



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

****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
Ellen Gorsevski
Robert Mejia
Wei Sun

[Audio Length: 0:48:24]
RECORDING BEGINS

Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Hello, I'm Trevor Perry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Thanks for joining us for today's episode.

Hi, listeners. Welcome again to *Communication Matters*, the NCA podcast. In the last episode of *Communication Matters* that I hope you listened to, we discuss the state of PhD programs generally and considered some possibilities for reform. If you haven't listened to that episode, you may want to check it out. It's available wherever you listen to your podcasts. So today's episode of *Communication Matters* follows up on that and delves into the state of the communication PhD. How have our programs fared during the COVID-19 pandemic and what is the job outlook for communication graduates with a PhD? Communication Professors Ellen Gorsevski, Robert Mejia, and Wei Sun join me today to address these questions and many more I'm sure. So first let me tell you a little bit more about today's guests. Ellen Gorsevski is an associate professor in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Gorsevski's research interests include environmental rhetoric, international and intercultural rhetoric, political rhetoric, social movement rhetoric, media criticism, critical animal and media studies, and non-violent conflict communication. Dr. Gorsevski is the author of *Writing Successful Grant Proposals*, *Dangerous Women: The Rhetoric of Women Nobel Peace Laureates*, and *Peaceful Persuasion: The Geopolitics of Non-Violent Rhetoric*. Hi, Ellen and welcome to the podcast.

Ellen Gorsevski:

Hi. It's great to be here. Thanks so much for having me.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Wei Sun is an associate professor and the director of graduate studies in the School of Communications at Howard University. Dr. Sun researches in the areas of intercultural communication, new media studies, and health communication. Dr. Sun is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters including a forthcoming chapter in *Counter-Terrorism Laws and Freedom of Expression: Global Perspectives*. From 2018 through 2021 Dr. Sun was on a Fulbright specialist roster. From December of '19 to January of 2020, Dr. Sun visited Hangzhou Dianzi University and Shanghai International Studies University as a Fulbright specialist. Hi, Wei and welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Wei Sun:

Thank you for inviting me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Robert Mejia is an associate professor in the department of communication at North Dakota State University. Dr. Mejia's research concerns the relationship between culture, economics, politics, and technology including propaganda, communication infrastructure, and video games. Dr. Mejia is the author of numerous journal articles and book chapters including the recent including the recent *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* edited forum on "Communication and the Politics of Survival," featuring Dana L. Cloud, Michael Lechuga, Shereen Yousuf, Stacey K. Sowards, Benny LeMaster, Meggie Mapes, and Jessica Hatrick. His forthcoming themed issue in *Review of Communication* on "Articulating the End: The Production, Sustenance, Deferral, and Negation of Endings, co-edited with Matthew Houdek and Logan Rae Gomez, is currently accepting submissions until June 13th. Hi, Robert. Welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Robert Mejia:

Thank you so much for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So let's start first by talking about the state of the world like that's not a big enough question for us to begin with. We've discussed in a few episodes now of *Communication Matters* how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting a lot of aspects of our lives from teaching and classroom behaviors to how students deal with communication apprehension and anxiety, a whole range to a lot of public health discussions about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. Of course, we haven't really gotten at how COVID-19 is specifically affecting graduate students and graduate students in various communication programs around the country. So graduate students are now having to teach remotely. They're working on their projects remotely. Could you all speak to how COVID-19 is affecting your graduate students and what you think the future holds in a new post-



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

pandemic world for graduate education? We can start with Ellen if we want. That sounds like a good place to start.

Ellen Gorsevski:

Our graduate students are hardy souls and they've really rallied. And I've reached the middle age where I realize that I am always a little bit behind the power curve and I'm never quite up to speed. So they were already quite comfortable with whether you were doing WebEx or Zooming. I feel like those of us who are a little bit slower to adopt new technologies particularly in terms of grad students who are teaching, I think they've been very buoyant and the rest of us are catching up more with that. I think where in my experience with advisees and just students in our program in general, and we were talking about this in our grad faculty meeting a couple days ago, it's been just a challenging time kind of missing the sense of community and having my advisees be able just to swing by my office with my office door open and just say hello. So kind of just missing that interpersonal immediacy and synchronistic happenstance meetings in the hallway and things like that that really help sustain and support our grad students. So I feel like that's where it's been missing. But our program, my colleagues, everyone really rallied. But yeah, it's nothing like being there I think. So yeah, it's been kind of a mixed bag I think for our program.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's interesting that kind of, I've always often thought that with a lot of what we do academically, that a lot of it is serendipitous. I remember when I was a grad student, this was back in the day, just finding other sources next to the book that I was actually going to get on the library stacks and it was all by accident. But it was a real way that we expanded I guess what we were thinking about learning and I think that applies here to what you're saying about the students in Bowling Green at least missing that camaraderie. Are you all seeing the same thing at Howard and at North Dakota State?

