

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.....as Lance is holding up a big letter "L" above his forehead.

LL: Well, our guest today, Dr. Pete Smudde, will tell me there's always a big letter "L" on my forehead, but it doesn't stand for 'Lance'. It's on a little notebook my wife got me, on sale.

JN: What does it stand for?

LL: Um, Lance. But Dr. Smudde's gonna, say, I think, 'Larry' – but no.

PS: It stands for 'Love'.

LL: Love. So, it's on my heart. Thank you. We have a guest today!

JN: We do!

LL: We should record what happens before we go on air.

PS: No.

LL: Stream this!

JN: Best left in this room, I think. Well, welcome, Dr. Smudde. Lance has, effectively, ruined your introduction. But, welcome! Thanks for joining us today on COM-Versations. Dr. Pete Smudde is our associate director of the School of Communication and the public relations program coordinator. Welcome.

PS: Thank you!

JN: Thanks for being here! Well, would you like to start? How about give us a little introduction in your history with the School of Communication.

PS: Well, I was born in the suburbs, west suburbs of Chicago...

JN: Let's fast forward....

LL: And you think I'm bad?

JN: No, but the two of you next to each other.

PS: It's not boding well for this show.

JN: No, it's not.

PS: OK, so, alright, so, I've been working in my career for 36 years. Twenty of it has been as a full-time professor, but the previous 16 years has been in industry where I was doing professional communication for a bunch of different places, including General Motors, and an agency, small agency, north of Detroit, and then was a freelance writer and consultant for a while and one of my clients offered me a position to be its director of PR and it was a software company in Ann Arbor, MI. Along the way, I earned my doctorate at Wayne State University in Detroit, which is the same place Dr. Joe Zompetti graduated from and we even had one class together at the time.

JN: Oh, really? I didn't know that!

PS: Yeah, he finished earlier than I did because I was going part-time. He just wanted to get through and he was, he made good time. So, my focus has always been rhetoric theory and communication theory but, very specifically, focused on organizational communication and, especially, public relations and, so, that's what my doctoral dissertation and my research have been focusing on, but, over time, I've broadened that to being more focused on message design, strategic planning, the teaching of public relations, and, even more recently, the intersections of religion and spirituality in the workplace, including the degree to which one's religiosity or spirituality might have a role to play in their ethical decision making and especially with public relations professionals.

LL: We keep using that word public...or that phrase public relations. Can you, for a lay person, I think that we have...I always brag on our program. We'll talk about that in a few moments, but, for the layperson, for me, mainly, thank you. What....how would you describe public relations to a student that wants to come into it or as a career?

PS: One of the problems that the field public relations has is that the way it's been demonstrated in, especially in mass media, over decades, not anytime recently, has been that it's been shown as sort of an overly attractive, partying kind of thing that people who are public relations professionals are schmoozing with celebrities, they're going to events and they're doing all this, you know, fancy stuff, but it denies all the work that has to go into the opportunities to meet with famous people or to be the face of an organization, the face of, the voice of an organization. So, I like to explain it as there's this 8% of the job is what gets portrayed or what people think public relations is, but there's 92% that nobody cares about or even wants to know about, but we in our public relations program cover 100% of it, because you have to be able to do the hard work behind the scenes, because public relations is very much a behind the scenes sort of organizational function and the mass mediated portrayal of public relations has done it a disservice, thinking that all it is is this sort of spin meistering and truth management...this kind of stuff when it is not and it is so much more. So, I like to explain that public relations is the use of language and symbols to really ethically inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics. And this idea of cooperation is very open-ended, purposefully, because it's not, like advertising and marketing, meant to inspire economic transactions. Public relations is focused on what I like to call *the head, the heart, and the hands* of people's and organizations' connected interests. And, so, if we're talking coordination, collaboration, we're talking about, sometimes we have to educate people about what's going on. Other times we can celebrate certain things that have happened that are within an organization and its publics' interest. And other times we need to explain what's going on or even defend something that happened or apologize for something that has gone wrong and all of that, again, is this part of inspiring cooperation, connecting with what people and the organizations have as common ground.

