

*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 am joined by Dr. Lance Lippert and Dr. Brent Simonds, Program Coordinator of the mass media major and board chair of the Foxtail Film Festival. Welcome!*

BS: Oh, thank you. Happy to be here.

LL: Wait a minute! I'm answering his text. "Waiting." "Okay, well, I'm on my way." "Got it." "Okay, thank you."

JN: We never start on time when you're involved.

LL: I think so.

BS: It reminds me of an old foreigner song.

LL: Oh, tell me about that song.

BS: *Waiting for a girl like...* Oh, no, no, it doesn't remind me.

LL: I'd be so lucky, Dr. Brent Simonds. I don't...he likes music. We can talk maybe about that too.

JN: I think we should.

LL: I'm just gonna warn you right up front: this man is from Oklahoma.

JN: That's right.

LL: Being from Kansas, you'd think that would be the same. But it's not. He's from Oklahoma.

JN: So what's the difference?

LL: I'm not sure. What's the difference?

BS: Well, you know why it's so windy in Oklahoma?

LL: Oh, that's no, you know, it's supposed to be Kansas. Why is it so windy in Oklahoma?

BS: ...Kansas blows and Texas sucks.

LL: There you go! Insert state in the middle.

JN: Hesitation there.

LL: So what? He's a coordinator? What? Why are we talking to this guy?

JN: Well, I think I would like to learn a little bit about the mass media major that we have here in the School of Communication.

BS: We do have one.

JN: We do!

BS: Yeah!

LL: You have been putting a lot of work into it lately. By the way you added...so I talked to students taking part of our film sequence that you put together with film and...anyhow I'll mention that in just a second. But overall, what is our program about?

BS: Okay well, it's been many things through the years, but we went through a big curriculum revision a few years ago and we had four sequences, but we've streamlined that down to two sequences and that allows students to have a little bit more flexibility in the things that they take. And so, one of the sequences remained the same title wise, which is called "Management, Promotion and Sales". And then the other sequence is called "Media Arts". So broadly speaking, you can just think of, if you want to be a mass media major, you can major in the business of media or in the creation of media. So, management, promotion and sales obviously is the business of media, and media arts are for the creative people who want to make media. That's basically it in a nutshell.

LL: And it's really changed. I joke, we both grew up in the Midwest and we're involved in what used to be...old media. I guess it's still technology, but things have changed a bit, haven't they? From your days when you were a photog or did productions out in the field, what's the biggest change or can we even just say one change?

BS: Well, I think probably the biggest thing is the amount of places and platforms and things that you can get your...the things that you create onto. So, my undergrad major was Radio/TV/Film, that tells you exactly. It could be on radio, it could be on TV, or it could be in a film. But obviously there are a lot more places now for that. You know your streaming services. And so, you know, actually we've removed the term broadcast from all of our classes. Okay, so obviously we still deal with broadcasts. We still send students out to work at radio stations and TV stations. But obviously, you know, those are not the only way of disseminating information. So obviously with the Internet, all the different streaming services, there are a lot of different ways that you can get your message out and you can create for different things, whether it be social media or the big streaming services like Netflix or HBO or Amazon Prime, whatever it may be.

LL: And part of, yeah, I remember radio, TV, film, and we still keep the film, but it's a whole different thing. And we both worked in TV back in the day when we actually had to, we recorded on film and we actually physically edited film and then videotape.

BS: You're much older than me...actually, right when I got out of school, got into the business, all of that sort of like film at 11 thing was going away.

LL: Okay.

BS: So I like, I worked a lot of TV stations. I had a lot of these old film cameras still lying about. But it was just slow and cumbersome, but. And it was not good film. It was like...news film and so it was...you know it wasn't...I don't know. It wasn't film like you'd see at a Hollywood picture, so.

LL: Yeah, not, not that. Yeah. And then we also, then we went to full inch video and then three quarter and then half inch and then...

BS: Well, you know, video started out as 2 inch.

LL: That's right, even. But yeah!

BS: Yeah, back in the 50s, and what's interesting to me is like a lot of those videotape machines. So, videotape was actually invented in 1956. So, television stations existed before videotaping, if you can imagine. So, I think I actually worked on some of those machines from the 50s. So you think of like a technology that you...you know, you buy this big huge, incredibly large machine. You might get 30 years out of it. You know, you buy something now you get 18 months out of it and then it's, you know, passe, and it's been surpassed by technology already.