Wei Sun:

Yes. We are also like online. Have been online for two semesters and probably will be into the hybrid mode in fall. And we hope, we don't know yet, but our students are missing the campus culture and especially I think it's hard for the first year doctoral student and the same for the freshmen college student as well. They haven't got the chance to know the professor or their peer yet and they just stay home. So everybody's kind of, yeah, work to meet the like deadlines and our faculty and student, they are both overworked. There is no ending in front of a computer. You just be on computer one meeting after another. What we do is usually we hold online classes. It's kind of face-to-face on the Zoom, other online platform. I believe many universities are doing so. And we hold personal meetings with students on the Zoom as well. So just especially for the students who are in the dissertation proposal or dissertation writing stage and that's the way to keep them connected.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

Robert Mejia:

Yeah. What I would add for North Dakota State University is that some of the challenges have been is that on one hand, the department has invested quite a bit in making sure our graduate students, as all our programs do, but has made sure that our graduate students are prepared for teaching and we have faculty who are specialists in online education. So that's been an asset. And yet at the same time, it is an incredibly difficult transition for faculty and graduate students to think about how to coordinate the Zoom experience. Most of our graduate students are doing public speaking and that can be a challenging course to conceptualize in a Zoom or online environment. And so we have great graduate students but that has been a challenge. In terms of the socializing effect, that's also been an interesting experience. North Dakota State, not necessarily university but the state of North Dakota, has fairly antiquated COVID policies compared to other parts of the country. And so on one hand, the state was late to adopt mask laws and social distancing policies. And so how that affected a graduate student socializing, it didn't put the same barriers in place but our grad students are responsible. And so there's been difficulties in terms of maintaining those relationships with faculty. I understand that some of my own advisees and others felt a sense of isolation this past year. And that's a challenge because, Trevor, as you mentioned, so much of what we do is serendipitous, so much of what we do is the connections we make between our peers, faculty, so on and so forth. And some that serendipity has been lost this year.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I'm also curious too and, Wei Sun, this is probably for you, you've done a lot of work about minority students or underrepresented minority students and how they deal with various stressors and the like in the educational context. And speaking as you do as someone who teaches at a historically black college and university, are you seeing any impact of all of the, I guess I would call it the racial reckoning at work in our culture right now, both in terms of the horrific anti-Asian violence but also the legacy of the George Floyd killing in Minnesota and the ongoing trial? I know it's exhausting for me. I'm sure it must have a powerful impact on your graduate students at Howard.

Wei Sun:

Yes. Harvard University is kind of the legacy of the mission statement is work for improving social justice and equality issues for people underrepresented. And I think many of my colleagues and also our doctoral student, they are scholar activists. We kind of, yeah, since the long time ago, we started to do the research to investigate those current communication issues and the Bblack Lives Matter and also the COVID impact on the underrepresented historically marginalized groups. I think this is part of the, sure, the stressor, the big societal problem. And I did research on our HBCUs college student stress before the COVID and found that financial issues, academic performance, and also the political issues and the Trump. They were the top three stressors. And recently, I just collaborated article with two doctoral students on how African-American students



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

dealing with stress during COVID and there are 12 doctoral students participate the study. And now like just besides all these matters like isolation, financial issues, and technology issues, and interestingly, the faculty student relationship. They are more important and if they having or perceived they have understanding with the faculty members, their online experience could be positive. Otherwise, it's just everything is negative.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

One of the points that was made in our last podcast episode from the authors of *The New PhD* is that one of their proposals is that we need to make the PhD and the humanities more generally socially relevant again. And it speaks to what Dr. Sun was talking about with regard to the social activism. I'm wondering, Ellen, Robert, are you seeing that amongst your graduate students, a greater sort of interest or move towards more social activism, more commitment to the relevance of the intellectual work that they're doing?

