Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 31 – Book Highlight - *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*

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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 back to *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. In recent years, many universities have been considering whether or how doctoral programs should be reformed, should be changed. Often these conversations center around the lack of tenure-track jobs where the possibilities of broadening the career opportunities for doctoral students and doctoral graduates. Today's episode of *Communication Matters* focuses on the recently released book, *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education*. And my conversation today is really fortuitous and timely. It's with the authors of this great new book, Leonard Cassuto and Robert Weisbuch. They delve into the state of graduate education today and the possibilities for reforming graduate education into the future. Let me tell you a little bit more about these guests. Leonard Cassuto is a professor in the English department at Fordham University. Dr. Cassuto teaches and writes about American literature and American culture. He has published nine books on subjects ranging from race to baseball with his most recent work reflecting his current research focus on American higher education. Dr. Cassuto writes in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a monthly column called the “Graduate Advisor”, and he also works as a consultant for higher education institutions. Hi, Len, welcome to the podcast.

Leonard Cassuto:
Thanks. Well, we're glad to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Robert Weisbuch is a former president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and was president of Drew University from 2005 to 2012. Prior to that, Dr. Weisbuch was professor and chair of the department of English at the University of Michigan as well as interim dean of the graduate school and associate vice president for research. Dr. Weisbuch is a founder of Robert Weisbuch & Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in higher education. Hi, Bob, welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Robert Weisbuch:
It's good to be here. Thanks very much.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Now before we dig into the potential changes to graduate programs, let's talk a little bit about why graduate programs, PhD programs need reforming. What are the circumstances that face today's PhDs that are new or that are motivating some of these calls for reform and change?

Leonard Cassuto:
Well, the biggest issue surrounding PhD education has to do with its narrowness, that it essentially prepares students for jobs that don't exist. Because the curriculum and especially the culture of PhD programs center on preparing students to chase faculty jobs and in particular faculty jobs that look like the jobs that their own professors have at research institutions. Of course, such jobs exist but they exist in vanishingly small numbers. And the simple fact is that PhDs have always gone on to work in other fields but graduate school is not preparing them to do that. In our book, which we're calling *The New PhD*, we're calling for a kind of three-headed reform here. We want graduate education to be student-centered, career diverse, again reflecting reality, and public facing, that is in which graduate programs anticipate not only that their graduates are going to go out into the wider world but that they themselves, that universities need to interact with society at large in ways that are more generous than we have been accustomed to pursuing up to now. If some of this sounds like common sense, there's a way in which it is against the tide of history to say, oh, graduate school needs to be student centered. Well, yeah, sure except that the history of graduate education in the United States is the other way. It's been faculty centered. If we look at the scholarship of teaching, for example, there's an enormous amount that's been written about how to teach undergraduates but a tiny amount that's been written about how to teach graduates. And that's because graduate education has been historically designed as an offshoot of faculty research. There's a way in which that was never a particularly good idea but it's really not a good idea now. We have to acknowledge that graduate school is school, that our students trust us with their professional lives, and we need to design the curriculum of graduate school with all of those things in mind.

Robert Weisbuch:
You would think it would be, as Len says, common sense to say, of course, all education should be student centered. But too often in graduate programs, it's faculty centered and graduate students are assigned teaching the courses that faculty don't want to teach over and over and over again or students in the sciences, rather than coming up with their own ideas and projects, are given a little bite off of the faculty member's grant and so on. And so lack the opportunity to really come up with questions for themselves. So in many cases, it's not a student-centered experience. Our other two emphases, career diverse, not at present in too many programs. In many programs, it's career narrowing. People come in with all sorts of ideas about what they might do. They're very quickly told that the only worthy job is a professor's job which probably they're not going to be able to ever have. It's almost like a Ponzi scheme though it doesn't mean to be. And then of course, we're saying that programs should be socially engaged, public-facing but many of the problems we're describing occur because academia can be so hermetic, so self-contained.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
When you talk about the student-centeredness and the failure or the inability I guess of existing doctoral programs to recognize that student-centeredness, it seems to me you're almost talking about a sort of old-style apprenticeship model where the graduate student serves as sort of an apprentice to the faculty member. And I'm wondering if that's something I'm just seeing in say the sciences with you all make a strong point I think about the lab nature of scientific graduate education and the ways in which that may suppress original thinking on the part of the graduate students. Do you see that same thing? This is sort of a cross-disciplinary idea. Is that same thing happening in the humanities and the social sciences? Is it different in a meaningful way? That kind of thing?

