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FROM THEOREMS TO TWIRLS

WHY EMILY LYON '23 PUT HER SCIENCE CAREER ON ICE SO SHE COULD SKATE FOR DISNEY

by [Kelley McGee](#) | June 14, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

When Emily Lyon received the offer to skate with Disney on Ice after graduation, she knew her physics career would have to wait. She couldn't pass up the dream she'd been chasing since childhood.

"Performing with Disney has been my goal since I was eight years old. Skating at the professional level is much easier while you're still young and able, so I knew I had to make this a priority and pursue it immediately after college," Lyon said. "I knew I couldn't wait for the perfect moment or timing to present itself. I had to seize the opportunity and make my dream happen."

Lyon has spent the past year with the Disney ensemble dazzling enthusiastic crowds across the United States. Now she's heading to Europe, Australia, and Asia for the next leg of the tour. The travel is extensive, and the performances are physically demanding and involve multiple costume changes during each show but Lyon knew from the very first performance she was right where she wanted to be.

"I will never forget the feeling of running out onto the ice for the opening number after working so hard for so long to get there. It felt amazing to perform for such a large, energetic crowd. Every performance is magical in its own way, but my very first performance was by far the most special."



It's clear how much Lyon loves her job but she admits that her career choice stands in stark contrast to her fellow Class of 2023 physics graduates, who have mostly skated into research and teaching. While some might find it puzzling that a high-achieving physics student like Lyon would pivot to a career on ice, perhaps Newton's three laws of motion—mastered by every physics student—holds the key to understanding her unique journey.

Alumni Testimonial: Emily Lyon



1. AN OBJECT WON'T CHANGE ITS MOTION UNLESS ACTED UPON BY A FORCE

Lyon's object, her longtime dream of skating with Disney on Ice, never wavered throughout her four years at Christopher Newport. But she knew how competitive it would be to land a professional skating job. Her determination was the force that drove her to train hard daily in nearby Yorktown at the Chilled Pond Ice Arena, all while juggling the demanding requirements of the physics program.

"Most days I would split my time between the classroom or library, and practicing at the local rink. I was fortunate to have supportive and understanding professors who provided me with the support and resources I needed to pursue my dream and still succeed academically," she said.

"Emily is a very bright young woman, but that's just a small part of what made her an absolute delight as a student," said Physics Professor Dr. David P. Heddle. "She was diligent, responsible, respectful, and curious. And the icing on the cake is that she is truly joyous with an engaging sense of humor and quick smile. I am not surprised that she is first pursuing a career as a professional ice skater. And if later she pursues a career in physics, I will not be surprised to hear of her scientific accomplishments."

2. FORCE EQUALS MASS TIMES ACCELERATION

In a sense, the force of Emily's training efforts, combined with the acceleration of her practice sessions, contributed to big improvements in her skating skills (mass). And all these efforts culminated senior year, when she landed that audition and job offer from Disney. Emily says her physics training has been useful in not only understanding the mechanics of her skating, but also in learning to excel in a professional environment.

"The Physics Department strongly encouraged studying and collaborating with fellow physics students, which taught me how to thrive in group environments," said Emily. "This skill has been really useful on tour, where people from all different backgrounds work together to put on the best show possible. My time at Christopher Newport has also taught me about adaptability and perseverance, which are both extremely important in a show environment. When you put on as many shows as Disney on Ice does, unexpected challenges are bound to occur. It's important to be able to adapt to changing circumstances on the road."

3. FOR EVERY ACTION, THERE'S AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION

As in physics, where every action has a reaction, Lyon's actions, her dedication to her studies and skating, were met with equal and opposite reactions: the unwavering support from her professors and the CNU community. This balance of effort and support allowed her to excel in both fields. Emily is grateful for all the help she received while chasing her dreams, and says it influenced her perspective on goals and achievement.

"I'm so appreciative of the people who have supported me in all my pursuits. Since I started touring, I have realized

that true success is less about prestigious titles or money in the bank than it is about the satisfaction that comes with accomplishing your goals and dreams. While I am so happy I've been able to achieve my dream of touring with Disney on Ice, I believe true success comes more from a sense of internal accomplishment, rather than external goals. But this experience has given me so much. I have made connections and learned valuable life skills that will make me a more valuable candidate when I do pursue a job with my physics degree." Lyon hopes her experience will reassure current and future Christopher Newport students that it's okay to veer off course and pursue passions that may not line up with everyone else's expectations.

"My advice to students is pursue your passions, go for it! My time touring with Disney on Ice has allowed me to make connections, gain experience and learn life skills which will benefit me when I look for a physics job," said Lyon. "I really did get so much out of attending Christopher Newport. I loved the sense of community, bumping into friends on the Great Lawn, and singing with my acapella group. Although I am no longer a student on campus, I am fortunate enough to be a part of a new kind of community in skating, and I will always be a Captain at heart!"