



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**

BONUS Episode: Lessons Learned from Dealing with COVID-19 and Getting Ready for an Uncertain Fall

****Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.****

Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles
Vanessa B. Beasley
Marnel Niles Goins
Shawn T. Wahl

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RECORDING BEGINS

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

In March of this year, NCA released a special episode of *Communication Matters* about communication and the COVID-19 pandemic. For this episode, we want to look backward at how colleges and universities have dealt with the pandemic as we simultaneously look forward to what's likely to happen or not to happen in the Fall. I'm joined today by three university administrators with special insights on what we can all learn from the pandemic and where we're going to be going in the future: Professors Vanessa B. Beasley, Marnel Niles Goins and Shawn T. Wahl. Now let me tell you a little bit first about our guests today. Dr. Vanessa Beasley is Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of Resident Faculty and an associate professor of Communication Studies at Vanderbilt University. As Vice Provost and Dean of Residential Faculty, she oversees Vanderbilt's growing residential college system as well as the campus units that offer experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom. Dean Beasley



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researches presidential rhetoric, U.S. political communication and rhetorical criticism in theory. Dr. Beasley has published numerous works including *Who Belongs in America: Presidents, Rhetoric and Immigration* and *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric*. Hi, Vanessa. Thanks for joining us.

Vanessa Beasley:

Hi, Trevor. I'm really glad to be here and hi to all of my wonderful colleagues as well.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Marnel Niles Goins is a professor of communication, Interim Dean of Academic Affairs and Associate Dean in The School of Design, Arts and Humanities at Marymount University. Dr. Niles Goins is also a former member of NCA's executive committee, the current president of the Western States Communication Association and the immediate past president of The Organization for Research on Women and Communication. Dean Niles Goins is also a co-editor and contributor to *Still Searching for Our Mother's Gardens: Experiences of New, Tenure-Track Women of Color at 'Majority' Institutions*. Hi, Marnel. Thanks for being on *Communication Matters*.

Marnel Niles Goins:

Thank you. Thank you very much and thanks to NCA for hosting this.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Shawn Wahl is a professor of communication and Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at Missouri State University and previously served as the head of The Department of Communication at Missouri State. Dean Wahl leads the seven academic programs in the College of Arts and Letters and supports the college's mission to promote learning scholarship and service to the broader community. Dean Wahl's research focuses on communication education, college teaching, university leadership and the intercultural dimensions of higher education. Dr. Wahl has published numerous books including *Nonverbal Communication for a Lifetime*. Dean Wahl has also served as a corporate trainer, communication consultant and leadership coach. Hi, Shawn. Thanks for being on *Communication Matters*.

Shawn Wahl:

Thanks, Trevor. Also, thanks to NCA for putting this together. We appreciate it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I want to start our discussion today with the big picture question and Marnel, maybe you want to take a swing at this one. It's about the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act or



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CARES Act. As our listeners may know, the CARES Act provided support for higher education students and institutions. Do you have any thoughts about the CARES Act and your assessment of it and are there more funds that are needed for institutions of higher learning moving forward?

Marnel Niles Goins:

Sure. I'd be glad to take a stab at it. I want to just provide a bit of background about my institution. And so, while the CARES Act is helpful in some ways, my institution, Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia, it's pretty small. We have about 3,000 students and it's a private institution. So, being a private institution means that we're going to get less money from the CARES Act than public institutions. So, in terms of money that's allocated to our students, we got about a million dollars and in terms of the applicants who applied, we had over 400 students who applied. We needed to keep some of those funds for students who were going to apply a bit later, probably about \$200,000. But honestly, after we looked at the applications, each student ended up getting between \$150 and \$400. We have a really high international population. Many of those students were ineligible to even apply for funding. And so, we have to figure out ways to assist them. We have students who aren't working over the summer, students who aren't able to complete their internships, students who still need to pay for tuition and students whose parents have lost jobs. And so, to receive a check for \$400 from the CARES Act, while we appreciate it, it's not necessarily going to be very impactful in terms of them being able to pay their tuition for the rest of the semester or even enroll for the Fall semester. So, we need more and we as an institution don't have those funds to offer it to students and it would be great to increase this federal aid and also expand the parameters in terms of who's eligible to receive that funding.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Shawn at Missouri State, you guys are a public school, publicly supported by the state of Missouri. Did you see a different experience with the CARES Act than maybe Marnel saw at Marymount?