Leonard Cassuto:
Well, of course, you're correct that the apprenticeship model is what's at stake here and that in the sciences, it's a particularly salient economic component of the model. One of the reasons that big science can't slim down is because the basic unit of big science is the laboratory, not the individual student. And the laboratory needs a certain critical mass of people in order to do its work. And so all of this proves an impediment to scientists who are trying to rethink how they are running their discipline and training their not only, not apprentices but scientists who can go out and do a variety of things including academia. In humanities, the economic issue is not as present because funding is generally centralized in the graduate school. It's not coming from the individual laboratory. But the way in which advisors in the humanities and humanistic social sciences have tended to think of graduate students as my students, it's my student, that perpetuates a set of assumptions that's underwritten by the metaphor of the apprentice which needs to be let go of for reasons that we've already alluded to. It's urgent.

Robert Weisbuch:
I mean historically there were several years but that's all it was, several years after World War II up until about 1970, when at least the apprenticeship model, though I would say it was always questionable, worked. That is it was reasonable to expect that if you were a faculty member, the students you were working with would end up in positions more or less like your own. That was for a very short time. It ended over 50 years ago. So it was lovely and we should all take a few minutes to mourn its passing. But 50 years ago? It's time to change. So the goal can no longer be to create little versions of myself, mini me's. Rather, we have to be able to help our students to think creatively about all the applications that they're capable of and give them some pads that their own predilections will want to follow.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
You talk about some of—the 50 years ago and the sort of even beyond that, this post-war boom in higher education that allowed for that to happen and that ended as you say 50 years ago gave rise to 30 years ago a number of reform efforts that you all highlight in the book. One of those, I'll say, is from NCA member, long time NCA member, Richard Cherwitz at the University of Texas when he piloted a program that's still in existence at the undergraduate level about intellectual entrepreneurship. Is there anything we can retain or learn from any of those reform efforts? I know you all talk about reform efforts moving forward. But what worked, what didn't work if we're still trying to figure out how to reform doctoral education?

Robert Weisbuch:
I think didn't work is in the great majority unfortunately and I led one of those initiatives myself. And I would argue that there were many problems with a very large number of initiatives created by a number of groups including the Mellon Foundation, the Carnegie Fund for Advancement of Teaching and so on. And one of them was simply that there was no assessment. There was no evaluation. There were no consequences to whether a program actually achieved the reforms that were suggested or not. So a lot of places took the money and ran. Mellon spent $90 million dollars to try to lessen time to degree and overall, the 55 departments, and mine was one of them at the University of Michigan that engaged in that, was able to lessen time to degree by a total of three weeks.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Oh wow.

Robert Weisbuch:
In other words, nothing. Nothing. And by the way, because I really thought that this needed to happen and embrace the idea, my department was able to change time to degree by over a year and a half. So if you take that out, there was no change at all. But lack of assessment, lack of

consequences but also, I think very often it was top down. That is the initiative that I'm talking about from Mellon was sort of this is what we want you to do. And faculty said, well, we're not really into lessening time to degree. So there was not enough bottom-up discussion going on. On the other hand, Carnegie tried to get faculty to talk about their goals and the nature of what it means to be a steward in their disciplines. But they didn't really have a strategy for going from talk to action to actually practice. And you know and we know that what we love to do as faculty is talk. And so talk remain talk. But more than anything else, if we take one of our heroes, Rick Cherwitz who you just mentioned as an example and his intellectual entrepreneurship program at the University of Texas, that began as a graduate program. Then the graduate deanship changed. Someone else became the graduate dean. Wasn't enthusiastic apparently about it. And so intellectual entrepreneurship, one of the most powerful ideas of public scholarship that I've ever seen was relegated to undergraduates. And we'll talk about why graduate students would be perfect for that later. But the point is again that in that case and in many of the cases of these initiatives, the deanship matters greatly. And typically, graduate deans are underfunded and lack authority. And so programs go off on their own, they often behave by habit because faculty have many other things to do than worry about the practices of the program and so on. Local ownership is wonderful in the sense that you often get a high degree of dedication but it's unfortunate in that nobody's responsible. Nobody's watching. There's no oversight which is why Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard University, said PhD programs in the arts and sciences are the worst managed part of all universities. No one in charge.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I read that in your book where you note that Bok is like, graduate schools just aren't given the resources that they need. And I think that relates to the next major point of your discussion, the second of your third pillars. And that's this idea of career diversity, getting into issues of how do we encourage, I guess what I'm trying to say is it seems to me faculty are in many ways reproducing themselves. How do we get them to think more broadly about career diversity? How do we persuade curmudgeonly faculty who want to repopulate the professoriate to think that it's okay if a graduate student wants to go into private industry or non-profit work or whatever?

