

*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. I'm Julie Navickas, one of your hosts, and today, I'm joined by Dr. Lance Lippert and Dr. Byron Craig, Assistant Professor here in the School of Communication. Welcome, gentlemen!*

BC: Thank you! Glad to be here.

LL: Why are we here you know...

BC: Is that the trivia?

LL: Yeah, I think so.

JN: Is that the trivia question?

LL: Every day for the last 10 years, I've been asking myself *why am I here?* I know why I'm here, because this is the best place to be in higher education, I think, and we know that's changing, but we're even better when Dr. Craig joined us, and it's been a couple years now. How many years has it been?

BC: I am in my 4th year now.

JN: Wow.

LL: You know, there's some people that come in and it feels like they've been here - this is a good thing - you've been here forever. It feels like it's a lot more than four, but in a good way.

BC: OK.

LL: But it's gone very fast, so it feels like you've been a part of what we are and who we're becoming.

BC: I guess I should sing Sister Sledge (We are Family).

JN: That's a new way to market our podcast.

LL: That's why I shouldn't sing, but anyway, it's good to have you.

JN: You dance. Nobody can see it, but you're dancing.

LL: I had several - I just won't go into all responses I got from that, the Redbirds Give Back dance video.

JN: You were both featured stars for Birds Give Back.

LL: And, you know, whoever said people from Kansas can't dance, I'm just saying. They're right? No, they're correct.

BC: Is that what they say?

LL: That's what they say in Kansas, and parts of Nebraska, but, no, I'm glad I found Central Illinois, we're glad you found Central Illinois. Now, we'll talk about your role here, and your bigger role with the university, a little bit about you, but you're from Indiana, is that correct, or further?

BC: I'm, originally, I was born in Sandusky, Ohio, the home of Cedar Point, the world's greatest amusement park, but I did come here from Indiana. I was at Indiana University in the Kelly School of

Business, was where I was. Before that, I was at North Carolina A&T, an HBCU, where I was in. what they called speech communication, which is also in the College of Education, so it was just some experience, yes. It was nice being at an HBCU, don't get me wrong. That I loved. I loved the students there, but it was good to move on from there, so yeah.

LL: OK, here's the big question, you're gonna ask a question about what he does. I just have to be honest about this. As you look at us, who looks older?

JN: You're putting me on the spot.

BC: I'll answer the question.

JN: Yeah, I don't think I will. I'm not set up for success here.

BC: Remember, black don't crack. #blackjoy

LL: So, the answer to that is, Lance looks older, but, ever since, we joked about that, and it's a privilege to age.

BC: It's always good to be here, good to wake up in the morning.

LL: And, again, here we can ask him who are his two favorite colleagues in this room.

JN: Oh yeah, we should ask.

BC: My two favorite ones?

LL: In this room.

BC: Byron and Byron. Julie and Lance, my two favorite people in the room. And if I had to add a third one, I would say this soundproofing.

JN: It is pretty.

LL: It would be Julie, soundproofing, and then Lance.

BC: I'm just going to say, on the record, Lance was the first person, and he's not gonna like me doing this, but Lance was the first person that I met *in person* here, you know, the university. He picked me up at my hotel, because I was on a job interview and showed me around town and he was just really such a pleasant guy. That's really what made my decision to come here was because of this one right here. You can't see me pointing, but I'm pointing at Lance. And, walking in the building, everyone knew him. All the students knew him, they called him by his first name; he knew all *their* names which was really impressive. Like, *this guy he knows all these student's names*; that means that they really take time to get to know the students here. That was really important to me, because I knew kind of about the student demographic. It was completely different than Indiana University's student demographic and knowing that a lot of these students here have to work jobs, you know, to get through their education, which was different than, you know, being at Indiana University, so it was impressive to hear that he took this time to know these students and that was impressive to me. So, he had a lot to do with me coming here. Plus, he bribed me.

JN: We can't say that on the show.

LL: Well, we were looking for faculty and colleagues and staff who want to be a part of that with our students as we move forward and a big part of what we do here at the university, too, right?

JN: Yeah, without a doubt, yeah, and I can definitely speak for that, too. Out of all the hundreds, thousands of students that I've worked with in the past ten years in this role, everyone knows Lance from Kansas. Everyone.