Ellen Gorsevski:

Yeah, absolutely. One of my advisees was participating actively in Black Lives Matter movement starting early last summer and many of our students are involved in different ways and participating. One particular student was literally out in the streets at a time where the rest of us were terrified to even leave to go to the grocery store. So yeah, it's definitely a kind of throwback moment to the 1960s. I remember when I was a master's student at Oregon State University and I always wondered why the local newspaper was this brick building with an inner courtyard. And someone came to campus and was talking about the 60s and they said they built the newspaper that way because there were so many protesters protesting editorial policies that they built it that way to be kind of like a fortress. And we've had protests on our campus even recently. I don't know. It made national news. I don't know if any of you heard of it. But there was an undergraduate hazing incident where a student tragically died and there were students out protesting, graduate and undergraduate alike. So yeah it's, definitely an energizing time but it's also kind of an uncharted in a new way with engaging with civil disobedience and marches and the boycotts of the state of Georgia going on. So it's definitely an interesting time and our students are researching it, they're actively part of it, and they're also, like the rest of us, exhausted by it. Zooms, more to do. So yeah, it's an interesting time for sure.

Robert Mejia:

Yeah. So I think in thinking through this question, there's multiple layers and levels. And so North Dakota State University is a predominantly white institution in a predominantly conservative state. Fargo's more diverse than the rest of North Dakota but that's not saying much when you're in North Dakota. And so there's multiple levels in which students have been engaged responding and concerned and also, with faculty. And so in many ways, the university department is lucky to have the students we do. And so the students we have are taking on more work than I would say



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

the faculty, myself included, in many of these issues. We have undergraduate students, Ali Doyle who's been incredibly involved with the Fargo chapter of Black Lives Matters and has been organizing rallies and protests. And that's a lot for an undergraduate student to be engaging with in addition to her studies, in addition to her social life, in addition to the financial effort she might be engaging with. And at the graduate level, we're also lucky, Melissa Bartles has a JD with the University of Cincinnati and was involved with the Innocence Project and she's heavily involved with coordinating the public speaking program. And so in many ways, her presence helps us to think about public speaking as a social movements class. It still is very much a conventional public speaking program which may be something we need to rethink. But I think our graduate students are in many ways leading the change along with our students. The faculty, I think, and I don't think this is unique to NDSU, but in many ways need to be more active in providing cover for the students so that they don't have to do all this additional labor. And at the same time, they are incredibly smart, talented, and well equipped. So I don't mean this in a kind of way that minimizes the skill set that they have that in some ways is superior to many faculty.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Does any of this bear on how you recruit new students to come to Fargo, for example? How is the COVID-19 pandemic and the social activism and the tumult and Trump and all of that, how does that bear on recruiting students to come study communication?

Robert Mejia:

I guess I can start with that since Fargo is a space that is often overlooked in some ways understandably, in some ways perhaps due to media representations. People think of the movie Fargo or TV show. in strange ways, so Fargo recruits, heavily most of our students are going to come from the area, the region. We do get students, national and international, but the vast majority are going to be from the Great Plains region. And so at the master level, it's going to have less of an impact and again, that's true of many spaces. At the doctoral level, it can be a bit more difficult. I think that many doctoral programs are probably facing these struggles unless you're a highly visible program. And so for this year, I spoke with our graduate director and our class, most people chose to either defer or pursue other programs perhaps closer to home. And so I think the big challenge for a place like Fargo is helping students to see what opportunities are available in the area and also, sometimes recognizing that the city and university have a lot of work to do when students are considering where to go for school. If they see a state that has dysfunctional COVID policies, that doesn't bode well for their feeling safe about moving to a state where we had for a period of time the highest per capita rate of infection. And so those are definitely legitimate concerns and I don't blame students for having questions about those.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

What about at Howard? Has the recruitment of new graduate students changed in any kind of meaningful way?