Leonard Cassuto:
So you're talking about how to change culture which is, of course, not an easy thing to do but nevertheless a task that we have taken it upon ourselves in *The New PhD* to try to provide a road map for. And the question that you're pointing to is how can programs not only prepare their students for diverse outcomes but realize the value of doing so is something that would necessitate a cultural shift. And there are two main points that I'm going to make here from our book. The first is that in order for a program to reflect in the ways that are necessary to think about reforming itself, to think about identifying its goals, and shifting them, it needs to set aside some time to do that. In the book, we talk about mission time, how faculty in a program need to realize

together that if they want to, they can occupy themselves with the problems of this week and next week, all the time, ongoing because there's always going to be a problem this week. There's always going to be a problem next week. But if you want to talk about the overall direction of your program, you can say that there's never time for that or you can set aside some time each month, each term. We suggest retreats but mostly we suggest that programs consciously set aside time to think about these larger issues. In terms of how does a program prepare its graduates, well, there's a way that this is going to differ not only from discipline to discipline but from program to program, from university to university. Because there are different local cultures that we encourage programs to identify their own priorities. And they'll need to spotlight certain emphases. And I think Bob can talk a little bit more about that.

Robert Weisbuch:
Well, it's also the case I think Len and I would agree that many faculty have come to the realization that their students need something different and need to be helped to be more creative about their career opportunities. So there is change going on. We don't want to suggest that that isn't happening. In fact, I mean when we really, when I worked on these issues in the 1990s, the pushback was just extraordinary whereas now there's much more of an interest and enthusiasm, lots of questions but real interest that didn't exist perhaps 20 years ago or even five years ago to the same extent. And perhaps the pandemic has made it even more so as we're all a little more ready to change and think in alternative ways. Plus, the pandemic, of course, is going to make professorial jobs perhaps all the more scarce.

Leonard Cassuto:
The way that Bob was able to segue from the idea of career diversity into pandemic priorities suggests something else which is that even as programs identify their own major goals, like say one program might target career diversity, another one might make a priority out of reducing time to degree and work from there, as programs identify their own major goals, they will encounter, as all of us who work in the graduate school enterprise do, the idea that all these problems are connected and that if you address one you, will wind up addressing the others. Michael Bérubé who as president of the Modern Language Association was dealing with a lot of these issues himself described the problems facing graduate study as a seamless garment where if you start tugging on one thread, pretty soon the entire garment unravels and you have just a pile of threads at your feet. And while we certainly don't want to leave the emperor naked, there is a way that we do because the emperor could do with a certain airing out here because we have to address these issues for the sake of our students to begin with. Our students have lives and we have to take care of them in the way that they deserve, in the way that they trust us to.

Robert Weisbuch:
Two perhaps preliminary steps for faculty in thinking about career diversity. The first is really to understand that the past is over, that it's not returning. There have been so many myths during this 50-year period, that oh, just another couple of years, we'll have more professors and so on, more professor jobs. We don't see any evidence of that in the future. And it's important for faculty members who are working with graduate students to recognize that their own experience is not normative but in fact, they're the lucky or perhaps the most brilliant. But whatever it is, they are the academic equivalent to Bernie Sanders' one percent and their students are not going to be able for the most part to have the same kind of life they have. They may have better lives but they're going to be different lives. So the first thing is for faculty to get over the notion that it's very, very natural to feel this way, that my experience is exemplary for everyone. It just isn't. And so you want them to understand the real situation. Len introduced me to a kind of formula, 8-4-2-1. And he can correct what I get wrong. But you start with eight graduate students in a PhD program. Only four of them are going to complete that program. The dropout rate is 50% across all disciplines. Perhaps two of them are going to end up in a tenure track position somewhere. And only one of those two will be at a research university or a selective small college. So we're talking, if your goal is that, to get everyone into a research university or selective small college, your failure rate is typically just about 85% to 90% which is intolerable and frankly unethical ultimately. So the first thing you have to do is recognize as a faculty member that your experience is not normative.

And the second thing is to ask your students about the experience and the goals that they themselves have. Very often there's no survey of students that's gone on at all. And so you're operating by hearsay or anecdote. You need to really question the students carefully, thoughtfully about what their experience and what their goals are. And then reverse engineer the program to meet those goals. What I'd say finally is that for the same reasons we were talking about before, most of us in academia don't know much about careers outside of academia. And so it's really important for the graduate school to make sure that each program is connected to a career office that cares about graduate students and isn't there just exclusively for undergraduates and to an alumni office that can offer the possibility of internships.

Leonard Cassuto:
Kind of a summative point I think that needs making here is that to the extent, and it's a considerable extent, that graduate programs socialize students to want only one outcome, the faculty position preferably at a research university, when there's abundant data to show that students who go into diverse careers wind up leading fulfilling, satisfying, happy lives. When the extent that programs socialize students to want only that one thing, one thing that we're not able to supply, we're teaching them to be unhappy. And what kind of teacher would ever want to do that?

