

Hello and welcome to COM-Versations, your School of Communication podcast. Here in the School of COM, we know how to make Fell Hall fun. Tune in often to hear the latest conversations among faculty, staff, and students. After all, we're the best in the Midwest for a reason. I'm Julie Navickas, one of your hosts, and today, I'm joined by Dr. Lance Lippert and Dr. Nathan Carpenter, director of convergent media here in the School of Communication. Welcome!

NC: Hey, thanks so much for having me!

LL: I voted against you myself. This is probably one of the good reasons we have so much fun, you know. I'm sorry I was a little bit late. I was walking....

JN: You were late.

LL: I prefer to refer to it as chronologically challenged.

NC: It wasn't gonna just be like *stylishly not early*?

LL: I am getting better. You can imagine what it was like when it was.... I just put too much.... I would have been here sooner than 87.... I was walking and I bumped into Reggie Redbird and, oddly enough, I was walking with him and we both paused and then he crossed the road. Reggie Redbird crossed the road. After what he did and he kind of did....he waved at me and so I walked across the road and when I got over there, he was on his phone, and I said *what are you doing?* He goes *well, I just checked Twitter to make sure you follow.*

NC: Oh, that's good. That's really good. That's way better than the punchline *why did he cross the road?To show the possum that it could be done.*

LL: Indeed! Indeed! We say this, and I might have a few other ones, but you know he does work with social media. It's not just following Google, so that's it. What's your deal? Why are you with us today?

NC: I'm here to talk about the SMACC and to talk about, you know, social media analytics and social media listening and all those things that we've kind of set up here in the School of Communication.

LL: Wow! Well, first of all, it's always fun to myself....the SMACC. S-M-A-C-C. First of all, you're Dr. Nathan Carpenter, and I always tease you, what are you called again?

NC: I'm director of convergent media.

LL: I just call you a unicorn.

NC: Unicorn! Oh, no.

LL: Because you're just that rare of a bird or a unicorn.

NC: That'd be like a woodpecker. Because that's a rare bird.

LL: You're just that unique! We will be able to share that with our listeners, but he has that duty. So, you teach, you also provide service for us and work with students. Social Media Analytics Command Center. How did you and Dr. Hunt come up with that?

NC: What – the name or the space?

JN: I think all of it!

NC: Well, let's start with the space itself, right? So, the history of this really goes to one of our other alums, Joe Mazer, who was at Clemson before he became a dean at University of Tennessee Knoxville, is where he's at now, but he was, like, one of the people that kind of kickstarted this idea, like, an academic social media listening center and he was working with a group of people at Clemson that they got like a whole bunch of money from Dell Computers to, you know, do something fancy and fun and that's what they built there was a social media, like, wall and room with all this exciting stuff and he was kind of the first director there. And then Steve Hunt and Larry Long, our emeritus executive director, met up with Joe at an NCA conference (National Communication Association) and Joe was telling them all about how exciting this was and all the cool work that they could do and immediately... And, so, I'm in the job for, like, goodness, I started July of 2013 so let's see August, September, October, and, so, four months after I start, Steve and Larry, like, barged through door *Hey, we've got this really cool thing! Can we do that here, too?* and I kinda said *Sure!* Like, it was the reason I was hired was to build, like, convergence centers, right? Like, that was like.... the big.... like, that's why the name is in the title - all these spaces where you've got different technologies coming together, different majors coming together, different software and all that coming together all the time. I mean, that's our world right now, right? Like, we consume messages through converged media, you know. Mostly on our phone but in other spaces. But, anyway, they come to me saying, like, *Can we build this cool thing?* and I said *Well, connect me with Joe* like *Let me learn a little bit more about what's going on* and I'll put some budgets together and some ideas and long story short, like, we built the SMACC then, over that summer. I mean so I wasn't even here a full year, but, and we got, you know, money and equipment, and the research, found the software to run the space and all of that and the timing couldn't have been better, in all honesty. There were very few universities that had the resources and people to run these spaces. And, like, Clemson was one we saw, like, there were some other schools like Texas and they all had, like, some smaller labs, but they didn't have anything, like, big and showy that can be the visual centerpiece for all this work.

LL: And used in classroom learning.