Wei Sun:

Yeah. Last year, actually we waived GRE test scores. So that's probably one of the reasons most students apply to our program. And we admitted more than the previous years. But eventually to be, I guess if they receiving the funding. If they don't receive funding, probably they will go to other universities. And I think last year, our graduate school at Howard University, we tried all the ways to have those enrollment like meetings and then they reach out to HBCU masters programs in communication. So kind of have this kind of personal, yeah. But yeah, I didn't see much happened from that kind of meeting because our department does not offer a master's program. So most students, they were from undergraduate studies. Yes, seeking master's program. But we just don't know. Probably that's in the wake of Black Lives Matter, people realize that Howard might be a right place to come to study the racial issues and other issues.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Right in the middle of the nation's capital too. Shifting gears a little bit, I know, Ellen, you've written about the importance of grant writing and grant proposals and the way to successfully pursue external funding. Do you envision that this is something our graduate students across the board are going to need or is there a way that we can encourage grant proposal writing and recognizing that communication is that sort of hybrid humanities and social science discipline that we are? What do you think about the future of grant proposal writing for graduate students?

Ellen Gorsevski:

Yeah, I think it's going to be increasingly more essential for graduate students. I always encourage any and all students, a lot of colleagues will send students my way to sort of get the short version of my book even though it's very short. I encourage them literally, particularly my advisees, to apply to anything and everything because a lot of grant writing is just about failure and learning by doing. And we were just talking in our graduate faculty meeting, COVID-induced uncertainty among other things in fourth year funding for doctoral students. And so I'm sending emails to students encouraging, if I see something that comes up on CRTNET, I send it their way and I say just apply, apply to this. So I think at least as we're, the next say three to five years, as we're coming out of this and academia is reinventing itself and allowing more remote teaching, that means there's probably going to be more opportunities or crisitunities for universities to outsource teaching and do away with tenure lines which can have good and bad implications. So being able to soft fund yourself is incredibly important for doctoral students and for master's students going into a lot of industries. It's a really helpful skill as well because it's not just academia that's affected by COVID. It's the entire landscape.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

It's also, it seems to me, an important skill, an important body of understanding for graduate students who might not seek an academic career. Grant writing in the nonprofit world and in the foundation world and the like is a place where a PhD in communication can say, well, I've got this background and that might make them very appealing as a potential employee. And that kind of gets at this question of alt-ac and alternative academic careers. And I'm curious what you all are doing with your students in that regard? One of the things we do at NCA is we put out, as you undoubtedly know, a jobs report that offers a digest of all of the position announcements advertised in NCA. And we've seen an increase in non-academic career postings. We've also seen an increase in interest in non-academic careers amongst graduate students. And even as in this post-pandemic world, the academic job market is increasingly uncertain. So what are we doing? What should we be doing as a discipline to better equip our students beyond grant writing for potentially an alternative academic career?

Wei Sun:

In the last year, graduate school conducted one PhD student career pathway up to probably last 20 years, the graduates, like alum in all the PhD disciplines. They found out actually 80% of Howard PhDs, they teach in the universities and colleges and many of them in other HBCU universities. So and also, recent years, we saw some students would go to the industry, go to the government. So they have their own consulting firms. So that's kind of, yeah, where our students go. It seems so difficult for the new graduate to get like tenure track position right after they graduate. We will really look at their grant writing experiences, publication record. For the new PhD, very few of them could have kind of a record of publication upon their graduation. So yeah, I think because we are in DC, we probably have some more opportunities especially for the federal government job and many of them, they have part-time jobs and when they come here, some of them have full-time jobs. So that's just very kind of different for our students' demographic and most of our students already kind of the mid-career, middle career and that they come back to receive the PhD. But for the youngish ones is kind of, yeah, difficult.

Ellen Gorsevski:

Yeah. For one of our most successful recent graduates named Yannick Kluch, he ended up focusing in his doctorate on sport communication. And so he's been able to combine that really successfully post-graduation. And sports comm or communication of sport is a growing field and the increase in awareness of sport and sports-based organizations for having that knowledge and understanding and PR as well, the need for that, there's a growing need. And so I think some of our savvier students are latching onto that. But I think in terms of faculty awareness and faculty even comfort levels of advocating for students, hey, be open-minded. Look for think tanks. Look for other opportunities that are just starting to emerge. I think it's been a little bit more haphazard. We have had some excellent, we have the Institute for the Study of Culture and Society and