Trevor Parry-Giles:
No, that's absolutely right. I will say too it helps if graduate schools, graduate school deans, universities don't only reward programs for placement in higher education. It's useful if the graduate school would recognize that a program's placement in non-academic careers is to be valued and to be recognized for its contributions as well.

Robert Weisbuch:
Let me say as a former college president that presidents ought to like it a lot if some graduate students end up in careers other than in academia. Because they probably will pay better and give more back. So in terms of self-interest. But it's just amazing what conversations have not taken place. That is very often someone will say, well, we would change our program in this way but our dean or our provost says we have to get everybody jobs in the ivies or whatever. Has there ever been a conversation with that dean, that provost, that president to say, that's not the way it goes now. That's not the correct criteria. You have to change your thought about that. Here's this wonderful new book by Cassuto and Weisbuch or here's a 10-page summary of it let's say or a two-page summary of it. Read this and rethink what the goal should be. That often doesn't happen. So you end up, as Jim Grossman at the American Historical Association has argued, with each cohort, like students, faculty, administrators, blaming the other for the lack of sensible change.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right, right. And I've heard Jim make that point numerous times. The flip side of this career diversity question is what can we do to reform the admissions process and how are they related? In other words, a big portion of your book is dedicated to a discussion of what we need to do at the front end of things. I'm thinking that there's got to be room in that admissions reform effort to encourage this kind of career diversity thing especially as we're now thinking about getting rid of the GREs and those sorts of easy metrics for student success. Do you have any other thoughts on what we can do at the at the admissions level?

Leonard Cassuto:
The subtitle of our book is How to Build a Better Graduate Education. And as you suggest, when you build anything, you have to pay attention to the foundation, not just the dome or the spire. And let's remember too that Michael Bérubé metaphor of the seamless garment. So when we look at admissions, as we do in the book, one of the points that we make here is that admissions has to be considered as part of this entire process. Historically, there are a lot of embedded assumptions in graduate admissions. We ask prospective PhD student applicants to do the same dance every time and that dance involves putting themselves forward as a potential researcher at a research university. I want to go to graduate school because it has always been my ambition to become a professor and here are the subjects that I want to research in depth, here is my

possible dissertation. Now there's a certain value to the fiction that somebody can identify their entire dissertation even before they actually go to graduate school. It's a potentially useful fiction. You get to see somebody's mind at work and you can see whether that person's mind might fit into your community. But of course, the coercive power of that ritual encourages students even before they walk into graduate school to imagine that the faculty job at the research university is the only outcome that's truly satisfactory. If we're going to reform graduate curriculum, we need to reform the processes that lead into it such as admissions which is where the socialization that we were talking about a minute ago starts. And there is additionally the point that when we encourage this kind of ritualistic faculty dance from everybody who would go to graduate school, we are making certain kinds of assumptions that also interfere with a goal that is mostly shared virtually throughout the graduate school enterprise of diversifying the student body.

Robert Weisbuch:
Well, that's another aspect of a career diverse public-facing PhD, that it would appeal more—we know this through any number of surveys and reports—to students from underrepresented groups, that students from underrepresented groups typically want to give back to their communities to a greater extent than other students. And we're not necessarily offering that opportunity. But again, the whole admissions process when you think about it—let me make a confession. At one point in the 1980s, I had a student, a very bright student writing her dissertation with me who told me on an occasion that her hope was to become a high school teacher and eventually to work on curriculum for a district. And I said at that time, in my ignorant phase which lasted a long time, I said, that's not what we gave you a fellowship for. Now that same student would be my hero. But imagine that that student was applying to a PhD program and said, my goal is to teach in a high school. Many, many programs would not consider that student very carefully and yet they should embrace that as much as with any other career goal where you're applying your expertise in one way or another in any of the social sectors.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Yeah. That's really true and very resonant. And I don't think it has changed much in the 40 years since you said that to that young graduate student.

Robert Weisbuch:
And as we're talking about this, another aspect of it that occurs to me is the one about the number of students who leave a program. That is that's sort of at the other end, who leave without completing. Why did they leave? We want to know why they left. We want to understand. Now it's perfectly reasonable for 20% or 25% of beginning students to say, I loved this as an undergraduate. It turns out it's not for me at this other stage. That's just normal. But 50%? There's something wrong with that. And not only do they leave at that number but often at a very late stage of the program after they've spent several years of their lives in the program and get lost in

a dissertation that's not working out or whatever. So we also need to pay attention to why it is that students are leaving our programs and what it is about our programs that may be responsible for that.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
One of the things you all talk about in the book is the importance of finding some reasonable way to conduct assessment. And I'm thinking back a few years ago, Jim Grossman and I were actually the only learned society folks at this convening. But Lumina Foundation convened a group of folks who had done tuning and assessment and outcomes work in various forms to come to Indianapolis and have a two-day—they called it a convening. It's basically a meeting—about assessment in doctoral programs and doctoral education. And if I remember correctly, nothing ever came of that. It was sort of you kind of hit a brick wall and part of that brick wall was a real resistance on the part of faculty who see assessment at the undergraduate level has ultimately assumed to be simply bureaucratic and administrative and unproductive. And applying that to a graduate education model was just something that nobody could envision. Do you have any thoughts on that? I mean where do we go from this? Because it seems to me a good assessment regime would tell us something about why graduate students are leaving these programs.