NC: Right! And that's one of the biggest ones right and have classes come in to learn how to do that work, right?

LL: And incorporate across our discipline. So, yeah, when you say 'convergence' it's not just media, but we've used it in organizational communication, health communication, journalism, all kinds of things, right? PR, especially!

NC: Right! And we try to leave the lab open for, you know, that kind of access, right, so, like, again, I'll have a class like, actually just yesterday, I was with Chad Woolard's COM 201, which is social movements, right, and they're doing research on different organizations involved in, like, you know, social initiatives and students need to research those. They need to kind of see and understand how those organizations use social media so we walked through, like, five different tools that they can go use and just having that space kind of there points to students and faculty saying *We do different things here*, right, and we do work that matters or might be different from what we normally do in the classroom and so it sets us up for.... and it sets us up for success, right, and students are kind of prepped and ready to go. That's the way I feel when I go into the SMACC. It's like I change a bit. It's like *Oh, we're here to do analytics now* you know *We're here to study the larger social web now*, right?

LL: (imitates Dr. Larry Long) Well, this is Dr. Larry Long. Where'd you come up with this SMACC thing? What are you talking about?

NC: Well, Larry, you were there for some of those conversations!

LL: I don't remember that but.....too many late nights... but tell me about this SMACC thing you all came up with!

NC: So, we had all sorts of conversations about what to name this because, like, Clemson already kind of had the name down for Social Media Listening Center. They just called theirs the SMLC, yeah, right? Right, not fun, right? So, they just had this acronym and we actually invited, like, this big brainstorming session with University Marketing Communications. I think we had some folks from, like, Marketing, we had all of our folks and PR people and all that. And we were like just pitching ideas. It was hard to come up with this right combination of a good acronym, but also something that described what the space does and it's, like, there's some bad ones, like, I'll list some of these out there.

LL: These are the ones I came up with?

NC: No, these weren't yours at all. I think these were, like, my original list. So, we had one that was gonna be like the Social Media Intelligence Research Center and we thought oh, that sounds cool, then we looked at it. SMIRC. Smirk. Right? So, like scratch that one off the list. I think we had all sorts of variations of, like, it's gonna be Reggie's Nest we're like uh..... like what would it do, lay eggs in there? Yeah, you know, so yeah like bad visuals. So things that just weren't working and finally it came down to, like *Let's not worry about a good acronym. Let's just get like the name of what we actually do there* and So, what we realized is that we're trying to differentiate our space from other social media centers, like, in academic spaces, so like, again, Clemson was all, like, *We're social media listening*. I was like *We do more than that*. Like we don't just listen to trends and be, like, *There's the trends, there they are*. Like, we wanna make this a space that, like, our students can learn some strategy where our students can learn, like, now I'm teaching coding, right? Like, students will learn a little bit about how to go get their own data by writing some programming code in R or we used to do some Python work and all that and so we decided, like, *What is it that we're doing differently?* Well, it's analytics, right? So maybe if we put analytics in that name that'll help. The other part that really kicked in, too, is thinking about, like, what are these spaces doing from the perspective of, like, the work, right? Like if you're in a space like that and there's something like a big event going on, like, you know, we talk like, this is *Oh, it can be a media war room* or, like, *TV-10 is in there to do live shots, right?* We're like *Well, it's a command center, right?* Like, it's got that feeling. And as we found out later, like, our own Emergency Operations Center on ISU's campus was building their own operations center, right? So it's like the command center is a thing that that exists and a lot of the big companies have command centers where they're watching media. They're watching media, they're watching social media and they're basically just tuned in everyday to make sure, you know, their brands and their identities, you know, look good or whatever. So, that command center idea was like *Oh, that fits*. So, finally we're, like, *social media command center..... yeah..... social media analytics demand center*. *Oooh, that sounds fun!* So, SMACC, right? S-M-A-C-C. And I think it was it was kind of an afternoon, like, days after we had that big meeting and, like, came to, like, no conclusions and I think it was just me and Dr. Hunt and Dr. Long and we were just kind of sitting there saying *Yep, this works, this sounds good* and then the jokes started, right? Like, *Oh yeah, we can have some SMACC talk!* So, it kind of fed into our personality as well and I think that's been the joy of it. Like, it looks very official up there but then also, you know, there's an informal quality, too, when we're doing

research or there are events happening where, you know, we let down our guard a little bit in a good way, right? And we can have SMACC talk.