Shawn Wahl:

Yes. Because we are a state institution, we have benefited from the CARES Act. The amounts that were just discussed per student, we were closer to \$1,000 per student and the majority of funding that we received at our institution from the CARES Act, the majority of that money went to the students to help them with their bills and other costs.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

That speaks to a lot of the issues that have affected students I think during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, students were leaving campuses in the middle of a semester and they were leaving their dorms and they lost access, many of them, to a variety of resources and services including housing, food, healthcare and importantly, for learning purposes, internet access. Vanessa, did Vanderbilt do anything to try and address these losses or these different issues that their students might have faced when the pandemic hit?

Vanessa Beasley:

Yes. We did a couple of things. As my colleagues noted, we were also able to give, thanks to the CARES Act, funds to individual students basically constituting emergency financial aid and in our case, we're a private institution. We were able to give those funds to about just under 20% of our undergraduates and actually just about 18% of our graduate and professional students. And so, first answer would be, just like the other institutions were discussing today, we were glad to receive that money to give it back to our students to help them through that difficult time. The second thing we did was develop a hardship fund that students could apply to and we, of course, tried to be as generous as possible to help them with exactly the issues you were talking about, Trevor. And we were very fortunate that that was something that we had donors step up and help us with. So, that was wonderful. And then the third thing is always the most important thing, right? It's the relationship that students have with their faculty members and in the Spring, I think what was so heartening was you just saw everybody trying to make it work even as we all learned quite frankly things we didn't know about each other with regard to the full extent of all the circumstances people were in. But everybody was I think very attentive and immediate and tried to make sure that we continued with continuity of education as much as possible.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

What do you think? Do you think that can continue over to the Fall? I mean this has become such a contentious issue these days I think on a lot of campuses. Can we keep that same kind of esprit de corps or camaraderie going in the Fall?

Vanessa Beasley:

I feel like the good will is there. I feel like it's a classic case that things are just changing so fast that I personally am shying away from making too broad of predictions. But the one thing I will say is that the goodwill and everybody focusing on again the quality of the education, that's not going to change.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. I don't know about the three of you but I've been disheartened as I've watched both the federal government and local leaders and then college and university administrators grappling with these questions. And then all of our colleagues, the faculty colleagues on social media and the like and there's a lot of anxiety out there and I think Vanessa is right about that spirit that emerged in the Spring. But maybe Shawn, Marnel, do you have a sense if it's going to carry over to the to the Fall and depending on what happens? I mean this pandemic doesn't seem to be going away.

Marnel Niles Goins:

I think that faculty are anxious, and I think that they're fearful and it's a bit more difficult in this situation because you can't really blame anyone. I mean you can blame the federal government for not providing more funds. You can blame administrators for making classes online or face-to-face. But at the root of it it's no one's fault. And so, I think because of that, faculty are both fearful but they also understand that the administrators, university presidents and officials don't necessarily have any answers because we don't know what's going on either essentially. But one of the things that has kind of worked for us at Marymount and is kind of still working is this kind of grace in a sense. And so, I'm asking faculty, this confusion that you're feeling, this anxiety, just imagine how our students are going to feel in the Fall when they're trying to negotiate five different faculty members teaching all sorts of classes, hybrid flex, hybrid online and then they're taking labs and they're meeting some of their cohort via Zoom and they're meeting other people face-to-face and imagine this type of confusion and anxiety that the students are feeling even more so than the faculty. And I'm asking faculty to kind of be a little bit more gracious, a little bit more kind and to exhibit I guess more sympathetic behaviors to students in a sense. Because this level of anxiety is being felt not just by a faculty, not just by administrators but even more so by students. And I believe that once students kind of feel that and know, we don't know what's going on, if you have issues, if you want to talk, if you just don't understand what we're talking about because we're teaching this class virtually, then we can try to figure that out together. And so, having these face-to-face conversations and these individual conversations are offsetting some of this anxiety that I believe that we're all feeling in some part.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's good advice. That's nice to hear I think.