Leonard Cassuto:
For better and worse, we have thoughts on everything. The dialogue on assessment is utterly dysfunctional in academia. Consider to begin with the idea that academics at every level lead lives that are based on assessment at all times. Assessment is what we do all day. A typical professor is not only evaluating her students but evaluating manuscripts by peers both before and after publication. We evaluate our colleagues' teaching for the purposes of tenure and promotion. We evaluate those applications for tenure and promotion and so on. It's a culture of evaluation and assessment. Assessment is our jobs. And so the idea that we talk about assessment as something, oh, we can't do that, that suggests simply that there is, in the terms of your own discipline, what we have here is a failure to communicate. And so the communications problems surrounding assessment we believe could be solved if assessment were viewed more collaboratively in terms of programs and reforms. That is instead of assessment being the carrot and the stick with the emphasis on the stick where mandates for assessment come down from on high and faculty resist, instead of that kind of adversarial communication which as you say leads nowhere, just throws sand into the gears, how about if we look at assessment as something we could all benefit from and move forward together if we conducted it together? And Bob, of course, has been an administrator and knows all about how this can work.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right.

Robert Weisbuch:
In writing our section on assessment or planning or how to go from ideas to practice, we were greatly influenced by a very brief book and a terrific book by David Grant called *The Social Profit Handbook* where he argues that assessment is not, as Len has suggested, it's not done quantitatively by strangers who don't get it who plan to punish us. It's done by ourselves for ourselves with ourselves including very much in this case students as well as faculty and also those who leave a program as well as those who complete it. And it's really not about evaluating afterwards. Assessment starts before anything else in which case you say, what are the major goals? We see all these different issues. Let's choose one or two. As Len has suggested, you choose one or two but everything else is going to come into play as you go after those goals. Every part of the graduate program will be reconsidered in a way that's hopefully creative and interesting and intellectually alert rather than mechanical and punishing. And so assessment begins before. And of course, no matter how bright you are, you're not going to get everything right the first time. So it continues throughout so that you make mid-course adjustments in any innovation. And then it's very important after a particular period, let's say three years, to say, is it working? Whatever we changed, is it working? And if it's not, you have to have the courage to pull the plug. Because one of the reasons that faculty are averse to change is their sense that whenever you start something in academia, it's almost impossible to end it. And so you have to be able to say at a certain point, we are going to say, this is working great, let's expand it; this is working pretty well, let's keep it, adjust it in one way or another; or this really isn't working, let's end it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
When I was in graduate school back in the late 80s, one of the things that we read was an assessment, sort of a seminar, or they called it a conference, the Wing Spread Conference. And it was designed to rethink rhetoric and the training in rhetoric that students were receiving. And one of their calls was to allow for group dissertations. Bow this was coming out of the 1960s and the freewheeling days of the 60s. And they called for allowing group dissertations, allowing for creativity in the dissertation process. And we all laughed at that in graduate school. But now I'm reading you all saying we need to reform the dissertation. We need to rethink the dissertation. And I suspect this would be somewhat controversial and it falls into a lot of what we've already talked about. I did it. My student should have to do it. Those kinds of rhetorics and logics that guide people's advising and participation in a doctoral program. What should we be doing with the dissertation?

Leonard Cassuto:
So one of our key phrases which we've already mentioned in conversation with you today is reverse engineering. That is to think about what is it that you want to get to and then build backwards from there. Identify your goals and then figure out how you're going to achieve them.

The dissertation has I think for far too long not been examined in anything like this spirit with the result that it's become a kind of Frankenstein creature that takes on a piece of this lore and a piece of that lore and it never sheds anything. The dissertation requirement needs to be reverse engineered. Programs and disciplines need to do that for themselves. But surely, in reverse engineering it, the dissertation needs to be shorter than it is now. Because the dissertation phase can occupy too many years of a graduate student's life and stall them at a very low level of economic growth but also personal and professional growth. So you talked about the group dissertation as the product of 1960s thinking. Well, it's also the product of three weeks ago. The advisory group on humanities doctoral education at Yale just published a report and we want to highlight best practice wherever we see it. And this advisory report which was submitted to the dean suggests among other things that humanities departments at Yale consider the possibility of the collaborative dissertation instead of simply chucking it out the window. That doesn't mean that it's going to happen at Yale or elsewhere necessarily but it's encouraging the kind of thinking where we examine a requirement from its assumptions on up to make sure that the requirement as we redesign it reflects our current assumptions and especially the goals and the needs of the students who are the ones who are going to do the work to fulfill that requirement.

