

*Hello and welcome to COM-Versations, your School of Communication podcast. Here in the School of COM, we know how to make Fell Hall fun. Tune in often to hear the latest COM-versations among faculty, staff, and students. After all, we're the best in the Midwest for a reason. I'm Julie Navickas, one of your hosts and today I'm joined by Dr. Lance Lippert and Dr. Megan Hopper, Program Coordinator of the journalism major. Welcome!*

MH: Thank you for having me!

JN: Yeah! I'm excited!

LL: I feel like a guest today, thank you.

JN: That's how I introduce you every single time.

LL: That's true, I, I think I'm...where are we, by the way? We're Fell Hall.

JN: We are.

LL: Okay, but I've been hearing strange noises too. It's not me. I'm just saying. So, I really think this place is haunted. I mean, you've been in the building for a while, a couple of years, off and on, and what do you think?

MH: Sure.

LL: Okay! Is it newsworthy? Is it fake news? Let's see. I've actually seen well, I hear voices, but...I've assumed it was Jesse and over at Williams Hall, Mrs. Milner. Miss Milner. Miss Milner, yeah...she's there. I'm just saying.

JN: Just like Jesse's here.

LL: Do you believe in ghosts?

JN: Yeah.

MH: Maybe.

LL: Well, like I tell people, sometimes the 70s catch up with me. That's all I can say. And if you don't know what that means, you're all not old enough...secondhand smoke, so! We have a guest, another colleague and the program coordinator and that does many other things but journalism. Thank you for joining us, yeah, that's good. So, lots happening relative to journalism. And things have changed a bit over the years since, jeepers even just five years, even a year. But our program has stayed consistent. We've had a journalism program here for a while, haven't we?

JN: Yeah, absolutely.

LL: I'm trying to think how long.

JN: I don't recall, but.

LL: But the Vidette just went online, right? Now and...

MH: Not just, it's been online for a while.

LL: Right, only online.

MH: Yes, it is solely online.

LL: Solely online. Let me...okay here's the show of how things have changed. Okay, you ready? Reggie told me to tell this one to you. What is black and white and read all over?

MH: Newspapers.

LL: Yeah, not anymore, I wonder, not the Vidette. And I still like the hard copy, do you guys?

MH: Yes!

JN: I prefer it, yeah.

LL: I still do too, but I guess we're losing that is, so this seems inevitable for the Vidette to do that, I guess, but thriving online, right so why was maybe that decision made then we'll get...I wanna hear a little bit about...we're going to talk about you but that was a necessary decision wasn't it, especially at colleges and we see some commercial papers do that as well.

MH: Yes, printing is very expensive and I think the Vidette saw that students are used to reading things online, on their phones, on their computers, and so it was both just a monetary decision as well as looking at reach and spread and the capabilities that social media and websites can have that the print copy just doesn't have that new audiences are used to being able to access things online.

JN: Yeah. I think it's consistent with a lot of other things that we've seen, and you know, things change so rapidly that you know, even with its long-standing history, it's still successful, just in a very new capacity.

LL: Speaking of long-standing history, both of you have been students here. When did you guys, you went to school here when? I'm trying to think, before or after you.

MH: Before. So, I received my undergraduate degree in 2002 and then I went off and worked as a journalist at the Pantagraph here in town for a couple of years and then came back and got my masters and graduated with that in 2006.

LL: Okay, so you, so you were after that, right?

JN: Well, we may have overlapped just a little bit, which I didn't know until just now.

LL: Well, we're finding out the people you went to school with, and it's a big enough program that we don't always know, right?

JN: That's true. I came here for my undergrad in 2006, so we've probably overlapped just a little bit.

MH: Okay, yes!

JN: That's fun!

LL: You know when she was at, when she left and started working before, she came back and got her masters, then went to Missouri for her PhD. I was...caught a bunch of heat for giving Brent Simonds...grief about Oklahoma, but being from Kansas, we all know that it's meaningless, right? But you know, her nickname used to be Scoop!

