

*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 conversations among faculty, staff, and students. After all, we're the best in the Midwest for a reason.*

JN: I'm Julie Navickas, one of your hosts, and today I'm joined by Dr. Lance Lippert, Professor of Communication Studies, and Dr. Stephen Hunt, Director of the School of Communication. Welcome!

LL: Hello! How are you?

SH: I'm good for a Monday. It's a pretty good Monday.

LL: We're recording it on a Monday, but who knows when they will hear this? If, in fact, that is the case. People have trouble with Mondays. Maybe we should go to a four-day work week, Steve, what do you think?

SH: Yeah, I'm all for it. Four-day work week, for sure.

LL: So, these are some of the conversations you might hear in the hallways of Fell Hall. This is where we have the most fun.

JN: Absolutely!

LL: And you're gonna go, *what are they talking about?*

JN: I don't think we even know.

LL: No, no we don't. And what you hear in the hallways don't always stay in the hallways of Fell Hall, but it's all good stuff! Well, listen, we'll talk to Dr. Stephen K. Hunt, or just Steve as we call him. But he is Executive Director of the School of Communication, and we are all a part of COM; yeah, we're all colleagues here. How are you today, Julie?

JN: I'm doing pretty well. How about yourself, Lance?

LL: I am ok. I'm feeling a little, you know...uh, but I'm working on it. Like he said, it's the first day of the week coming back and crazy weather, so I'm doing ok, yeah, thank you for asking. You're the first person in about a week that's asked how I'm doing.

JN: Really?

LL: So, yeah, you really want the truth?

JN: Sure!

LL: I'm great. Because I'm here in the School of COM! So, we're going to be talking to this fellow – a lot of people probably know him. He's been around since before 2000 and he also is a fellow Kansan.

SH: Yes! Southeast Kansas!

LL: I've been there. Have you ever been to Western Kansas?

SH: I have been to Western Kansas!

LL: Have you ever been to Kansas?

JN: I have not!

LL: It's the second-best place besides Illinois, right where we're at.

SH: Right!

LL: So, what are we looking at today? This is our second in the series; again, just for everybody, we're doing this everything School of COM, COM-versation, so today, we're trying to bring information about the School, and we thought for our second show we talked to Steve about this, right?

JN: Yeah, absolutely! So, Steve, we're gonna kind of look to you. Why don't you share a little bit about your history with the School of Communication?

SH: Absolutely. Yeah, so Lance mentioned that I came here before 2000; it was actually 1998. So, 25 years here at Illinois State University and, I'll be totally honest, that at the time my wife was completing her PhD at Carbondale and we thought *well, we'll go there for a couple of years and then maybe move along* but we fell in love with the School of Communication; it was a Department of Communication then, eventually became a School, and with Illinois State University, the campus, and the community and we couldn't leave, ever, so but I came here in 1998. I was hired to be Co-Director of our introductory public speaking course, COM 110, that everybody loves, universally, as one of those requirements of general education and I spent the first ten years doing that and then I moved into the role of Associate Director of the School and Director of Graduate Studies and then eventually moved into the role of Director and I love it. The community is great, our students are fantastic, our colleagues are amazing. It's just a really special place to be.

LL: And this isn't a stand-up comedy routine, Steve, so what we laughed at, you said everybody loves the basic.

SH: Because everybody loves public speaking.

LL: I know, I would love to see you do stand-up comedy, but the point is that this is such a good course and, at the very least, it introduces people to our discipline, but it's a very important course for young people to learn how to...

SH: It is and if you think about the fact that for about 98% of students across the country, it's the only course in communication that they take and it's just, you know, I know we all agree that now is a really important time to study communication. There's so many things that are happening in our world that depend on effective communication. We live in an information ecosystem that, on the one hand, is more bountiful than ever. We have more sources of information via the web, social media, legacy media, than we've ever had in human history. On the other hand, it's a pretty polluted ecosystem, right, with a lot of stuff to navigate and misinformation and disinformation to filter through, conspiracy theories, and things of the like, so it's a really important time for us, whether it's personally, professionally, or just in terms of us thinking about being good citizens and facilitating democracy to have those communication information literacy skills is just essential.

LL: It's interesting because one of the things that employees still list or say they want people who can communicate well, both written and orally, and, so, at the very least getting up and presenting yourself and what you want people to receive about you and the information in a way that's understandable - that's transferable across every discipline, across every industry and organization, and it is fascinating. A

lot of people just think it's so easy to do. So, we have a number of things, courses and reasons why. So, I guess what I'm kind of dying to know, we've talked about, it we're fans of communication, but why communication? Should we have, is that something?

JN: Yeah, I think we should absolutely. I don't know, Steve, what do you think? What's the value of a communication degree?