Robert Weisbuch:
Well, it's not only about the nature of the dissertation. It's also about the status of the dissertation that actually has changed and changed in my view for the worst. That is to say speaking as an old fogey, when I wrote a dissertation, the idea was, and by the way, most people graduated with a PhD in the humanities in those days in four to five years, not eight to ten or seven to nine at present. But the dissertation was thought of as sort of an audition or whatever. It was not necessarily going to be published in full. And people who were thinking of hiring you would read a chapter or two and decide whether it had potential. Now of course, you're supposed to be publishing parts of the dissertation or other papers you've written while you're still in graduate school, thus lengthening again an already too long time to degree so that you're almost doing what you're supposed to do in your early stages of a professorship while still in graduate school. It's the exact wrong direction to be traveling in.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
One of the things that the discipline of communication prides itself on is teacher training, pedagogical training, especially for graduate students. And part of that is rooted in a real commitment in our discipline to the introductory communication course which on many campuses is an all-campus requirement. It's something that is our bread and butter in many ways. It keeps communication programs or it helps to keep communication programs flourishing and in place. I'm not certain reading your discussion that that same commitment to pedagogical training for graduate students is evident in other disciplines. What do we need to do? What can we do better about pedagogical training? Because you're right. Most of our students are not going to get

research intensive jobs even if they join the professoriate. They're going to be at teaching institutions. So what can we do to improve that?

Robert Weisbuch:
Well, for one thing, at present very often as we said earlier, graduate students teach the same course over and again, usually an introductory course. So we've matched our most inexperienced undergraduates with our most inexperienced graduate student teachers. Again, exactly the wrong way to go. And really if we were design a program in pedagogy, we would say that you should be taking on tasks, each of them more ambitious than the last, a variety of tasks that help to develop you as a full educator. You also should perhaps be working with different kinds of cohorts of students so that you are learning how to teach the various different audiences and perhaps not only within academia but beyond. Because as you know, teaching is part of what everyone does in life when they have a career. When there's someone who comes into the office, you're going to have to be a teacher to that person. So back when and still now, there is a program called Preparing Future Faculty and it had the great virtue of connecting the graduate schools of research universities with community colleges, liberal arts colleges, branch campuses in the area and the students, the graduate students would then visit those campuses and follow faculty members and see what life was like in a variety of institutions. Unfortunately in our view, this did not include actual teaching. And so many of us thought, myself included at the time, that it was too much time for too little effect. But if you added real teaching responsibilities to doing this kind of networking and had students perhaps in one semester not doing their teaching on your campus but at a different kind of institution, that would give us another kind of career diversity within academia that's very badly needed. I'll never forget someone saying at one of our conferences, he was the president of a of an urban campus, and he ended up saying, your graduates, your PhD graduates really don't like my students. My students come from blue collar families. They're often working a job. They come to school at night. And not only do your graduates of PhD programs not know how to teach them but they don't really respect those students. And I thought, this is really wrong.

Leonard Cassuto:
And as Bob's last point suggests, it would not only reforms PhD programs to think more productively about training graduate students as educators and building their skills across a range of settings but when we put our least experienced teachers in front of our beginning students without any training or for that matter any respect, because giving them the courses that we just don't feel like teaching which happens in so many disciplines, we're casting away the opportunity to recruit majors in those disciplines. Because those are the gateway courses to those majors. In our discipline of English, English freshman composition is the gateway course to the English major. Now of course, there are a lot of English professors who will say, that's not an English course, that's a writing course. But that's not how the students look at it. And so when we take

the teaching of freshman composition and assign it a lower caste and we encourage our best teachers and our most experienced teachers to avoid it, we are passing up an opportunity to recruit majors. And as everyone knows right now, the humanities could use more majors. This is simply an example. It prevails across the arts and sciences, that if we commit ourselves to teaching graduate students to be better teachers, we will improve the entire enterprise across not only graduate education but undergraduate education as well.