LL: Yeah, it does go fast. Okay, let me ask a quick question. I'm sorry, we're just having this side chat because we're both old.

JN: I know it's just all over my head.

LL: No, no, but think about this, okay? The first format that you listened to music on as a kid, a young person. I'm trying, I can tell you mine in a minute, but what was, you remember? Did you have an album? Did you have a disk, a CD? What, Julie, what did you have?

JN: A cassette tape?

LL: A cassette tape. And people, there are students that are going back to that now—

JN: Really?

LL: —because of...it's not the best, but it's just something different, so.

BS: Well, they like vinyl.

LL: Vinyl, and people...yeah. So, what was your first format?

BS: It would have been vinyl.

LL: Vinyl?

BS: Probably 45s.

LL: Yeah!

BS: Because you used to buy a, it's kind of funny because you think about the prices of these things. You go buy a 45 when I was like in junior high for like \$0.99, which got you two songs. Right?

LL: You had to flip it over too, I'm telling you. And of course, driving around in that muscle car that you drove around in in high school, you listen to your 8-track probably, right?

BS: I did listen to an 8-track...I don't think a Gremlin was a muscle car.

LL: Well, I didn't want to throw you under the Gremlin on that one. I had a Ford Galaxy and before that I had a Vega.

BS: Ooh!

LL: With an 8-track. And how about you? What was your car of choice?

BS: Was the Vega, was that Chevy?

LL: Yeah, Chevy. You could put a whole...yeah, Vega wagon and you used to be able to put a whole big sub in the back. What did you drive?

JN: I drove a bright yellow Chevy Cavalier. That was my first car.

LL: You must have been some kind of...

BS: I had a Cavalier back in the 80s.

LL: Really? Cool! Well, just listen to this talk about media and I, I did hear something the other day that millennials or whatever were talking as a generation, as one person was speaking for the generation. Well, we're bored with it being so easy. We're going back to something that's harder like a cassette, it's like, but it doesn't sound as good but we want...

JN: We want the challenge? I don't know.

LL: But the vinyl? You're right. Still, new vinyls coming out, and that's costing \$20-30.

BS: What's interesting to me is...not only the medium that you do this, but because of the way the medium works, it causes you to consume it differently. Obviously if you have like you know, your phone, you have your streaming music you're listening to, you know, through your Air Pods and it's just a private experience. But I remember very vividly when I was in college that if I bought a new album, that I would actually make time before I ever listened to it, that I knew that I could sit and listen to the whole thing. And so, I set the sweet spot, you know, the stereo field—

LL: Not in the Gremlin, but.

BS: No, no, no! I get in my apartment. So, you have your speaker set up and so you have, you know, a very particular place where you set where you get the full stereo image. And I would sit

and I would make sure that I had enough time to listen to, what, probably 45 minutes, right, 45 minutes so I could listen to this. You're reading the liner notes, you're looking at the album artwork. It was a very different experience. It was a very, *I'm all in on this right now*. Whereas I think a lot of people, when they're listening to music, they're not all in. It's just sort of like background sound.

JN: Right?

BS: I can't listen to music as background sound because I pay too close attention.

LL: Well, you also are an artist or performer, and you make art, and you use a big part of your productions that you've done. Back in, I mentioned I'm from Kansas. I just wanna say I sound a little more sophisticated than somebody from Oklahoma. But the kid down the street thought, *Oh, let's put a turntable in a car!* Well, I thought there'd be some problems with that, but we got it stabilized, but we could only go a block because our cord was never long enough.

BS: Oh!

LL: But so...So let me, I mentioned film. What does...you did something new when you redid the major. What is it? What do we have with film right now that students might be interested? I talked to a student the other day and they were excited about the classes they were taking. I said, *I didn't know, who did that?* You! And we partnered, didn't we?

BS: Yeah. So, in theater they've had like, a film minor. And for the longest time it's mostly like film criticism, which is cool, but they didn't actually have people there that would, you know, teach, you know hands on production. But they have now hired a new person and so they now have a film and digital media major. So, what we speak about the film industry, there are actually a few films in Hollywood that are shot on film, which comes to great surprise to many students. But there are a lot of directors and cinematographers that won't give up film. But at the same time, a lot of it is digital. And so, we, we may refer to something as a film, but it's not really film. So, what's interesting to me is like, you know, during my time in television in the 80s and 90s, you know, we'd be out on the shoot. We'd be shooting on videotape, right? And so, people go, *Oh, you're out filming something*. We always go, *No, we're out videotaping something*. Right? That was a thing. Well, guess what? When we shoot video now, it's not videotape and it's digital, it's not analog. So, it's a completely different—

LL: What are we doing?