Shawn Wahl:

Yeah. And I want to just add to the point made about grace and compassion. I think that that's really important and that's something that we really have focused on at our institution is kindness, grace, serving each other and doing whatever we can to take on fear, anxiety, all of



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the doubt that we have. I would just add that it's not just a global health crisis; it's a financial crisis. And then we also have significant issues with race, inclusivity and diversity and all of these things are hitting at the same time. And I'll give an example of something that we've done at Missouri State University that I think has worked really well. We planned a series of electronic town halls. We've opened up the Zoom access, very public. We just finished one last week and the capacity was opened up to 3,000 participants. We invite the media. So, we've done our best to focus on transparency, grace, compassion. Students are participating. Family members are welcome to participate. And so, that gives me hope that the interest and the engagement of our campus community, that it's positive and people hopefully will carry that momentum into the Fall semester. It is a different experience to have so many people using web conferencing, Zoom. But in one case, we spent almost three hours fielding questions from our employees, staff, faculty as well as students.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I also know that Missouri State did a lot to fill the gap left by online virtual graduation ceremonies. I know that for a lot of especially first-year, first-generation college students where graduation and commencement ceremonies are so important that that left a gap. They're important for everyone but particularly when a student has really achieved and done major things in their lives. What are some of the ways that Missouri State dealt with that? I know I saw some evidence of it in social media and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how Missouri State sort of filled that gap.

Shawn Wahl:

Absolutely. What we did is all of the academic deans, our president, various leaders, we all made a commitment to basically, we all gave virtual commencement speeches to our colleges and our university communications team, they stepped up and helped us with just getting organized. It's not necessarily easy to put together a two-minute address for a video just in a few minutes. And so, we really tried to have fun and to realize that the aim was to provide that expert video, that message to first-generation college students. Because as you said, Trevor, I mean it really is devastating for family members, for people from all over the world, our international students who had that commencement experience, just that absence. So, we did everything we could with social media and with video and then at the department level, we actually have a new department head who started on July 1st, Dr. Brian Ott, one of department of communication of Missouri State University who did a lot of graduate student profiles to try to recognize the graduate students who are completing their Master's degrees and of course, there are other examples at the undergraduate level as well.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

Sounds like a creative approach and I think that's great. One of the big anxieties that I think a lot of faculty especially adjunct faculty but even some tenure-track faculty and graduate students have been facing furloughs, that kind of thing. How have your universities—we can start with Vanessa on this—how have you been affected by furloughs and layoffs at Vanderbilt and what does the future look like? I mean what's the prospects for the Fall and beyond?

Vanessa Beasley:

So, I will say that we have not had university-wide furloughs and layoffs. The senior leadership has left it to local decisions and obviously, I will say as somebody who has more staff reporting to me than faculty really thinking through how important our staff are and how their labor is often invisible, how they themselves represent a wide diversity of different kinds of populations including people who have never gone to college, whose children have never gone to college. And so, all of that is to say, when I'm making my own decisions within my unit, doing everything we really can to keep people first because we really can't be open without our staff and without our academic affairs professionals who are supporting our students along the way no matter their school or college. I really think that that's a message that faculty even as we all consider from whatever our different vantage points are what the uncertainties and anxieties are of the future. It's really important to remember that our professional staff are doing work that actually helps support all of us do our work too and that's just been one of my guiding principles.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Any thoughts on furloughs and layoffs at Marymount?

Marnel Niles Goins:

Yes. So, we haven't done any university-wide furloughs or layoffs. What we have done, we've offered our faculty and our staff voluntary furloughs and voluntary early retirements. And we've had a number of faculty accept the early retirement offer and I think being home these past few months, a lot of people have said I kind of like this. And so, we've probably had maybe ten faculty who have taken us up on the early retirement.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Are you looking at furloughs and layoffs? I'm particularly interested I suppose what Shawn's thoughts on this are at a regional state institution and dependent as you are so heavily I suspect like many folks at public institutions on state budgets which are really facing a crunch, what's the furlough layoff situation like at Missouri State?