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

they've been incredibly proactive, run by my amazing colleague Jolie Sheffer in having workshops that introduce both doctoral level grad students, masters level grad students as well as faculty two ideas about do more outreach, do more writing in non-traditional and alternative journals because that's where you can start to get noticed. But there's a lot of sort of the conservative wing, the sort of tried and true, no, it must be peer-reviewed journals. So there's definitely this sort of push and pull between those impulses right now. I definitely would encourage students and colleagues to be open-minded because it's going to be a bumpy ride coming out of COVID for the academic job market.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, correct me if I'm wrong and you all might have a different sense of this, but I think we're at a sort of inflection point where older, more established faculty are and have been for years in the mindset that graduate students and especially PhD students are being trained to be academics and that's where they should be. And I think younger graduate advisors are a little bit more in recognition of the idea that graduate students may not want to necessarily pursue the academic career. There's nothing wrong with that. But you do end up in a kind of push me pull you sort of situation. And I worry personally for the graduate student who's trapped in that kind of dynamic. I don't know. I'm just ruminating here. But it seems to me we're at an important point when we talk about the advising that we do with regard to alternative academic careers.

Robert Mejia:

A few thoughts based on the conversation we've been having as well as the conversations the fields been having for some time. And so academia, I think, itself constantly been responding and some of those interventions and changes have been more effective than others. In terms of thinking about how we train and prepare our graduate students, I think we can learn a lot of what we're doing at the undergraduate level. And so for a conference that I'm a part of as an organizer for the Building the Fugitive Academy, we had a workshop on radicalizing mentorship, patronage, and power and Michael Lechuga spoke a bit at length about the difference between patchwork and constellation mentorship. And at the graduate level, we're very much a patchwork mentorship type of program where if you happen to be fortunate to be working with a faculty member who has experience with grant writing or happen to be fortunate to be working with a faculty member who has local, regional, or national connections with non-profits or industries outside of academia, then you fare quite well. And this happens as well within the academic employment area. If you have a faculty member who's connected to various programs, then that gives you a leg up. At the undergraduate level, we're not as dependent upon your specific advisor. We have programming in place, whether that's through something like an internship coordinator or a career center or whatever it might be. And so I think the graduate level can definitely learn from what we're offering our undergraduate students. And so we should have programming at the graduate level in terms of grant writing workshops. And sometimes we do but sometimes we don't and it can vary for



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

institution. Or we should have programs that are about, like I'm thinking of the conversation that actually I think, Trevor, you held last week if I believe where you mentioned Richard Cherwitz's intellectual entrepreneurship consortium and like having the space where it's a program that's designed to tell local business leaders, nonprofits, etc. like here's what our students are doing. We have value. And so helping make sure that people in our community know what we do with communication. Otherwise, we have that antiquated notion that communication is just multiple years of taking more and more advanced public speaking courses which is great and yet there's so much that we do, whether it's for public health, whether it's through education, family, etc. So my main point is I think we need to take the infrastructure we've developed for undergraduates and think about translating that into programming for graduate students.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

It's interesting, the point that we discussed last week about Cherwitz's IE program in Texas was that it was a great successful graduate program that when a graduate dean changed ended up reverting back to the undergraduate population. So it was kind of the reverse of what you're suggesting and I think you're absolutely right. I think we're at the cusp of beginning to think about how to train our graduate students to translate their academic training into meaningful ways for non-academic careers. That's the trick it seems to me.

Robert Mejia:

Exactly. And I think what I would add is I think what Cherwitz did, and I'm less familiar with the program but from having heard it talked about, was great. It still was dependent upon one person who needed support from a dean and whereas our undergraduate program is never viewed that way. A faculty member retires and it's not like all of a sudden, the internship program dies or the career center dies. It's like we see an inherent value with that and that's what we need to be thinking about at the graduate program and also giving faculty the support and incentive to participate in that programming. Because again, too often it's like here's your service assignment. You do it. Nobody else wants to do it. As opposed to here's something that is a space for all faculty to participate and we've also given you time and incentives to participate in it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. We've often I think used or thought of graduate advising as a sort of apprenticeship model. You work in a one-on-one relationship. And I think what you're calling for is spot on. It's this idea that we need to collectivize our understanding and our commitments to graduate advising so that we're giving people the support they need. That's great. What would you say in about 10 years is the future of the communication PhD based on everything we've been through over the last year? I realize these predictions are always tough. But is it going to matter? Are people still going to be getting a PhD in communication? Is it going to be radically different? Just a round robin. What are



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

you all thinking in terms of the future of where we are and how a communication PhD matters or doesn't matter?