JN: Oh really?

LL: Because it was like, yeah, she would. Everybody thought she worked at an ice cream store because she was scoop!

MH: Fake news.

LL: Scoop, scoop.

JN: Your face says it all.

MH: Fake news.

LL: Anyway, I'm...but you got some...again, a neat thing that you bring with you is this practical experience and reality back into your classroom. So, you've been working with our, I guess we can talk about the journalism program? Okay, well, then I'll let you ask. I'll put it on the tee for you.

JN: Okay...Megan, tell us about the journalism program.

LL: Swing away!

JN: Thanks, Lance.

MH: The journalism program is amazing. I can say that as both a former student of the journalism program as well as an instructor for the past eleven years in the journalism program and now taking over as program coordinator. And I see the amazing things that our students go off and do in the real world and as well as what they're doing in the classroom and the amazing opportunities that they have not only here in terms of campus media, but then also the internships that many of our students are engaging in and doing fantastic work and several of them then actually go on to get a full time job at the places where they intern, so that shows the quality of work that they're doing at those organizations. I am one of those individuals that can speak to that as well because I did an internship with the Pantagraph, and it led to a full-time job with them upon graduation. I feel like the journalism program here is very well-rounded, and it gives our students the capability to dip their toes in the water of all the varying

forms of media that we have now available to us. And it also then allows them to specialize in areas that they like. When I came here as a student, I was dead set that I was going to be a radio DJ. And nothing against WZND, because it's fantastic. I just found that I wasn't very good at it. At no fault of WZND, it was my own. And I took a basic reporting writing class, and I realized this is what I love to do. I'm a writer, not a speaker. Obviously, you can tell in this podcast, but that ability to try both and to be exposed to both and I also then was able to take a broadcast class and realize no, I do not have a face for broadcast. Getting that experience, getting to test it out was phenomenal and amazing to me. And I think that that's what we provide our students with, is the ability to test things out and then to be able to specialize when they find their jam.

LL: Speaking of jam, I think her air name was DJ Scoop.

MH: Another set of fake news.

LL: No, but it is interesting how we kind of fall in the line and find out what's interesting to us. But now it's interesting as we had to pick ways to go. A lot of it has, I'll use the word converged back together and I guess that's how things are working. I mean, it's not just happened, but we're, is it really, are we converged, are we a converged media? Is this what it is about? Everything kind of goes into the one platform?

MH: Yes. And I think that it's almost expected now to have converged content, to have video, audio and written form. And not only that, be able to have links where you can just go to other sites, you know, at the click of the mouse or the touch of the screen. So, I think if you don't have that, it's almost jarring to many readers that it feels like something's lacking.

JN: Oh, absolutely. I mean, it's part of the full experience is getting to choose which type of media you want to consume, how you want to consume it. Yeah, things have changed.

LL: But I, as much as things change, what I like about our program and still the business, there are still some basics I would imagine. You know what does everybody still have to do well to be successful in journalism? I'm thinking of something, what do you, is there one or two things that we still have to do that same now as it was maybe 20 years ago?

MH: Critical thinking. And I think it, you even now have to be even more of a critical thinker because we have more information accessible to us now more than ever. But there's many pros of that. And that's great, but it's also scary because there could be people saying your nickname was Scoop and it's completely not true. But, you know, to someone who's not following through and doing their research on that, they might just take that at face value.

LL: So, this idea of critical thinking, good research, and I'm going to mention writing. I've seen your writing. I know you're an excellent writer from when you were in school here and what you still do. But teaching writing is something that's really critical as well, right? Being a good writer.

MH: Yes.

LL: And not relying on this new stuff. AI, I mean which is a whole nother conversation. She just says, *Oh my gosh!* But so, writing is still a core part of our curriculum, right, yeah?

MH: Yes.

LL: Uh oh!