LL: So, which came first? Obviously, they're talking SMACC, and then we created it. I don't know if I buy the order of that, which feeds into our personality, he's not sharing. Also, this was one of the first type of command centers, analytic command centers for social media in a campus in the United States. And we also, the School of COM and SMACC and Dr. Carpenter, do work with students first and then we do work with internal organizations and departments as well as community-based organizations and also nationally. So, yeah, you get out there and really use this in a way that showcases the School of COM.

NC: Right, exactly! And I'm glad you point out, like, you know, we're among the first to really be doing this work and the most important part of that is that we're bringing students in to do it as much as we possibly can. And that makes a big difference, especially, like undergrads, right? Like, I have so many students that have kind of now left and they're doing work in some form of, like, data or digital analytics or something of that sort because they didn't know it existed. And they learned about it here and they were never expecting that to be a thing, they would have never had it on their career track trajectories and, again, now they had some time with us and they got the sense that there was a relationship between data and social media and all this kind of hidden world and then communication as a discipline, right?

JN: You know, I have a perfect example of that, too, because it actually just came up within the last two weeks or so but I had the opportunity to talk to..... I don't know if you remember..... Allie Keck?

NC: Yeah, yeah, exactly, yeah!

JN: Yeah, who is a star these days. Yeah, she's on The Voice, and so I got a chance to chat with her. Yes. I know you're looking at me like I'm crazy.

LL: She's on with, like, Whoopi and all those people? Oh no, that's The View. Oh yeah, OK.

JN: The Voice, a singing competition, NBC. I had a chance to sit down with her to kind of hear her story. She was partnered with Kelly Clarkson, like, she was moving forward in this progression for this show but she mentioned you specifically, Nate.

NC: Oh, wow! Cool!

JN: So, I asked her like, *You spent a lot of time in the School of Communication. Like, what did you take away? What helped you in your career?* And she specifically said *The SMACC. She goes I run all of my social media accounts. She's like This is, like, blowing up as I'm on this program* and she specifically mentioned *If I didn't have those skill sets, if I wasn't exposed to this as a student, I wouldn't know what I was doing.*

NC: That's awesome, yeah, that's awesome. Oh, that makes me so proud!

LL: Well, you obviously didn't teach her to sing.

NC: No, she came out that one...

JN: Not from here.

LL: Cool. I didn't even know that connection!

NC: That's awesome!

JN: Yeah, first thing she said.

NC: And, you know, it's kind of funny because, like, I, one of things I feel like I always stress out about it's like *Oh we're not giving students, like, enough, you know, education and social media* or, like, you know, *We're not giving them enough time to learn how to manage all this* and, like, there's never enough time to do that, but really.

JN: So fast, too, you know.

NC: Yeah, but like what you just described is, like, she figured out that there was something that needed to happen because of being here, right? Yeah, it became important. She recognized that it was something that she's gonna have to spend more time learning about, yeah, and that's really the goal, like the SMACC is a catalyst, right? That's one of the ways I often pitch it is it sparks ideas and connections, you know? And if that's not convergence, I don't know what is, right?

LL: Indeed. Well, everybody thinks he's so special. I talked to Nate a long time ago and I don't know if it's come true yet, but he said *One day, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook will merge*. You predicted this. It hasn't happened yet. It might, with Meta and stuff.

NC: That's not a direct quote, is it?

LL: I think so. You said it would merge, and you wanted to call it...you know what it would be called if it happens? You Twit Face. I think he was maybe talking to me or foresee the future, but this is the kind of insight, you mentioned working with students, and this kind of insight and being a good colleague that got him noticed and opened the door for him to now depart from us.

NC: It's true.

JN: It is true.

LL: I heard a rumor, but, again, I said you're a unicorn. There are very few of you, I think, at your level. That's how much respect I have for you, all kidding aside. But somebody found you and now you're going to Florida.