Robert Weisbuch:
Reminds me that in the sciences, teaching is what you do if you don't get to work on the faculty member's brain. Teaching is the off-ramp essentially and that creates such a powerful negative message that it's ridiculous. But again, it shows how the various disciplines, however unlike they are in many ways, have these various similarities and problems. The National Academy of Science published a very fine report a year or two ago on STEM education in the 21st century. And almost all of their recommendations could be translated into the social sciences and humanities as well. The problem of time to degree, the problem of neglecting the development of pedagogy for student pedagogy. The big difference of course between the sciences and the humanities and social sciences comes with a dissertation phase where the problem in the humanities and social sciences perhaps is MIA, that the dissertation director can be sort of missing in action, the students just go off and get lost for a long time and maybe never come back. Whereas in the sciences, it's micromanaging in the laboratory so that the student doesn't gain the kind of creative challenge that's really necessary to a real PhD. But in many ways across the disciplines, the same problems may have different forms of realization but the same problems exist.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
One of the concerns that you raise, or not a concern but a prospect for the future, is the encouragement in graduate education of public scholarship, of the importance of training graduate students to engage with larger public audiences but more than that, to have the systems, the institutions of higher education, graduate programs and the like, recognize the value of public scholarship. I think a lot of our graduate students get the message very early on that the only thing that's going to really be valued is a book or journal articles that are read by a very narrow audience of fellow academics. What can we do to encourage more public scholarship and the recognition or value of public scholarship?

Robert Weisbuch:
Well, the first thing we might do is recognize that it's not all that esoteric, that it's not just about a luminary writing for the New Yorker or The Atlantic, though that's very valuable. Every time a teacher steps into a classroom, they are engaging in public scholarship. They are an expert trying to introduce non-experts to why this topic is interesting and important. And so everyone needs to

be in a sense bilingual as a historian, put it. That is needs to be able to speak perhaps in the language of the discipline which always has its own lexicon but also needs to be able to speak lingua franca so that any normally intelligent person can understand the worth of what you're doing. We have a big case to make for higher education in this country. It's not very well respected right now. It's often being attacked rather than praised. We need to make our case and we need to make our case by bringing ourselves out there. Public scholarship can mean such a wide number of things. Yes, it can be about writing for a national publication. It can be showing up at your local library or going to a book group and talking about what you're up to or a topic. And it doesn't have to be something that has a very difficult kind of vein to it. But it also can mean community engagement. I mean there really are I think two basic forms of public scholarship. One is the bilingualism that I just described. The other is to take your learning and apply it with a community group with urban challenges, with anything that is that is facing society now. Rick Cherwitz did that in the intellectual entrepreneurship program very successfully. At times, he actually suggested that various non-profits and businesses come to him with problems that his students could try to help them solve. And that's usually considered an undergraduate sort of effort and that's what happened with Rick's own effort itself, as we said. But it started as a graduate student effort. Imagine how much better prepared our graduate students are to go out and use their learning in the community and by the way, not just use their learning but to learn from the community in a way that they could never learn in a classroom and bring that experiential kind of learning back into the academy.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I'm reminded here of ACLS' Public Fellows program where they place newly minted graduate students or PhDs actually in non-profits or public-facing opportunities. And I think that's a great program and I think you're right about the sort of mutually reinforcing education that happens in those situations.

Leonard Cassuto:
We think so too and we praise that program in in the book. I think we can't praise it enough. It's a model initiative. But not all programs have to be as large scale as that one which received and deserved a lot of publicity. There can be, as Bob suggested, just when an academic walks into the public library and asks to give a talk. Let's say an oceanographer offers to give a talk in the public library about sharks which everybody's interested in. When that happens, that builds bridges between the academic enterprise and society at large in ways that can only help. And we talk about best practice in the book. We try to identify examples. We couldn't identify everything but there was a program at the University of California at Irvine where a philosophy professor organized graduate students and himself to go into not K through 12 but K through 6 classrooms to teach philosophy to very young people, to encourage them to ask the kinds of questions that philosophers ask. And when the professor was asked, what's the goal here? It's Marc Fiocco by

the way is his name. He said that he wants to build better citizens. And what better way to start than when they're in that formative stage? Intramurally, at North Dakota State University, we don't normally get a lot of news about cutting edge academic innovation out of North Dakota but maybe that's because we don't look hard enough. At North Dakota State, every PhD irrespective of discipline has to make a five-minute video that is designed for general audiences in which the student, the graduate explains his or her research in terms that a general audience might be able to understand. It's not that these videos are going to become YouTube hits. It's that by learning to make them and going through the process of making them and having the university take it seriously by funding the production values, you're demonstrating to everybody, starting with the students, that this kind of work matters.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's a great idea. We always in communication think of this as a communication problem, that graduate students need the training, need the expertise that our discipline provides in terms of translating their often jargon-laden scholarship for a non-academic audience, a public audience. I remember the National Association of Science and Technology Centers contacted us and they were facing a problem at a lot of the science and technology centers around the country. They were having these public meetings where they would bring in really esteemed scientists and then they weren't working. And they wanted to know why those meetings weren't working, why they weren't successful, and what was the communication problem at heart. We went to their conference and gave a talk. It was very useful. That's a great possibility for the future. I'm thinking as a way of sort of wrapping up this notion that you've talked about several times, the textile metaphor from Bérubé that you pull a thread and the whole thing unravels. Reversing that, you can think of ways of stitching things together to create a broader whole. And I'm wondering if you had to summarize what we would need to stitch together to create the tapestry of a reformed successful PhD program, what that would look like beyond any of the things that we've talked about?

