago now, spearheaded by our Assistant Director for Survey Research, Teresa Edwards, [00:33:35] and it has wound up blowing up and becoming a huge deal on campus for sure.

Tyler Steelman: Oh, absolutely. One of the great things about having something like the Odum Institute on a campus, and especially at UNC where we help bring this software on, is there's a single place to go to get help with these sorts of things, and that may not necessarily be something you would find at all campuses, and so having a single place where people can come and get help and have consultation on their projects, [00:34:05] I think is just a huge service to the campus community and really speaks to sort of this goal of the university to improve all research across all disciplines and doing it in a way that's accessible to as many people as possible.

Kasha Ely: And you've used a few of our services as well, I believe, we talked about before.

Tyler Steelman: Oh, yeah. Yes. I am a frequent customer of the Odum Institute, and so it was it was not uncommon when I was stats consultant that [00:34:35] I would help someone with a stats project and then I would, you know, our shifts would change over and someone new would come in, and I would go from the side of the desk being the consultant; I would just walk around to the front, and I would then be the customer, and so I was a frequent user of the stats desk. I've taken several short courses offered by Odum to supplement the training I received in my department, and then of course, I work with Teresa very closely on my own projects, just having a second set of eyes on the surveys [00:35:05] I make because it's never a bad thing to have a second set of eyes. Yeah.

Kasha Ely: And I think we've talked about this before: there might be this idea, sometimes, among grad students that you can't ask for help.

Tyler Steelman: Yeah, so I would put this in the category of the imposter syndrome and feeling that you don't belong because you don't know, and so it took me a little while to realize that I'm here to learn, and I'm here to be trained, [00:35:35] and I've enrolled in this program because there are things I don't know, and there are people who are qualified and skilled who can teach me, and so once I realized those things, it like really opened several doors, and so I realized that coming to ask for help wasn't a sign of weakness or not knowing it was just a sign that there was something I needed, and I was taking the steps to go and find that, and we're lucky at UNC that there are several resources available to grad students, whether it's in your department or out, [00:36:05] to find this information, and we're even luckier that the Odum Institute exists. It was one of the first stops when I came to UNC for my accepted students weekend. We came to Odum because they wanted us to know that that there was a place on campus specifically designed to help us with research and improving our research, and so I think that Odum is an invaluable resource to all grad students, and I hope that as many grad students as possible come so that we can expand our hours and we can add more consultants, [00:36:35] which is even more opportunities for grad students to get involved in sort of offering the service to campus. So yeah. I hope we see a flood of people. Yeah.

Kasha Ely: Absolutely, and I agree. Alright, so I think we're at the end. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention?

Tyler Steelman: I can't stress enough how important Odum is to UNC, and it's programs like this that I think are supported obviously by the university and supported by outside funds from donors that there is a there is a tangible [00:37:05] impact of the resources that go into a program like Odum. Dissertations are being improved, master's theses are being improved, honors theses are being improved, the research done by faculty is being improved, which I think is not only a benefit to their departments, but also the university and then just our collective knowledge as a society. We're really doing great things here, and I hope as many people as possible know about it and hear.

Kasha Ely: Well, thank you so much Tyler, and thank you to [00:37:35] our listeners for tuning in to the first episode of Data Night. Stay tuned, and we will have more for you soon. Thanks so much, bye!