BS: It's a different...it's not video. I mean it is, it is video, but it's not video, but it's not film. But we say video and film. I think we're just...pixeling.

LL: Oh, that's the word I was looking...pixeling!.

BS: But you know pixels, that's a digital thing. There aren't pixels in analog video, so. Video is not video anymore. Film is not film anymore. For the most part.

LL: I'm really getting depressed. I'm feeling really old.

BS: But the funny thing is, is that the technologies, I mean, film and video are two different mediums, right? Now they're pretty much all the same medium, using the same tools. So it's just a matter of is this something that you're going to shoot and edit in the same day like a news story or you know, some sort of, you know, very quick turnaround thing? Or is it, you know, a major motion picture where you're going to have hundreds and hundreds of crew and all that stuff going on in order to make that? So, it's all a matter of scale now, but the tools are pretty much the same.

LL: And how to use...not necessarily how to use the tool, but the artistic perception and what you bring with your creativity, that still is something you can talk about today like you did maybe 20 years ago and that's still needs to be taught and learned and yeah.

BS: Sure, I mean aesthetics are aesthetics. I mean there are things that happen that are like...I don't know, what's the newest cool little trick or something. I'm not so much into the newest cool little tricks because they age pretty quickly, right? Just good old-fashioned storytelling because we've been doing it since before people were literate. That's how culture was passed down, was through story and song. And as human beings we've been doing it for millennia, right? So, we tend to know what a good story is when we hear it. And Aristotle knew that stuff thousands of years ago.

LL: And he didn't use pixels.

BS: He did not.

LL: You mentioned something when you introduced this person that they got something going on soon. That talks about film, right?

JN: Yeah, yes. So speaking of storytelling, we have something exciting coming to the Illinois State University campus this week. Tell us about it.

BS: Awesome! Yeah, we have the Foxtail Film Festival, which...I cannot remember exactly what, like mass media faculty got together the first time I talked about trying to make this happen. I'm thinking 2014.

JN: Oh, wow.

LL: It's been a few years, yeah.

BS: Yeah. But we were getting ready to go through program review and really couldn't make that happen. But once we got through that, we started working toward that end and we were lucky enough to hire Dr. Andrew Ventimiglia to teach mass media law and ethics, but on top of that, when he was working on his doctorate out in California, he had actually managed a film festival and he has film degrees from NYU. And he has a postdoc at a law school in, you know, Australia and so wow, somebody who could teach mass media law, that the law school

experience and has this, you know, film experience. So that was kind of a weird strange amalgamation of things he could do that kind of ticks a lot of different boxes for us.

LL: So now is the time. This is the year.

BS: This is it. So it's been many years in the making and a lot of, a lot of stuff behind the scenes, you know, to make this happen. But yes, this Thursday, which, what's the date on that?

JN: The 27<sup>th</sup>.

BS: The 27<sup>th</sup>. So yeah, we have—

JN: Shouldn't you know that?

LL: Were from Oklahoma and Kansas, what are you asking us for?

BS: April 27th, 7:00 PM we'll have our first session at the Normal Theater, and we'll actually have a couple of our alums, professional filmmakers coming back and talking about what it is they do. On Friday night, we're gonna have again at 7:00, at the Normal Theater, a collection of ISU films from ISU students. Some of those are from School of Com, some from Theatre, some from Art. We will also have some competitive films from high school and college students from around the country who entered into the festival, and we'll be giving awards away Saturday night for those films. So, we're really excited to see some of these young filmmakers and what it is they have going on and perhaps we can talk them into coming here and studying that here at ISU.

JN: That's so cool. And I love the title. Foxtail Film Festival. Where did that come from?