LL: Which is scary, now they all want references and it's hard writing that many references. I have offered a coffee or, if you don't have a job you like in five years, come back and I'll buy you a cup of coffee or I'll buy you lunch, and I've had people take me up on that. But we are a better place with you two, and especially with you, and also Dr. Craig, and we really wanted him to be a part of what we're trying to do as we step forward. I think he's really been part of that, and he's motivated us, he's inspired us in so many ways so, but what is it that, I guess, why did you come here, besides me? But what is it you are trying to accomplish here, personally and professionally?

BC: Sure, so, I mean that's a great question, you know. As you know, I, you know, I was hired under, doing African American rhetoric and that's my area so I look at all things race, through a rhetorical lens. But not just race, but the intersections of our race, gender, socioeconomic class, political, and, you know, two of the classes that I'm teaching now.... I'm teaching intercultural communication which, I'll be honest, I was kind of like *Oh no I don't know that area* but I'm actually having fun with it because I'm making it my own, which is one of the things I love about this place is that I can take these classes that I might not be that familiar with and I can do some good things with it and I love what we're doing in that class right now. And I've met with students who are doing their teamwork this semester, the head of their teams, just today, and the projects they're working on are just wonderful. I'm just really happy about it, so it makes me, it helps me realize that the work that I put into the class and maybe the changes I made with it are working. It's worth it, but of course my baby is my race and visual rhetoric class, right, because I like helping students think about the intersections of race and the visual and how that speaks to who *is* and who *is not* seen as a citizen, and so this class is helping them do that and actually really excited about an assignment they're doing this semester, if I could just go on for a second. they're doing this assignment where they're going out and taking photographs that speak to this notion of the person of color being a citizen. And really just the, you know, we think about the notion of race, who's the citizen, who's not the citizen, and how can we see that through the photograph, through the image, right, so they're kind of being photojournalists in their own right and they're taking images and some of the things that they are going to come up with are going to be amazing, and I've got to talk to Dr. Hunt about finding a space because I want to exhibit this work at the end of the semester so people can come around and look at it and they could describe just what this means about citizenship and how we look at this person and, really, a way we can look at that person who might not be seen as a citizen the way the photograph makes them a citizen, right, in all the best ways. So, I'm really excited about that and I hadn't done that assignment before with a class, so it just hit me one night. I woke up I was like *whoa, here's what I could do with this class* I'm really excited about it but, and that's what really drives me, you know, in this profession. You know, I came to this profession older. I did a number of different things. I worked for CNN, I worked for the United States Court of Appeals, and even in those jobs, those kind of push me to go back to school and think about what I really wanted to do and what kind of impact I could have. And I think you could have an impact doing this in the classroom and, you know, people say you might not reach all the students, but I kind of say that I think I can reach all the students in some way and maybe not in all the ways that you want to but I think you can still reach them

in some way so and it's basically towards notions of social justice. Everything I do in my life is about social justice, basically, right? And how we really need to make that, for me, at least the center of what I do with my scholarship, with my teaching, with my community work. I mean I just recently, get ready for this, I just recently accepted a position. So, I'm teaching cycling at the YMCA in town.

LL: I wanted to take that class, but we never go anywhere. We're staying in the same place.

JN: How disappointing!

BC: You would feel like you're going somewhere if you came to my class. BJ, who's the CEO of the Y, had just recently asked me to be on the, what they were calling the DEI committee, but I said *we're changing the name of that to the EDIA committee*. So, you know, equity, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility. So, we had our first meeting yesterday and I'm really happy to be working with them and this gets me into, involved in the community here also, something I wanted to do so I'm very excited about that and I'm actually bringing a lot of the things that I do here for the President's Office to that committee as well.

LL: Well, if you ever need any assistance with anything, let me know. That's terrific. I like the fact that you lead with equity first, and inclusion is included along with accessibility. You mentioned social justice and we are in the School of Communication. What do you think our discipline can bring to our understanding of that? Because there's a lot of conversations going on - some not positive, some positive - but what can we as a discipline bring to that?