SH: Yeah, so beyond the things we've already talked about and, as you mentioned, Lance, it is something that's transferable. So, you're not going to find a sector of our economy: for profit, nonprofit, government work, whatever sector of the economy that you're looking at that doesn't require somebody who knows how to communicate effectively, you know? And in the School we think about that in terms of Communication Studies, Public Relations, Journalism, Mass Media, but, really, the key across all of those majors is how do we build effective messages, communicate those messages, and understand how people receive them, right? So whether you're a Journalism major, Communication Studies, whatever your major is, there are lots of opportunities for you out there and, as we said, communication is more important now than probably it ever has been, so it's a great time to get into communication, to understand it, it can be applied to anything that you are interested in from sports to politics, you know, and I mentioned the four majors that we offer at the undergraduate level, so I just think we're in a really good position and students that are interested in doing this kind of work, this is a great place to be right now.

LL: And, plus you might want to add to that globalization. I mean, certainly, as we look at a workforce in our country, as we've talked about, four different generations, not to mention somebody from a different country or virtual teams, so we have to learn how to cross-culturally communicate well, so, intercultural communication is a big part of that - understanding how people perceive this and what we want them to perceive and then what happens when there's that disconnect and those dialogues that are going to be challenging.

SH: Yeah, the world is more connected than ever, that's for sure, and, I mean, if we just think about our experiences in this room - whether it's going to Paris or the Republic of Georgia, you know, those kinds of things, we work with other professionals, individuals, students across the globe and that's the world that we live in. We have to be able to do that. We are just connected in ways that we haven't been in the past and so we need, students need, faculty need, we all need an understanding and sensitivity to that kind of intercultural competence that will allow us to work across boundaries.

LL: School of COM, pretty special place. I'm wondering - does he know anything that is really interesting that others might know about the School of COM or not know? Like, what's your trivia level here with you?

SH: Well, it's not great, I will tell you that. Yeah, it's better probably than it was maybe a couple of weeks you know, because we kind of had to go through some stuff as part of Birds Give Back, right, our day of giving that we had a couple of weeks ago, and as part of that, we were kind of sharing moments of history from the School of Communication and Illinois State.

LL: I'm going to ask him a couple of these questions. We have other things here besides the disciplines. We have The Vidette, we have WZND, we have TV-10, we have WGLT, all housed under the umbrella of

the School of COM. But, let me ask, I want to clear something up first. Have you ever engaged the ghost of Jesse Fell in Fell Hall?

SH: I have not.

LL: OK.

SH: I've heard rumors of such things, but I've had no personal encounter.

LL: Let me ask you, do you know Reggie Redbird?

SH: I have met Reggie Redbird, yes.

LL: And I am no Reggie Redbird, right?

SH: That's right. Reggie's a lot more limber!

LL: OK, well why did Reggie cross the road?

SH: To show the possum how to do it?

LL: Well, that was one, yeah, but the other part - Reggie Redbird crossed the road because he was social distancing.

SH: Well, we got Reggie Redbird, we got chickens, we got all of it.

LL: Reggie Redbird's all over the place. He's crossing the road to go to the women's tournament, MVC Champs, so, that's how well he knows his School of COM history. You got questions?

JN: Yeah, I do. I've got a couple here, so should we start with an easy one?

SH: Yeah, please!

JN: Alright, so Dr. Hunt, what was the very first RSO on Illinois State University's campus?

SH: That is an easy one! That's our Forensics Union. Interestingly, you know, with our roots as a university in teacher education, one of the things they thought it was kind of important for teachers, prospective teachers, to be able to do was communicate. So what better way to do that than fire up the competitive speech and debate team?

LL: And that's been around since 1857, right?

SH: Oldest student organization on our campus. Also, have won more national championships than any other team on campus.

JN: You are full of the fun facts!

SH: Yeah, there you go!

JN: You have me thinking here. Now, Steve, correct me if I'm wrong. You have a history in competitive speaking, yes?

SH: Yeah, absolutely and I went to Emporia State University as an undergraduate, which is also a normal school, and Emporia and Illinois State were on the same circuit back in the day when, Emporia, third of 18, was formed after ISU's but it wasn't too long after and they competed against each other constantly.

LL: And we might want to mention a normal school - a teaching college was created as normal, meaning a teacher college, and the school I went to was a normal school as well. And that's where the city of Normal came from after the university was created by Steve's old buddy, Jesse Fell. You got another quick one for him?

JN: Yeah, we got time for another one. Let's talk about The Vidette, student newspaper. When do you think the very first issue came out?

SH: Oh, I was looking at that. 1888.

JN: Ooh, very good!

SH: Is that right?!

JN: Yeah, it is!

SH: Sweet!