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Shawn Wahl:

Just about a year ago, it was summer of 2019 and, of course, prior to the pandemic, prior to all the challenges that we're talking about today, we had run a simulation for decreased enrollment and we had planned to have less state support and I will say that one of our most dramatic scenarios that we looked at a year ago or dramatic simulations that happened plus a little bit more. But we really have focused on efficiencies and our number one priority has been focusing on maintaining faculty compensation, protecting our staff and then also, the affordability issue for our students. And so, one of the things that we learned, we just rolled into our new fiscal year and so, at this point, we do not have plans for furloughs. We discussed furloughs but I am very proud to say because of our leadership team, because of our campus community, we've really come together and at this point, we've been able to avoid that. To another point that was made, we have had some employees who have voluntarily gone to two-thirds pay for various reasons but that was voluntary. And then we did have our executive level team took voluntary pay deduction for several months but it's all been voluntary.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, that's heartening in a way and it speaks to another I think persistent challenge that you all as administrators might be particularly poised I guess to talk about which is that as you've been talking thus far, it strikes me that there are a lot of different communities, a lot of different individuals, a lot of different groups on campuses and the communication challenges, I mean just straightforward communication challenges of dealing with all of those different audiences and in a moment of crisis, we've all become experts, right?, in crisis communication and risk communication. But I'm curious about what you all have learned or what you've experienced with regard to the communication challenges of communicating with staff and academic professionals and students and parents and all of those different component parts of our higher education ecosystem if you will?

Vanessa Beasley:

I like this question because I think one of the things that our discipline does really well is put us in a position through years of our on-the-job training and through years of our scholarship to think about the basics that other people sometimes aren't thinking about. What's the audience? What's the exigence? Just the basic boxes that we all check. And one of the things that's been important to me throughout this is to raise with perhaps colleagues who aren't thinking about it in the same way a communication background trains us to is think about the fact that everybody—a colleague spoke to this earlier on a call—everybody is operating from a place of some kind of feeling of psychologically and physically unsafe, right? And when people are starting from a position of not feeling safe, of having the kind of fear and anxiety we were discussing earlier, it's really important to let people sit with that and to honor that. So, telling



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people they're wrong to be afraid or having a message that suggests that their current emotional state, whatever it is, is wrong is something to be avoided. And then I think the second thing is for me, it's been a moment to really educate our colleagues, our students and many of our constituents, there's a reason why we have humanists on our campus, people who are studying things like inequity of health outcomes as well as resources from not just a social science or basic science perspective but also from the lived experience, from the stories we know of people before. So, to your point, Trevor, it's about thinking about the situation and what the immediate message should be but it's also about the posture that we take and then that we listen to people's stories. I think that's one of the huge messages.

Marnel Niles Goins:

I'd like to really echo what Vanessa said because it's interesting. Even within these subsets, you've got just voices that are completely different. So, some students will say I need to be there on campus, I need to see my friends and other students will say absolutely not, my parents don't want me within six plus feet of anyone. And so, you've got these contrasting voices. But part of it is how we're responding. Number one, I understand that this is a feeling of anxiety or you feel unsafe or this is just a really tough time for you. And so, one thing I try to make sure is not that I'm a voice of reason, though I'd like to be, but that I'm a voice of maybe peace in a sense. Like I'll listen to you, I'll keep my tone calm and I want the faculty or the staff or the students or the parents to feel validated and heard. And at this point, we just have so many different options that we can use to work with students and to work with faculty. And so, once they realize that we have I guess these rules or these things that we're trying to do for the Fall but within them, there are various ways that students can still get an education even if they need to stay at home or even if they're compromised somehow in terms of their health. Same with faculty. So, we say yes, we want you to come back to campus but if there are certain things that will cause you to not come back to campus, here are some strategies or some things that we can use so that you're still able to teach. I think once they realize that and they feel heard and they feel validated and they feel safe, then they begin to kind of come back in a sense to okay, I can do this, I can get through the next semester.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. And then life throws you a curve, right?