Robert Weisbuch:
Sure. And I think where we ought to start is remembering that education is a public good and that that is all the more true at the level of expertise that the PhD represents, those three magical letters as it was called by William James. We are really after a kind of recovery of what our founders of this country felt was the basis for democracy. And it certainly is a timely moment. If a nation—this is Thomas Jefferson—if a nation wishes to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. James Madison talks about liberty and learning, each leaning upon the other for their mutual and surest support. And so if we can recapture, and we know that most colleges were begun by religious groups that saw learning as a means for improving the moral efficacy of the society, that most of our public universities took place through the Morrill Act which suggested that education again is a public matter, a public

good. We have to recapture that sense and think about our PhD in in those kinds of terms. And we also have to imagine that our graduate students who are highly selected are extraordinary people who know how to think creatively, who know how to bring a major research project to term, who are extraordinary teachers, who write very well, who can explain things well. And really the question isn't what jobs can a PhD in philosophy or political science or physics do but what can't they do. At one of our conferences years ago when I was at Woodrow Wilson, the CEO of a large corporation said exactly that. He said, I can hire MBAs any day. But I can't teach them how to think, how to do research, how to teach, and how to write. Whereas I can hire a PhD graduate and teach them a particular task in no time at all. Why would I not want to hire one of your graduates instead? And then he waited a moment, paused, and said, it's because you don't have them apply.

Leonard Cassuto:
Our undergraduates today are taught that higher education is a personal investment that they're going to invest their own money in the hope of getting return in the form most obviously of a high salary. And mercifully for the entire enterprise, that the so-called college dividend as economists have identified it, is intact and that keeps higher education afloat. However, we want to encourage everyone, starting with students but also our entire public and private sector, to think about higher education as something that is not simply a personal investment but a collective investment in not only economic benefit—because when higher education has been considered a public good, it is paid off handsomely in terms of the bottom line—but also a civic good. In these times, we're talking to you now in March, the country is still resonating from the events of January 6th. And if there were ever a case to be made for more education, better education, higher education, the value of education to the collective, it's now.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
No doubt. Well, listeners, you can pick up a copy of *The New PhD: How to Build a Better Graduate Education* at an online or physical bookstore near you. It was published just this year from Johns Hopkins University Press. So be sure to look for it. Bob, Len, thank you so much for joining us today on *Communication Matters*.

Leonard Cassuto:
Thanks for having us.

Robert Weisbuch:
Thanks for having us. Communication is one of the more outward facing of the discipline. So we expect you all to take the lead in this.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Oh boy. Tall order. But listeners, there you have it. That's our marching orders. Thank you so much for joining us. And as always, thanks for listening in to *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast.* Be sure to subscribe to *Communication Matters* wherever you listen to your podcasts.

NCA members can be on the lookout for NCA's *Communication Currents* email digest. *Communication Currents* summarizes explain research recently published in NCA's journals in straightforward language that is suitable for classroom use as well as for sharing with the wider public. To be sent quarterly, the digest includes links to all recent *Communication Currents* summaries along with links to select classroom activities from *Communication Teacher*. So check your email later today to catch up on the latest in Communication research or visit natcom.org/communication-currents to read about the latest research.

In NCA news, NCA's Doctoral Program Guide which provides timely and useful information about doctoral programs in communication for students, prospective students, and other interested parties has been updated to include more than 30 videos from the virtual Graduate School Open House at the 2020 NCA Annual Convention. These videos provide prospective students a new way to learn about Communication programs around the country. So visit natcom.org/doctoral-program-guide to view the Doctoral Program Guide today.

Also in NCA mews, join NCA's Officers for the first-ever Conversation with NCA Leadership on April 19th from 12:00 to 1:15 in the afternoon Eastern Daylight Time. NCA Officers will give brief updates about issues that are relevant to NCA members including 2021 convention plans, outcomes from the most recent Executive Committee meeting, and the status of multiple task forces and other initiatives that the leadership is undertaking. At least 30 minutes will be devoted to attendee questions, comments, and discussion. So if you have questions, concerns, or feedback related to NCA, if you have ideas for future NCA initiatives or projects, or if you would simply like to learn about current NCA initiatives, please join us. Visit the NCA website for more information at natcom.org.

And listeners, I hope you'll tune in to the April 22nd *Communication Matters* episode which will explore the state of the Communication PhD with guest communication professors Ellen Gorsevski, Robert Mejia, and Wei Sun. The episode will address a variety of issues including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on graduate programs and the job outlook for comm grads. I hope you'll join me for this important *Communication Matters* episode.

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.

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