JN: The ghost is here. Jesse Fell.

LL: Wow! No, that one was me. I just kicked over my thermos of hot toddies—hot *coffee*, no water. I'm sorry. I don't drink when I work...*We're staying on task here, will ya!* I put it on the floor—

MH: You know you don't work much.

LL: I don't, I don't. I think I do when I wake up. But I put this on the floor so it wouldn't be in the way, and I kicked it over, sorry. So, our curriculum is important, but one of...the big part of our curriculum is we mentioned the Vidette and certainly that's a huge part of what we do, and we have a new advisor with the Vidette now, don't we?

MH: Yes!

LL: Who is that?

MH: Kevin Capie, yes.

LL: Quite a line of people that have done that over the years and quality people. So, do a lot of the people that study journalism work at the Vidette normally? Is that how that works?

MH: Typically, if they're interested in print, which obviously the Vidette as we just talked about is convergent now. And so, they're, they have much more capability than just the print. But typically, students who are interested in or find a joy in writing gravitate towards the Vidette. We have many students who are well-rounded and work at WZND, TV-10 and the Vidette and again are getting that full experience if they can find the time for it in their schedule.

JN: It's really impressive. I have several students in my class this spring in my feature writing class and several of them are working at the Vidette and so their writing skill sets are just incredible. I'm just blown away by not only how well they can tell a story, but the way that they can churn them out so quickly too. They get excellent training over there.

MH: Yes.

LL: Well, why should...what will somebody see if they're considering coming here to study journalism or what would they be seeing that they might not see somewhere else? Or why would this be a benefit? We know it's changed just a bit, but still, it's a very...people have a lot of interest in the major.

MH: Yes, I think what we have here that is fantastic is again the state-of-the-art facilities within our campus media, the opportunities that our students are given to get that real world hands-on experience and I can't count the number of students who upon graduation talk about how much they learned by doing, and I think that again also the opportunities for them to do internships, but not only that hands on practical experience, we're also very focused on giving them the theoretical background. It's incredibly important in this day and age for our students to know about media ethics and media law, and also the effects of the mass media and be able to recognize fake news, as well as to not engage in spreading fake news either.

LL: She looked at me! Well, I don't blame you for...no, that's a great point, and I want to dispel a myth or a rumor that people don't study journalism anymore. I mean we have still some great programs around the country. We have a great program, but I've heard some people say, *What? You can still go to school for that?* I mean that's a, that's a myth, something that still is useful and very interested to students, I think.

MH: Yes, I think that is definitely an issue and we talk about that in the classes that now we have so many individuals producing what they're calling news and saying or being considered as journalists when they're not and they don't have the formal training or the background in it, and that's dangerous. So, I say to my students, they have a responsibility to go out in the world as trained journalists and show people we can trust journalists again. There are actual credible, responsible journalists doing good work out there that is enhancing and sustaining democracy and it's often overlooked. And I think a lot of people want to just blame the media for all these problems that we have and it's our responsibility to change that...change that mindset.

LL: Well, that's powerful, especially if we look around especially over the last maybe decade and not just the political cycle but even you know domestically and globally, we just see so much misinformation and true journalists are needed. We need that to protect the truth. And it's something that I think we do well here as we prepare our students, so.

JN: Without a doubt. And Megan, correct me if I'm wrong, but you just appeared on an episode of PBS publication, correct?

MH: Yes! It was the local, or the Peoria, excuse me, PBS affiliate, WTVP, and they have a show called *At Issue* where they choose a particular newsworthy, timely topic and they have a panel of individuals discuss. And my topic was misinformation and fake news and the new Illinois law, state of Illinois law that there has to be some form of media literacy curriculum for high school students. And that is something that I think is incredibly important and I would love for that law to be expanded to be, you know, K through 12. And certainly, we teach that here. That's another benefit of the journalism program is we have a class in news literacy that I think everyone that attends ISU should take, but it's incredibly important for journalists and journalists majors to take as well. But yeah, that's...