BS: Well, I'll tell you where it came from. So I assembled a board and some of the people from the board are from Theatre and Art and Anthropology and School of Communication. So when we got together I said, *Well, we need to come up with the name for this. But right off the bat, I want to tell you, I don't want any sort of dorky play on words with the word normal.* Right.? You know, *Beyond Normal, Abnormal Films* or something like that. I said, *But we are in the Prairie State so we should do something that reflects where we are.* So, Illinois is the Prairie State and Ruth Burke who's relatively new, a faculty member at heart, is a video art teacher. She immediately came out and said, *Well, there's a native grass from this region that's called the foxtail. And it could be the Foxtail Film Festival* and literally everyone on the, in the meeting, on the board said, *Oh that's awesome and we love the alliteration* and that was it. That was done. So, it's the Foxtail Film Festival, so it reflects the fact that we're in the great Prairie State but without doing something silly with the name *normal*. I mean, how many times do you go to places and tell people you know, *Where is it you teach? Illinois State University. Where is that? Normal, Illinois.* Hohoho, normal. Do you know where normal comes from, by the way?

LL: Yes! That's a trivia question for you, Julie.

JN: Oh! I don't know the answer.

LL: Well, it's a teacher's college.

BS: Yeah, teacher's colleges were called normal schools.

LL: Why though? Why? Why normal? I never could figure out the original use of it.

BS: Well, because you are teaching norms. Okay, if you want to be a, if you want to be a participant in our civil society, you have to learn the norms of our society, the history, the culture, the...all the things we did. Yeah, so it's norming.

JN: Look at you with the fun facts.

LL: We are norming and so—

BS: I do have a doctorate in education, so I did learn that much.

JN: We did kind of skip your introduction, didn't we?

BS: Oh I don't know. I haven't done this with you guys. I don't know what the intro should be.

JN: Lance just launched us right in.

LL: Oh I went right, being from Oklahoma and he's understated too. But he also has done internationally and nationally known documentaries, or as we say in Western Kansas, documentaries, but. And it's something that you do and know a lot about it are very passionate about so and you bring that to the student so good teacher, good scholar, very creative guy. What's your favorite song? What's your favorite type of music?

BS: All of it.

LL: There you go!

JN: Good answer!

LL: So this—

BS: Well, not *all* of it. I mean I...

JN: Britney Spears, you know, I see that from you.

LL: Ohhh yeah! I could mention a couple others, but I won't go down his secret trail. He loves Britney...I didn't know that. Okay.

BS: Now I will tell you that the best line, the best line I think in all of rock music.

LL: Is?

BS: Is from Tom Petty. It's a great line from "American Girl": *God is so painful. Something is so close and yet still so far out of reach.* And I saw something on *Ozark*. You've seen the show, *Ozark*? Right in the very last season they were having this conversation and they were talking



about this rapper and they were talking about this song and basically, you know, the guy was talking and he was explaining how you know, he was, you know, lived in New York. He's looking at all these neighborhoods and places he couldn't go. And it's right there. And so it's far out of reach. I said that's a universal thing with humans. So whether it's, you know, a guy that's Tom Petty that grew up in the 50s and 60s in Florida or whether it's somebody who grew up, you know, in the last 10 or 15 years in New York City in a, you know, hip hop as opposed to like...classic rock, it doesn't matter, you know. The point is that these people are doing something that is creative and they're telling their story, but they are dealing in universals. So I think any good music or any good art or any good film deals in universals, the things that people can understand and recognize it as being a human concern. So that's the really important thing I think about documentaries is not so much that you, *Oh, I wanna do this documentary about homelessness*. Well that's great. But you need characters and you need a people story because that's what people are going to connect to when they hear that people story. So, when we talk about Fisher's Narrative Paradigm? He nailed it. We are storytellers, that is how we operate.

LL: Aristotle, Tom Petty, and Fisher. So, there you go and the Foxtail show, and if you hear this after the weekend...if you heard before, go on down to check it out, it's Downtown Normal and also, we'll talk more about it after the fact and—

BS: That's Uptown Normal.

JN: Uptown.

LL: I'm sorry. That's right. That's Downtown Bloomington. But we'll hear more about it afterwards. It should be lots of fun.

JN: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to it! It's a really cool thing.

BS: It should be fun.

JN: Very good. Well, Brent, I know you have to run because you literally have to go.

BS: I have to go to the theater! I have to go down there and take care of some things.

JN: Well, thank you so much for spending your time with us. We really appreciate the conversation. And on our next episode, we will have Dr. Megan Hopper who will be joining us to talk about the journalism major. Thanks for listening.