Marnel Niles Goins:

Yeah. There'll be more and more curves.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, I'm thinking here of the recent announced regulations from the Homeland Security Department and ICE in particular with regard to international students. And you work so hard to demonstrate the empathy and to be caring and compassionate and then boom, your federal government comes in and basically says we're going to deport you if you have to do online teaching. Shawn, did you guys deal with that at Missouri State? I'm sure you did. I don't know the extent of your international student population but I'm struggling with the communication challenges just keep coming at us.

Shawn Wahl:

Yeah, absolutely. I find the announcement that has been made extremely problematic. We've got to do better. And on our campus, we are committed to supporting our international students. This information is devastating. It's cruel and we've had a very positive reaction as a community to this issue and we have released some information. Thankfully, so many of our students are enrolled in courses and it's been a real slam to us and I know that we're only one story. There are many stories. But we have a very, very strong position on this issue and we have to do better.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

It dovetailed with the whole concern about online teaching in general, right? And the ways in which we've made adaptations to create resources and capacities to allow our faculty to teach online and to do so successfully. I know NCA produced a resource bank of a variety of things that The Teaching and Learning Council put together. A lot of other associations and universities did the same thing. What are some of the takeaways from your campus' experience when we drill down specifically about online learning, online teaching, virtual teaching and all of that? What are some of the best strategies that you've seen implemented and some of the worst? What's Marymount doing?

Marnel Niles Goins:

So, it was interesting because in the Spring semester, the fact that it happened in March was just kind of disastrous because the syllabi were already created and projects were due and The School of Design, Arts and Humanities, we have a lot of studio courses. So, we have fine arts where students are taking ceramics courses or fashion design and their final projects are to sew, I don't know, a pair of pants or something. And so, if students aren't allowed on campus, many of them don't have sewing machines at home. They don't have any kilns in their homes I'm pretty sure. And so, to now try to figure out how to navigate and turn these courses into these hybrid or these online courses in the Spring was really, really stressful and taxing for some faculty to try to think about how can I turn this final assignment into something that's



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actually doable. And a number of our students since they're international went home for spring break and just never came back. And I don't know very many students who go home for spring break and take their textbooks. And so, that was also really interesting in terms of we can't necessarily use the textbook, we can't use a sewing machine, we can't use a kiln for pottery. But as Vanessa said, for the Fall semester both faculty and students are bit more prepared in terms of how to revamp the syllabi, how to prepare students. So, we still have to have them come on campus for our studio courses and for a number of our other courses but how can we have half of the class or a quarter of the class come in on certain days and get this one-on-one time with the instructor and kind of offset that and then do it another time during the week.

What we've really become conscious of though it's faculty workload. And so, even though faculty may be teaching three courses a semester, now you're still doing the same lesson I guess two or three times a week and you're prepared to teach the course as a hybrid flex. But just in case something happens, you're also prepared to teach the course completely online and you're dealing with students and more office hours and more emails. And so, I've talked to the faculty about how we can reduce workload and still be mindful of the fact that we're asking them to still be prepared for three different types of situations. And they've adapted really, really well and I'm very, very proud of them but I also understand it's difficult and it's tiring and it's taxing to try to teach a drawing class three times a week to three different groups of people and still be considered one prep.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I love that insight because I think what it speaks to is that one size doesn't necessarily fit all in terms of online teaching. We get questions at NCA about online teaching and public speaking courses and that's important but those are going to be really different than what I know, Shawn, a lot of your colleagues deal with at Missouri State because of the fine arts component, the performance dynamics or, as Marnel highlights, the studio art courses or the fashion design or at Maryland at least, I know the University of Maryland is dealing with a variety of struggles about research labs and the ways in which research continues to happen and that has educational implications as well. Shawn, have you seen the same issues with the fine arts and theater music? I know that's a big emphasis at Missouri State.