BC: To that, sure and, you know, I'm, as a discipline in communication, right, so my training is in rhetoric and public culture. And one of the things that I love doing is looking at the way we think about, you know, of course public speeches, speeches that are made, but also documents. The way we look at documents and what we can look at. Documents, historically and currently, to think about the language that's being used. You know, it's no secret right now we live in a time of great divisiveness. You know, we're hearing people using terms like *critical race theory* that they're not using correctly, and I think that's where this, you know, field of study comes into play is that we can we have the power of correcting those notions, right? This is what this really means and, right, we look at a genealogy of a term and critical race theory and I think that's what we can do as communication scholars and rhetorical scholars and even media scholars, you know, because media is a part of our discipline as well, and look at those terms and say *well no, the genealogy of this suggests that this is what it means*, right, so we have the, I think we have, the power of doing that in our discipline and doing it from a rhetorical lens and, of course, even the area of rhetoric and communication studies, you know, there's pushback against that also. We have to push back against it, also because it's traditionally been very Eurocentric the way we look at it, but there are young black scholars and white scholars, scholars of all races and creeds and beliefs and backgrounds who are questioning now, *it's been this way for so long....let's think about what communication studies and rhetorical studies and media studies, what it actually can be*, right, and that's the question we should be asking all the time. It's not *what it's been* because it's been this way and it seems to be working, but *what can it be?* And that's how I approach everything, my scholarship, my teaching, *what can it be?* And, I think, if we all ask that question more, we'd be better, but I think communication studies and the School of Communication has a real potential opportunity to really think about it and, you know, and Lance, you know, you do a lot of work with civic engagement and I'm really happy to be a part of the American Democracy Project and to be a fellow with them because you can take ideals *from* that and even bring ideals *into* that, you know, the organization, and think about what can we do to help our students think about where we are currently in this public

culture? So, what kind of changes we can make and the study of communication really offers, has some really great opportunities to think about change and, you know, and understand that this field, it includes things like intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, race and communication, sports and communication, right? All these things help us think about the way we can make change because we're at a time where we have to make change.

LL: And learn how to be contributing citizens, and one of the other aspects I think of this is that we can walk or help our students understand how to have these difficult conversations, dialogues, to talk with somebody that's different or has a different opinion, so I do think it's about being prepared to be a contributing person in our communities and I think that's also what we bring, this discipline brings, you and us, and we try, I've learned so much, and I've got so much to learn, you know, and I think that that's why I like what I do.

JN: Yeah, without a doubt, and you know, I appreciate, too, Byron, that you're mentioning the changes that you're, you're opening our eyes to here in the School of Communication, but you also mentioned your work in the President's Office and I would love to hear more. What are you doing?

BC: Because I am the co-president of the Queer Coalition, which is one of the affinity groups on this campus, I have had the opportunity to work with the President's Diversity Inclusion Advisory Council for the President's Office and, of course, we now have an Interim President, who we actually met with yesterday, but I work on that Council, right, and our job is to make suggestions to the President about, you know, the change that we see that need to happen at the university. We're also working now with, you know, this new position for the Chief Inclusion and Equity Officer for the university and what we're gonna do with that position moving forward, who's gonna be in that position. A job search will start pretty soon for that, so I'm really very involved in that, but I've also been named Chair of the subcommittee on LGBTQAI+ policies and procedures, so, my subcommittee, we're looking at different policies and procedures that are in place at the university. What things are here already that seem to be working as, you know, it's a university so you want to start at that space, but then moving beyond that and saying what can we do better, right? What needs to happen here to make our students, staff, faculty, administrators, who identify as queer in some way feel safe, have the same opportunities as everyone else, and it's a lot of work. You know we're in a culture now where we're starting to have transgender folk come and work here and students who are coming to the university, you know, one great thing that we have here, we have a Rainbow Floor. We have students who identify as LGBTQAI+ and, for a lot of them, it's very difficult because sometimes their families don't know. I also work on a student support fund with Jill Benson where we can award emergency funds to students who may have been disowned by their families, right, who don't have the financial support so, you know, it's a lot of engagement, a lot of involvement, but it's necessary, and these are things that I can take, you know, I mentioned, you know, going to doing this office, doing this position the YMCA, I could take those things and use them in different instances, right? I think the university provides a good example of how you can use these tools, these strategies, in other places as well, so that's another good thing about being a university. I think universities have the opportunity of leading the way for the rest of the public culture as an example to look at and, you know, let's face it, we're in a good state and I mean by being in a, and not to be political, but we're in a blue state, and Pritzker basically supports these initiatives, so, and not every state has that, so we're very fortunate that we can, you know, we can move forward with these things. And, not that people aren't going to question some of the things that you want to do, but, you know, at least you can have the fight here. You can have the fight, you can be supported.

LL: You can have the conversation.

BC: You can have the conversation.

LL: Yeah, which is another conversation.

JN: On the COM-versations podcast!