JN: Absolutely. I get it...a question...very often from prospective students who don't quite understand, you know, what is public relations? And I often get similar words like advertising and marketing and it's difficult to explain what the differences are but since you just brought up, would you educate anyone listening? What are the differences?

PS: Well, there are, first of all, there are areas of intersection and those areas of intersection can be and should be used thoughtfully and purposefully and ethically so that what public relations does and what advertising does and what marketing does all help each other, but each of those areas are different. Now, like I said, public relations is meant to inspire cooperation between organization and its publics by

using language and symbols and we do these in very particular ways that help people understand what their common ground is. And that means we're talking about more than just a product or service. We're talking about, actually, the relationship between an organization with its publics and vice versa. So, we're trying to help people understand what's going on in, embrace it attitudinally, and then act on that sort of knowledge and emotions in ways that can bring about results that are good overall. For advertising, it's very specific in trying to promote a product, service, or organization. These are planned communication artifacts like print advertisements, radio advertisements, but also social mediated advertisements, messages that are showcasing some product, service, or organization and then marketing is the bigger picture of how we can obtain appeal among people for considering a product, service, or organization that would benefit them in some specific personal way. Or maybe if it's business to business, how one business can benefit from the product, service, or organization and, in particular, in value-added ways. Does that make sense?

JN: Oh yeah, absolutely. It's just one of those common questions that I often get and it's difficult to explain because, you're right, they're all interrelated but it's hard to pick up the pieces that....

PS: Yeah, and there's this area called integrated marketing communication, which argues that public relations and advertising are just a subset and actually covered under marketing and that they'll just.... they're kind of like the same thing. We're like *No, it is not the same thing, and we can show it. We can prove it. Just look at the scholarship, for one thing, but also look at the products of what is done* because if we're having, for example, a product launch....we can advertise about the product. We can advertise about the launch, but the public relations around that product launch involves so many more dimensions about the organization, plus the audiences' intellectual, attitudinal, and behavioral responses to that that only public relations handles.

LL: And some of these students that do.... this week I was just talking to a student the other day, she has, she's graduating, she has a job up in Chicago at Freeman....Free.... I can't remember the name of the PR firm in downtown Chicago, but where might these students end up when they're done, that just in these PR agencies, boutique agencies, smaller or internal place in organizations? I mean it's a pretty wide range of job opportunities.

PS: Yeah, the answer is 'yes'.

LL: Yes, thank you.

PS: So, yes, students often will go to agencies, but almost just as often, they go to organizations like corporations, nonprofits, or even governmental agencies or units, and so, you know, for public relations as a field there is not a single organization in existence that cannot benefit from it because of the nature of public relations being that effort to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics. The question, though, is how much can an organization assemble resources to do that? And, if it can, will it do it internally, for its own self and its own operating unit or will it hire experts from outside? And the resources are always a combination of time, people, money, equipment, facilities, technology, and all kinds of stuff so it's a big management sort of decision. You just don't go on *Hey let's go pronounce this thing*. Yeah, no, it's more than that.

LL: But that reminds me, you know we have a couple trivia questions. When you went to that voice.... I have that very important question. Which Warner Brothers cartoon character is your favorite?

PS: I think it's pretty much Bugs Bunny.

LL: Bugs Bunny. Why?

PS: Because...

LL: Because you sounded like the Martian right there.

PS: Well, see, the other thing. I do like Marvin the Martian [imitates Marvin the Martian]

LL: So, you like Bugs, though. I thought you'd be an Elmer Fudd fan.

PS: No, I'm not Elmer Fudd [imitates Elmer Fudd]

LL: So, we have a trivia question for him today.

JN: We do, and it has nothing to do with that, though.

LL: Well, I just, you know, I'm, that's what I'm here for.

PS: We can now go on to a whole other topic.

JN: Absolutely!

PS: Voice characterization.....let's go!

JN: What percentage of the School of Communication faculty were once a student here?