LL: So, when you're talking about what is Illinois State, communication has been there a part of Illinois State from the very beginning.

SH: Yep, from the start!

LL: Matter of fact, there's a picture of President Lincoln with a copy of The Vidette sticking out of his pocket.

SH: There you go!

LL: Because he was our first lawyer and was buddies with Jesse Fell. I was wondering, also, why the School of COM? I mean there are a lot of other communication programs, right, and so we're talking to parents, students, alums, just whoever wants to listen. Why the School of COM?

SH: So, that's a good question and, when we meet with prospective students, we talk about this all the time. I think we're really well situated. We mentioned the history - so we've been at this for a very long time and we're good at it, right? We have a history of being really good in communication, we have the facilities that you might not find in smaller programs and that might not be accessible in larger programs, so we have that fit, you know, where we get students a lot of individualized attention, they have access to all the great technology and facilities that might not exist in other programs, so, I think those are really good reasons. We have great internship programs. You mentioned Study Abroad - we have four Study Abroad programs as well. We have lots of student organizations. We've been kind of focused on Forensics and we talked about The Vidette; TV, radio, Association of Women in Communication, and others. We have lots of ways that we support student learning outside of the classroom. We have great faculty. We have won, since 2010, more teaching awards than anybody else on campus, than any other academic unit on campus, and our faculty are in the top 25% of researchers in the country, so it's a great place to be.

LL: I have enjoyed it. We've both been here for a while and wow, so I'm getting excited. Can I go back and enroll again?

SH: Yeah, we've talked about that.

LL: Well, actually, I'm taking, I'm auditing a language class and so I actually got invited to join the Red Mortar Club, you know, because of my, I guess, my grades are good.

JN: Are you gonna join?

LL: I don't think I can, I might be failing.

JN: Don't tell Joan!

LL: No, that's ok. I agree. I wish it would have been on my radar when I was younger. The program undergrad the graduate basically, you're right, we have some great colleagues.

SH: Absolutely wonderful people.

JN: And I think what's fascinating, too, I think Dr. Smudde was the one who came with the statistic, but I think we have close to 80% of faculty who actually attended Illinois State University and then continue to stay here and teach.

LL: And that's amazing. I think the other thing that's interesting, too, a large number of our faculty have held jobs outside of the academy. So, that's always interesting. It's not our job to get you a job. It's our job to prepare you for a career, your first job out, and others following, and also help you to make that journey, so we get excited about it. How is it relevant? How is it meaningful? I have a quick question as we're getting ready to wrap up. OK, I'm gonna put him on the spot. Who are his two favorite employees?

SH: I think it's you two!

JN: Good answer!

LL: I was gonna say Julie and Reggie Redbird. And then the other thing I've heard about is do you have, you know, it's how some of these administrators work, do you have a School of Communication bass boat parked somewhere?

SH: I do not. That is something that we have been working on and thinking about for a long time. You know, we kind of gave way we had to kind of build like the Social Media Analytics Command Center and the Communication Innovation Center, we had to put money into moving our television station into the fully high-definition world and all of that but I think maybe next on the list: a School of Communication bass boat would be appropriate. There's a lot of communication going on in fishing. Maybe that's a whole other show.

LL: One final thought for whoever is listening about Illinois State School of Communication that we could take with us and go *oh wow*.

SH: OK, I'll give you one, and I don't know if it's going to be an *oh wow* but it's kind of an interesting piece of my history with this place. In 1993, I was a graduate student at the university of Northern Iowa

and one of the first debate tournaments that I got sent to, you know, as the coach on record - like I was the person driving the van, I was the only coach with the team and all that, was to Illinois State University and they had just moved into this great beautiful facility in Fell Hall, right, from Stevenson and other places. They've been located, the Department, now the School of Communication, located in other places, so I bring our debaters to this tournament. We did pretty well but one of my memories from that is we were in the lobby. OK, so check it out - Fell Hall had just been renovated. They had just moved in and we had a Nerf football and we're between rounds and we're like, *you know what come on kids, let's toss the football around* and the ISU coach came out and yelled and was very upset that we were in this brand-new facility throwing around a Nerf football and could potentially break something. We didn't damage anything. It was all totally fine, but, you know, to look back at that time in my life and to think that just a few years down the road I would be starting as a faculty member there is just a really kind of interesting memory for me.

LL: Well, some things don't change, do they? Steve Hunt, Executive Director of the School of COM, you rock and, as he would say, *fire it up!*

SH: There you go. Absolutely!

JN: Well, Dr. Hunt, thanks so much for being on our show. On our next episode, we're gonna be knocking on Dr. Aimee Miller-Ott's door. She's the Director of the School's graduate program and we can't wait to share a fun conversation with her. As usual, thanks for listening.