Ellen Gorsevski:

It's one of the fastest growing majors for undergraduates nationwide and has been for the past at least decade or two. And I think it's going to continue to be incredibly important and relevant. It's trickier to make predictions at the doctoral level because we have these interesting demographic things going on. People are living healthier. Baby boomer generation is not retiring because they don't have to. They're incredibly healthy. They're incredibly experienced. But it's kind of a taboo subject too to discuss because then there's this similar shift in a lot of states where the state share of funding is decreasing and students and faculty alike have to become increasingly more independent and entrepreneurial and beyond soft money and self-funded for portions and sometimes all positions. So it's going to kind of depend. Like BGSU I think it was roughly 10 years ago tried to implement a policy where they were trying to incentivize really long-term like 30-year faculty to think about retiring. But instead, it was a little bit too tepid and timid. And so what ended up happening was there was this complete leaving of the university of all the institutional knowledge of these incredibly advanced administrators and administrative assistants. So they all took it because somehow in the shuffle, financially it worked out better for them. But then factually didn't take advantage because it wasn't advantageous for faculty. So all these kinds of issues and then are they even going to be replaced, is a tenure line going to be replaced if someone retires? So I think all of these issues are really going to continue to be on the radar of a lot of programs and a lot of provosts looking at programs. Knock on wood, our program is really vibrant and strong right now even in spite of COVID and our master students numbers are up. But yeah, 10 years from now, that's a hard prediction to make but I think they're going to be a lot of these conversations happening on a lot of campuses.

Wei Sun:

I would say always there are people who pursue a PhD from whatever university they dreamed for like recent years, I guess especially this year. We saw many older students apply and being accepted. So they already in the, I mean the workplace for I guess and now it's always on their mind and they want to study for it and they want to make a change or want to be a professor or they were currently teaching in the community college. They want to go to a research university. And if people want to make a million dollar money, they won't be able to get it, very few, they can do it through the communication PhD. But if they want to make a change, that's how we persuade our student. And if you want to make a change, bring your research to the community and this is the right place you can come. And I think it still depends on the assistantship and assistantship, the tuition increase every year. If they won't get funded, it will be very hard to keep the student. I think, yeah, grant writing it is very important and currently my department has a national funding doing research on COVID-19 itself, not only can make our program visible and also could create



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

a lot of at least the research assistantships. So that's how I mean my school and Howard University always encouraging faculty members to apply for funding. Even though I think graduate school also encouraged graduate students to apply for funding, that's very limited because of this federal big company. They ask the tenure track or tenured faculty to apply and they could apply on the university, some scholarship or fellowship. And I always encourage or sponsor student to apply for it so that they can fund their research. Otherwise, it'd be difficult. I'm not sure about the other university. For our program, typical that's four years to graduate and the university has a limit. Everyone has to finish in seven years. So between four and the seven, that's the range and if without funding, that would be very difficult. And many of them have their family and other responsibilities to do.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I think the average in communication is 5.3 years from the MA to the PhD. I think that's right. Robert, what do you think? Where are we going for the next decade?

Robert Mejia:

Yeah. This is an interesting and amusing question for me, amusing in that because it's a bad question but amusing because I'm not 10 years removed from my PhD. So I still don't know what it's going to look like in two years post-PhD or I guess I should say year 2021 snuck up on us. Right? But in terms of answering your question, I think a lot of it is really going to depend upon our faculty, our associations. I think NCA, the field has a number of fissures that need to be resolved. So historically we emerge from the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking and I think the field sometimes has an antagonistic relationship to its basic course and sometimes the field has an antagonistic relationship to the intersecting disciplines. So for instance, my PhD is in communications with an S and there's a tense relationship between communication studies and communications research. And I think the field will be stronger if it resolves those tensions and I think seeing that there are strengths. And so examples I think of, for instance, in terms of trying to work through resolving that tension with the public speaking level is I think of Cal State LA's program and the work that Kristina Ruiz-Mesa has been doing there in terms of thinking about like, hey, we're teaching public speaking at Cal State LA which is a predominantly Hispanic-serving institution. And how can we rethink our public speaking model in a way that resonates and relates to the lives of the students? Because there's so much value in our basic courses. One, in terms of program funding, it's a huge source of support and all the general education courses we offer. But two, in terms of student recruitment. But three, it also allows for the university to serve or the department I should say to serve as an advocate of the work we do. And so to give, just to help sum this up as an example, I work with Humanities North Dakota which is a statewide North Dakota nonprofit dedicated to advancing the humanities. And I teach courses through them for adult learners. My students, most of them are retired. It's very inexpensive or free for them. And I'm teaching a course on technology, politics, and culture this