Shawn Wahl:

Yes. I completely connect and identify with everything that Marnel said when you look at the impact that the crisis has had on the arts. There are a number of really positive examples that I could talk about and I'll just give one. I was talking with one of our keyboard faculty, outstanding performer and when you look at the one-on-one instruction of lessons whether that's getting one-on-one instruction for trombone or for piano, I can name other instruments, there have been



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some positive stories that have come out of technique and different training that can happen with the use of Zoom. So, I've been impressed with our theater and dance faculty, music as well as art and design. Looking at communication, one lesson is I think that we've learned a lot about actually trusting faculty, trusting people's expertise and, Trevor, the point that you just made about public speaking, we're using a lot of social distancing as one example. So, there may be a lecture hall that would normally see over 200 students and we have our public speaking sections because we are returning to campus. That's what our plan is. But we have 20 students taking public speaking in a hall that will seat 200 for social distancing. Then we are about to roll out a mask policy. But the other thing that stands out is also blended format courses. I'm hopeful that we can learn efficiencies and ways to teach in smarter ways that we haven't realized before when you look at smaller groups. So, for example, our public speaking courses that are in a blended format will have 10 students who will be meeting on Monday and another group of students who might be meeting on Wednesday. And so, we're hoping that they'll be more high-quality, one-on-one conversations with speech coaching and other examples. And so, I'll end by reinforcing that I think it's been very important for us to trust our faculty and when they've had that uncertainty, to let them make those recommendations and decisions about their courses. And so far, that's been our spirit is to trust the experts. Our content experts, I've been amazed at the innovation and creativity.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

As you're speaking, Shawn, I'm struck by the fact that it we're right in the middle of this ongoing national conversation about reopening schools and that applies to colleges and universities and it's a great segue to talk about all of your plans and the plans that are underway and that are probably subject to change on your various campuses for what's going to happen and how those plans do a good job of meeting the needs of your populations, the student populations, the faculty populations, the staff populations on your campuses. What's Marymount going to be doing in the in the Fall?

Marnel Niles Goins:

We're face-to-face to the extent possible but by face-to-face, they're going to be hybrid flex in a sense so online components to all courses. We've increased our online course offerings mostly because a number of faculty have asked for that and they feel comfortable teaching that course online. But for our first-year students, we're trying to get them on campus just to kind of establish more of a sense of community to the extent possible and in smaller groups and with specific types of faculty who would like to teach face-to-face. But again, most of our courses are hybrid flex though we have increased our online course offerings. And what's interesting for us though is that because we're in DC, we have a high international student population, we've already had rules from various countries that said their students can't take more than two online



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classes while they're taking courses at Marymount. So, these have been kind of put into place for years. And so, I think we had that in the back of our minds as we were framing what we were going to do this Fall and what we're going to do potentially in the Spring. So, with ICE, it's extremely disappointing, it's heartening and, as Shawn said, it's not something that we agree with at all. We also understand that some countries do want us to have face-to-face offerings to the extent possible. So, we're trying to kind of accommodate that in a sense but we also want to make sure that we don't lose our first-year students and establishing that sense of camaraderie and community. However, things might change based on the numbers and based on the news. Faculty are prepared for a variety of scenarios.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

At Missouri State, I suspect you don't have the same level of autonomy that Vanderbilt and Marymount might have as just freestanding private institutions. Is the system telling you what to do? Is the state legislature telling you what to do in Missouri?

Shawn Wahl:

We actually have had a lot of positive collaboration with our local health officials. They've included our campus leadership. Our university of president has been in touch with the mayor, the director of the health department. And so, it really has been collaborative and it seems like we're getting information in advance. We have been looking at a citywide mask ordinance which I think that that decision will be made today. As I mentioned, we use the information from state and local officials to try to make science-based decisions and to, of course, keep safety, risk mitigation, contact tracing, we're doing all of those things. So, we haven't really been in a situation where we've had anyone dictating to us. It's actually been very positive and collaborative.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's great. And that sort of I guess leads to a final kind of thought about I guess what I would call the new normal. I think there's a lot of discussion now and I'm of two minds. I actually think in some ways, this pandemic will yield a new normal but in some ways, I think there's going to be a real nostalgia to go back to the way things were and recapture all of those good things that we used to think about prior to this pandemic. I'm curious if you all have any thoughts on that. Do you think these are long-term structural sorts of changes that we're going to be seeing in higher education or when the vaccine comes out and we're all safe and healthy again, we're going to go back to the way things were?