LL: Yeah. And that's what's cool, we'll see some of our faculty and folks out and about and staff and colleagues. And yeah, really nice. I think I saw part of that. Yeah, you were nice. Did a nice job.

MH: Thank you!

LL: Yeah. So, we go all the way back to where I mentioned Jesse Fell, you mentioned Jesse Fell and he knocked over my thermos. So, when did this, when did this all start here? Do you know, Julie?

JN: Well, maybe we should ask Megan.

LL: Oh!

JN: Let's go back to the very first issue of the Vidette.

MH: Okay, I think, Lance, you were a freshman? In Kansas in 1848?

LL: No...

MH: 1888!

LL: Maybe '88, yeah, 1848. I was still in junior high in 1848!

MH: Were you?

LL: Yeah. So, 1888. So, this, Vidette's been around almost as long as the school itself, I mean talking. Yeah.

JN: Mm-hmm.

LL: Wow. Have you looked at some of those early issues?

MH: Not that far back. If they have them in good condition, good for them.

LL: That'd be fascinating. I've seen copies or photocopies or...

JN: Digital scans.

LL: Digital scans, yeah! There's just some incredible stuff. And you can see how that's even changed. I mean, even before we had newspaper, go back to the printing press. I know I'm on another track, but I mean technology keeps changing. And it makes sense that we're digital now compared to where we've been, so 18, what was that?

JN: 1888.

LL: Wow!

JN: I know, it's incredible.

LL: Been a big part of McLean County and what we do here at ISU.

JN: Without a doubt, yeah.

LL: Well, I've seen a few college newspapers around the country in my time and I've always been very proud of what the Vidette's done. And just being an old school kind of person, I miss the hard copy. But fiscal and programmatic responsibilities, things come up right, so. Did you have another trivia question for her or did she, was that the only one she can miss?

JN: Well, I mean, I think we kinda, we covered it, when the last printed edition was of the Vidette.

MH: 2021.

JN: 2021. Not that long ago.

LL: In 30 years we'll be talking about that too. Back in '21. How much do you...are we getting ready to wrap up? You gave me that look.

JN: Yeah, I did give you a look.

LL: One more question. How much...what is your favorite source for news and information? Is it just one or do you have multiple sources? Just look at different places?

MH: Yes, I think that's critical. That is using your critical thinking and media literacy. News literacy is to not just have one favorite source. For me, I try to get a diversity of news sources. But I do love NPR, WGLT here in town is great. I still subscribe to the print copy of the Pantagraph.

JN: Loyalty.

MH: So yeah, I do have some loyalty and I feel like there's quality local news. But then I go to our campus media because I feel like our students are doing the best job of covering the issues that are directly affecting me on ISU's campus in Bloomington-Normal. So certainly, the Vidette, read that daily. Subscribe to the newsletter if all of you don't, haven't subscribed in the newsletter, please do that and follow them on social media, but also WZND, TV-10. Those are my main sources. And then nationally, NPR and...yeah.

LL: So, yeah, there's a lot of good stuff around. We just have to look for it. So, I just wanted her to mention the newsletter and you know, Vidette again too, so.

JN: Absolutely.

LL: All right, well, listen, it's time to go. I got that second look.

JN: You're just blaming me at this point.

LL: I am! I'm a blamer!

JN: Well, Megan, thank you so much for coming on.

MH: Thank you for having me!

JN: We really appreciated the conversation. It's just nice to learn about all of our incredible faculty and what they bring to the program. So, thank you. And we're getting ready to wrap up our season one of COM-Versations, our podcast. So, our next episode will be with Dr. John Baldwin. He's gonna come in and talk a little bit about our international efforts here in the School of Communication and that'll do it for our first season.

LL: Yahoo!

JN: Thanks for listening, yeah!

LL: See you soon. Thanks.