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

semester and they're fascinated by what the discipline is doing. They didn't realize that people are studying the political effects of technology. And from my perspective, I find that exciting. From another perspective, I also think that that's an issue of visibility, an issue of faculty and association which I know are doing a great job but of really advocating for what we're doing. And if we do a really good job with that on all levels, then the discipline will have a bright future and also will be productive in advocating for ourselves and other affiliated disciplines. If we don't and we keep having our tensions left unresolved, then I think that most of the growth is going to remain and go to other disciplines that have more visibility, whether that's sociology, political science, economics, and other spaces. So that's just my two cents from a person who has not yet witnessed the 10 years at this point in time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. Well, give it time. It'll come.

Ellen Gorsevski:

Yeah. I think I could just piggyback too on that. I was amazed looking, NCA has some really great statistics on its data page about doctoral programs and master's programs that I looked at. And in the 2019-20 academic year, there were roughly 600 political science ads at the assistant professor level. But in communication, whether with or without an S, it was, and media and related, it was about half that. So it definitely speaks to whether the cachet or the elan or the punditry of political scientists to be the first ones to call. So I think universities also, programs have to become more agile, publish more widely in more things like blogs and things that get them noticed for doing good research but in a really publicly accessible way. So that we can explain, like Robert was saying and Wei Sun too, better what we do and the richness we bring as experts in our own respective areas of communication and media studies, etc. So yeah, it's going to be this important time to get communication selling itself and pitching itself and rebranding itself to the public as being valuable in a state like Ohio where we are our funding is shrinking. And so we really have to do more to make our important work accessible to the public so they understand better what we do and value it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. I think all of that's right and I know NCA is certainly committed to all of that. Hence this podcast and other ways by which we push out the value and importance of why communication matters. And that's probably a great place to wrap things up. I want to thank all of you for participating in this really interesting conversation. This was a nice companion with the broader view that was given by our guests in another episode. I would say to listeners and to everybody, Ellen, made mention of some of the data available. Every year we pull a report together from the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates that offers a profile of the communication doctorate and tries to give as much information as we can about the nature of the



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

doctorate. And we do our jobs report every year that talks about positions in communication. The other thing is we have a doctoral program guide and what we've discovered is that that is one of the most visited portions of the NCA website. So there's a lot of interest out there in the communication doctorate and doctoral education. And so hopefully, everybody will visit those resources and take advantage of that information. Again, Robert, Wei Sun, Ellen, thank you so much for joining us today on *Communication Matters*, the NCA podcast.

Ellen Gorsevski:

Thank you for having me.

Robert Mejia:

Yes, thanks for having us. We appreciate it.

Wei Sun:

Yeah, thank you. Have a nice day.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

In NCA News, doctoral students can now apply to take part in NCA's virtual Doctoral Honors Seminar, which will be held July 14th through 16th. The Doctoral Honors Seminar provides the opportunity for promising doctoral students to work with distinguished communication faculty members. This year the seminar will feature three tracts: Mass Communication and Media Studies, Social Science, and Rhetoric and Performance Studies. Interested students can learn more about the faculty mentors on the NCA website. Apply by May 14th, 2021 at natcom.org/DHS.

Also, in NCA News, the 2021 NCA Institute for Faculty Development, also known as the "Hope Conference," will be held virtually July 19th through 23rd, 2021. The Hope Conference offers an opportunity for undergraduate communication faculty to build collaborative research and pedagogical relationships, learn about new directions in theory and pedagogy, and develop new course area expertise. Visit the NCA website to learn more about the seminar leaders. Seminar participation is limited so register today on the NCA website at natcom.org/2021-hope-conference.

And, listeners, I hope you'll tune in for a bonus episode of *Communication Matters* on April 29th for NCA's virtual spring public program, "The Future Of Education: Identifying Challenges And Opportunities In Pandemic Learning." Professors Vinita Agarwal, Mindy Fenske, Alanna Gillis, Chris Gurrie, Matthew Hubbs, and Shannon Borke VanHorn will join me to discuss how COVID-19 has changed education and the possibilities for digital learning as we transition out of the pandemic. I really do hope you'll join me for this timely and important discussion next week.



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 32 – State of the Communication Ph.D.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get 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.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

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.

Conclusion:

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

RECORDING ENDS