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Marnel Niles Goins:

I was watching a movie yesterday and it started out with two people hugging and I felt sad and I thought about the last time that I hugged someone who was not in my immediate family and it was months. And so, I think that for a long time, we'll kind of be thinking about how things used to be and how we were sitting in the classroom and looking over each other's shoulders and shaking people's hands and meeting in offices without Plexiglas. And so, I don't think that feeling go away anytime soon. One of the things that we're doing at Marymount is we're kind of using this as an opportunity to really just look at all the things that we've talked about in the past that we want to change, all the minor and major problems that we face whether they're structural, whether they're pedagogical and if there's any time to do it, now is the time because we're already kind of making these changes anyway. So, if we are going to transition to this hybrid flex model and we're not saying forever. We're just saying now's the time to look at how we're going to improve our teaching. Should we just incorporate more online teaching? And instead of being forced to do it, what are some ways we can think about it in a manner where we're making the decisions and we're calling the shots? And so, this is a time. This is a time to look at not a new normal but interdisciplinary studies and how say communication can work with technology or how crisis communication can work with the biology department. And so, we're trying to kind of look at the positive and see what kind of creative things that we can come up with but that nostalgia is going to be there. It's going to be there for a long time. Trevor.

Vanessa Beasley:

I also agree that the nostalgia is going to be there and I'm really struck by two things. One is the way things were had some good things about it and also didn't have some good things about it, right? So, it's an opportunity, as Marnel said, to think about the changes we want to make and we need to make. Some of those are going to be related to public health. Some of those are going to be related to anti-racism. Some of those are going to be related to and I hope the majority are related to the intersection of those two things because the two moments that we find ourselves in as a society are very much related to my mind and I think universities have an obligation to step up and think about how we can start to address these things together. So, even though I think there is—I mean I feel it. I feel nostalgia and I love the point about watching something in a movie. Even when you see a photograph of something that you might have attended like a picnic and you see everybody together, you think are we going to do that again? And you miss it. But it's also true that as we know in communication studies more than some of our other colleagues in other disciplines that the way things were always leaves somebody out. So, my attitude is let's think about this moment and this kind of everything from technology to structural arrangements of whether or not we have power shared adequately to think about who and how we want to be moving forward.



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Shawn Wahl:

Yeah. I have two points. One of them is about interpersonal relationships in the face of this community and it's completely to Marnel's point that was beautifully made about just giving someone a hug. Within the past few weeks, I had the opportunity to talk to 20 incoming freshmen from all over the nation and I know that across private and public universities, we've been worried about well, do we have freshmen who want to come to campus, do they want to come to school face-to-face? And what I realized in that forum that was a Zoom session, I'm thinking of a student from Nebraska, another student from Chicago, our out-of-state students, they are so excited to come to college and I realized that we have juniors and seniors, students across the entire world have been at home. And so, there's certainly been positive things with families but I really learned in that moment that this group of students, they are ready to have a face-to-face experience and, of course, we have to do that in a safe manner. But the other takeaway that I have is I think we can use when you look at blended formats, online innovation, that we can get smarter or work smarter in the future based upon the lessons that we've learned during this crisis. And so, I'm hoping that as we plan future NCA conferences, ICA conferences, that we'll be talking about what the communication discipline can do to document those wins and best practices from the lessons learned.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's probably a great place to wrap things up. And seeing this, Marnel said this to me once in a different context about not viewing everything as an issue or a challenge but seeing things as opportunities and possibilities. Maybe that's the best place to leave off today and think about the lessons that we've learned from this pandemic and where we're moving forward. So, thank you, Vanessa, Marnel and Shawn for joining me today and participating in this really interesting conversation about the next stages of higher education in America. And listeners, thank you for joining us again on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

In NCA news, NCA's Teaching and Learning Council has developed a growing list of online teaching and learning resources that are relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. The page includes advice and tips for faculty and students as well as course development resources and information about online teaching platforms. The teaching and learning resources page also includes a sampling of free to access NCA journal articles that are relevant to communication amid crises and disasters. The resources will continue to be updated. So, be sure to check back for new information. Please visit natcom.org/Online-Teaching. That's natcom.org/Online-Teaching for this valuable resource page.

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your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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