PS: I have actually calculated that. It has been very interesting because I, myself, graduated from Illinois State twice in 1986 with a bachelor's degree in two majors, English and Philosophy, and then in '89 with a masters degree in writing from the Department of English, focusing on professional writing. So, I started looking around and I was discovering that people in the School of Communication who are instructors of all types, so many of them got a degree here. It's like *OK, how many people?* The answer there is almost 2/3. It's, like, 64% of all the instructional faculty in the School of Communication have earned at least one degree from Illinois State, which I love because there is nothing like the Redbird nest as a place to come back, because we like it here so much. We liked it here so much as a student that we, when an opportunity came to join the faculty in some way, we came back and I think that's great

LL: Well, I got a trivia question for you. Which person in this studio puts their money where their tuition is? Not only have they gone here and had 2 degrees but their two children also went to school here, and, out of the three of us, can you pick up on that is?

JN: Well, I'm just gonna guess, because I know it's not me...

LL: It's not me...

JN: I know it's not you so I'm gonna go with Dr. Smudde.

PS: Correct! It is I. Yes, and my wife and she did, too, so we are like an ultra threat.

LL: And I'm gonna say so, just briefly, because I know we can talk about this a long time, but your one son just helped make you a grandfather and his other son is finishing up graduate work somewhere else and, how proud are you?

PS: I can barely stand it

LL: Pretty sweet.

PS: Yeah, it's marvelous

LL: So, a lot of Redbirds floating around in that. Life feather, like son.

JN: Just waiting for like the opportunity to just throw in one of those...

LL: The puns, yeah, it's pretty cool, I think. So, PR program. It's got accreditation and it's one of the...it's recognized as one of the best programs in the country, I think.

PS: That's true, and the accreditation that we have is through the Public Relations Society of America, along with the Public Relations Student Society of America, the student society is a student-focused branch of the professional organization and we earned the accreditation in 2013 and then we had to renew it which we did in 2019. We are the first and the only accredited public relations program in the state, plus, historically speaking, our program is the first public relations program in the state of Illinois and so we have these firsts that no one can take away from us and it is actually very, very cool.

LL: This is Dr. Larry Long. Let me ask you a trivia question, there, Pete. When did I start that PR program here in the Department of Communication?

PS: Well, I believe it was in 1978.

LL: Exactly! All this trivia. 1978, so it's certainly evolved over the years as a discipline, just like our general discipline of communication, but why PR?

PS: Well, at the time, public relations was already pretty well established as a profession; but, as far as an opportunity in higher education, it was just starting to become more and more prominent and what Dr. Long and Dr. Hazelton, and there was one other professor whose name I can't remember right now, the three of them designed a program for public relations because there was this very clear growth happening in institutions of higher education where public relations was being taught and there was significant demand for it and significant demand projections and all of it turned out to be right and so, when you're able to look at the sort of competitive landscape in higher ed, plus, and this is really the big factor, industry that needs competent first-time professionals, it was a very astute move to create the PR program back in the late 70s and right along that time ISU got its first, got its chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America, PRSSA, making it one of the older chapters in the country for students to get some pre-professional experience and exposure to the profession.

JN: Absolutely. Well, one last question for you, Pete. If you were a prospective student and you were considering PR as your major here on campus, what would you say to convince them to come on over to the School of COM?

PS: PR rocks! Not only that but public relations is that organizational function that works very closely with organization's management and is strategically important in counseling management about all sorts of communication things that the organization has to be concerned with, including individuals in management. That counseling role is enormously important and, because students will be paid to be the best communicators in the organization, that's a very high standard that they have to live up to, but they can because the kind of things that they'll learn in our program will enable them to think critically about

situations, think strategically about them, prepare material in written form, also other forms that include social media, websites ,and other things, and ultimately be competent and successful representatives of the organizations that hire them.

LL: You asked. Should we turn the microphone on? Should we turn the...are we recording this? Well, I thank you, Dr. Smudde.

PS: You're welcome.

LL: Can I call you Pete?

PS: Yes.

LL: OK, thanks, Dr. Smudde.

PS: It's very good to call me Pete, actually.

LL: Well, we met another cool colleague and talking about the public relations program, one of several that we have here and good opportunity, great way to learn about how to learn, and then go out and practice it, so, really cool.

JN: Absolutely. Well, thank you both for your time, really appreciate it.

PS: You're welcome.

JN: And, on our next episode, we will have Tom Lamonica joining us to talk about our internship program here in the School of Communication.