BC: I know I went on with that but, you know, it's, I think it's important work. I'm glad to be involved in doing that work. I fell into it accidentally here. I'll say accidentally because I wanted to do it anyway, I mean, that's the kind of work I like doing. Always pushing, you know, a lot of that. Just real quickly, a lot of this work comes from the trajectory of my life, right, and the things that I saw that my mother and father couldn't get or couldn't do and that kind of pushes me to look for ways of getting social justice and equity for people who look like me, right? So, you know, I know the struggle they had with raising 9 children and the things that my mom wanted to do that she couldn't do so those, you know, those kind of guide me, but they also guide me to be the kind of person that I am. I, and it's kind of, you know, I'm not a very religious person, but I believe we all have a ministry and, you know, for me, that ministry is, you know, my father, my mother always described my father's knowing no, of having, of knowing no strangers. You know, he was a sheriff. He was a Republican, my mother was a Democrat, so, you know, I grew up in a household where every Saturday morning, there were these intense arguments about politics, right? And that shaped me a lot, you know, who I am and, but my parents always let us make our decision about what we wanted to do, right, what group did we wanna, so I had family who were in the Black Panthers, you know, others who, you know, weren't in the Black Panthers, who were more conservative. So, I always grew up in a family where there were interracial marriages, right? So I've been around people different than me all my life, but at the gist of that is the stories my mother told me coming from being born and raised in Alabama, right? And the things that she saw as a little girl and then the things that she faced as a grown woman and the way she had to carry herself just even to go in the grocery store in Ohio, so, you know, those are things and it's also..... but it's guiding me with the book project, second book project, that I will be working on on food.

LL: All of this while he's teaching the cycling class.

BC: All of this while I'm teaching a cycling class at the Y.

JN: Which dominates most of your time, I would imagine.

BC: It dominates a lot of my time. I mean, it's, I love doing that because it's, you know, it's, you all can't see me out there, but as a larger body teaching a cycling class, it encourages people to come in and work out. Saying whatever size you are, you can still do these things, right? You don't have to be this little skinny picture of something that you see on the Peloton commercial. Oops. Maybe I can't mention a company.

LL: Peloton. Peloton. Peloton. And, for the record, he looked at me and laughed when he said *skinny*, but. So he'd have to pick me up off the floor and put me back up on that seat. Well, we could talk much, much more about this, and I hope we do, and we invite everybody up to the 4th floor, to see us out and about because a lot of, most of our faculty, we're out and about in the community - whether we're teaching cycling or doing other things with different organizations. Before we go, I think, yeah, one bit of

trivia. Our trivia. People have been calling in and I get all kinds of messages about requests for trivia and other things, but what about the trivia question for today, then we'll call it a day.

BC: Before we do that, I would be remorse if I didn't that, you know, I'm very grateful to Dr. Doris Houston for getting me involved in all this work, so had do a shout out to her.

LL: What I was gonna say was, regardless of who's President, the one constant has been Dr. Houston.

BC: The work she's doing. I mean, she's trying, she's really working hard.

LL: The last three presidents...Dr. Houston.

BC: You're right, it has been the last three Presidents, that's right.

LL: Trivia question!

JN: Yeah, there's no transition there. But our trivia question. Alright, Byron, who was the first lawyer for Illinois State?

BC: Abraham Lincoln.

LL: No, it was a guy named Mortimer Gotchalk.

BC: When I first got here, I lived in downtown Bloomington so, you know, the law office for Lincoln is right down there by the Peace Center. So I read a lot about *saying, oh, this is interesting, it's the lawyer for Illinois State.*

LL: Yeah, pretty cool.

JN: Pretty cool.

BC: I'm so smart.

JN: And we went through the whole episode and we didn't mention Jesse Fell.

BC: Oh, I think Jesse feels in this room with us. Now, calm down, Jesse. He's like *who's that black guy you have here?*

JN: The ghost makes an appearance.

LL: He will make an appearance, someday, I heard. Depends on when he's in the mood, but we will have an interview with, you'll hear it first, an interview with Jesse Fell, and I'll ask him if he's thinking that.

BC: I'm not going to say things have changed.

LL: Well, I hope they've changed, and continue to change as we move forward, and this is a good space for it. The School of Communication and Illinois State. So, thank you, Dr. Byron Craig, for being a good colleague, a good teacher and adding so much to us in the community.

JN: And thank you for the wonderful conversation. Feel like I've learned a lot about you, and I really appreciate your time.

BC: Thank you, star romance novelist.

JN: Yes! Well, on our next episode, we are going to be talking to Elizabeth Chupp. She is our director of the academic advising community here in the School of Communication and she's going to join us for a fun conversation. So, thanks for listening, and thank you both for your time today!