NC: Yeah, that was not on my bingo card for 2023. I, no, I mean, think, things have been going really well here and, but you guys you mentioned, like I wear a lot of hats - from doing IT work, lab management, teaching, and then the SMACC on top of all of that. And yeah it's not that, like, you know, I just can't wait to get out of here, but then, yeah, the University of Florida just they're building a space called their Atlas Lab and it's dedicated to kind of many of the same things that we've been doing in the SMACC and they've been looking for a director for a while, and I got some calls from one of the recruiters and people from their department and, finally, it kind of turned the point of like *Really, we can offer you a lot and you can just do the SMACC work, right, and nothing else*. Was kinda like *Oh my gosh, what an opportunity*. So, yeah, I had to go check it out and it's just one of those once in a lifetime, once in the career kinds of opportunities, so it's really bittersweet. So, yes, I'm leaving, but I, you know, you are all still so much part of my life and thoughts and I, yeah, I don't know, I don't know how this is gonna go.

LL: Well, it'll go well, it'll go very well for you, and we will survive and you know the good thing is we still know where he's at, so we'll still be able to have him as a resource.

NC: Right - I can come and put my password in to fix your laptop. I can still fix the printer.

LL: I don't think he'll return calls. No, we'll have one of his people call your people. Well, congratulations on that, and they find, it's always, you know, when you give opportunities for good things and greatness and things have a way of finding those things, so it's all good. We'll be further ahead. He also created, was a big part of our computer lab, we're also something called CIC. We're on the second floor of Fell.

NC: Yeah, that's the Communication Innovation Center, and the main impetus really behind that one is that good idea of convergence. That we have a lot of classes that are doing lots of different things, media that are, that have needs to collaborate to use space just in, you know, new ways that kind of divide typical classroom settings, so the Communication Innovation Center set up to kind of be the splits like collaborative classroom and then also media production studio so it's got all these chairs on wheels. It's always a mess, it's like a delightful mess you walk in, but when there's a class in there people working equally for whatever it is they want to form. Chairs are different colors. That was actually originally a pedagogical decision that helps instructors say like *Alright, everybody in green, you're a group, everybody in blue, you're a group, everybody in red*, yeah. Yeah, I don't think anybody's picked up on that, at least lately, but it was the thing that when I was in there a few times we would do, so try it out next time!

LL: I will! Nice of you to share his secret with us. It's all good, we've gotten to this point, we continue to move forward, thanks to him. You know, he will create a void, but that maybe somebody will say is unTweetable but I think we'll realize and now we know we're looking for an excellent so you have....I keep....I know we gotta go, we can talk forever, but you have.... we have a trivia question that you might know or not. What do you think?

JN: I mean we've kind of already answered it.

LL: Oh, did we start the interview yet? Conversation?

JN: Our trivia question will be *What year did the SMACC open here in the School of Communication?*

NC: Yeah, that was so easy. I mean, I remember it like my kids' birthdays. 2014!

JN: Well, how about this one? Do you wanna answer it? When did we open the CIC?

NC: Oh, that one was 2018.

LL: No, no, it's, it does go fast, and, but, I guess, go faster. I like the direction we're going. Well, best of luck to you.

NC: Well, thank you! It's been a really good decade. Like, that's the other crazy thing to think about, like, this has all been a 10-year span, which, yeah, time for some different adventures, but, at the same time, there's a lot to celebrate and, again, I've been really grateful for all my time here, just the best colleagues, really.

LL: Well, when you get to Florida, be careful – the Gators' bite is worse than the Redbird, so.

NC: Oh, yeah.

LL: Watch your step.

NC: Though, Reggie's got a mean peck.

JN: We talk a lot about birds in this one.

LL: So, we're going through a lot of changes, Julie, and certainly as you work with social media and go into our archives and take a look at where we've been.... this is a huge.... things change faster more recently, right? So, a lot of changes. Come and visit us on the 2nd floor. Dr. Carpenter will be here through the end of the semester, and your resource. In the future, it will be interesting where we go next.

JN: Absolutely, well Nate, you'll be very missed, but thank you for spending some time with us today.

NC: My pleasure.

JN: About the history and all the amazing stuff you do there.

NC: Well, thank you so much.

JN: Alright, on our next episode, we will hear from Dr. Pete Smudde and he's going to talk a little bit about his dual role as the associate director of the School of Communication as well as his role as program coordinator for PR. Thanks for listening!