

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM: CMUnow: February 2020

Katlin Birdsall: Remarkable accomplishments are happening everyday on the Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College campuses. From faculty instruction and research, to student projects and community involvement. CMUnow is a monthly segment and the KAFM community affairs hour, where we interview faculty, athletic coaches, and students to keep you up to date on all things CMU and WCCC. I'm Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlam. We'll have three segments on the show today and our first guest today is Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kurt Haas. Welcome to the show!

Dr. Kurt Haas: Thank you!

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, thanks for taking the time out of your schedule to come and talk to us and share some stories with our KAFM listeners.

Dr. Kurt Haas: It's my pleasure. The school song was worth the time alone.

David Ludlam: You liked that?

Dr. Kurt Haas: Yeah!

Katlin Birdsall: That's a KAFM specialty too.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Excellent!

Katlin Birdsall: Alright, so you started off as an assistant professor about two decades ago and now you occupy the second highest position in the university. Could you describe for us your journey and maybe what you've learned on the way? Because that's, you know, that's quite a bit of experience that I'm sure you've had in those two decades.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Yeah! I mean, it's been a really interesting time. I mean, when you put it that way it's sort of my experience has kinda been in concentric circles, right? So, you kinda start with this really narrow focus just trying to survive through your first semester in the classroom and gradually you get to know more about what's going on around the campus, might have been a department head. I've worked in academic affairs and other positions before I ended up as a VP and it's shortly been really fun learning more and more about not only just my disciplines, which are still near and dear to my heart to me, but the other cool stuff that is going around campus. I know a lot more about how scientists and business professors think now than I did twenty years ago.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm

David Ludlam: Well, Dr. Haas, I understand that you have a couple children of your own who, are no longer children, that actually recently went off to college. What advice did you give them as they were making their way into university life and wherever they attend college? Or maybe, more clearly put, what advice do you give students who might just be thinking about going to college or are ready to embark on that journey?

Dr. Kurt Haas: Well, I mean, so, for someone that is just thinking about whether or not to go to college or not, it's a conversation just about opportunities and making sure you have enough doors to go through in your life that has some agency to make authentic choices about what happens to you and your life and having some control over that, and I think ultimately that's what college is about. From my own kids, it's talking about, "Hey what kind of major do you want to go into?" and that sort of thing, and for me it's just been about, if you latch onto something that captures your intellectual interest, right, you take something you find fundamentally interesting, you can make the rest of the things you do going forward work. You might have to do more training here and there as you move through your life, but everyone has to do that anyway. For me, I found you my avid reading turned into a love of literature and literature, if you allow it to, it shapes your brain in ways that allow you to do a whole lot of interesting things, and I think that's true of anybody. I think they just need to follow their passions and end up where they take them.

David Ludlam: That's good advice. Did they take it? Did they take the advice?

Dr. Kurt Haas: I think so. One of them is still trying to figure it out and the other one has kinda known what she's wanted to do from the time she was eight. It's kinda frightening actually.

Katlin Birdsall: I always admired those that do!

Dr. Kurt Haas: I thought I was going to be a veterinarian when I was fourteen and I'm really really far away from that now a days.

Katlin Birdsall: That was the same for me. I worked at a vets office all through high school thinking that I was going to be a veterinarian one day and definitely went a whole different route.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Yeah. Animals are cool but it seems like an appealing kind of path but ultimately it wasn't for me.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah me neither. You are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs and our first guest today is Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Kurt Haas. So that actually leads perfectly into our next question for you. So you were talking about that you were actually an English undergraduate student and you have a background in the humanities and I know David and I often have conversations that people say that the humanities are dead and or dying.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Ouch

Katlin Birdsall: I know. He's also an English undergrad, so, David's allowed to have that.

Dr. Kurt Haas: We talked about that before we came on, but we don't have enough time to talk about him as an undergrad.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah!

David Ludlam: My goodness.

Katlin Birdsall: But I am wondering, from your perspective, what are the humanities and what is their future? I'd be curious to hear from you.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Well, I mean, it's always hard to know. We are in a pendulum swing, or if we are in a kind of permanent trend, for me, the humanities are about asking these questions that we still desperately need in our society. It's about the why do we do things not the whether or not we can do things. What does it mean to be a human being trying to navigate everything from business world to technology to whatever else on our mind? The key, I think, for the humanities as disciplines, right, as places within a university is, well, how do we help students who decide to major in English or history or art or whatever figure out how they want to connect to the economy eventually. I think there's a whole lot of, really, data, surveys, and employers, and that sort of thing that show that the things that humanities folks do are kind of right in line with the skills that a whole lot of work places need. So, maybe, you're not going to be an accountant if you're an English major, but a whole lot of office circumstances, business circumstances need the kinds of communication, critical thinking. If you think about it, a whole lot of life, I mean, this is kind of born true for me, that when I'm not in the classroom, a whole lot of life is being able to understand difficult texts of some sort, and articulate how they affecting you or others. If you've got that skill, you are going to be able to transfer that to a lot of things. And I think that's true for a lot of humanities disciplines. So, I think as long as we continue to articulate what those disciplines are all about, they will swing back the other way a bit.

David Ludlam: I hope it does. Dr. Haas said you're a Chaucer guy, so I want to give you an opportunity to completely geek out on literature here for a portion of the show. Maybe talk about, you think about Chaucer and Shakespeare and sort invokes the canon. Can you explain to listeners what is literary canon and why is it important and what's it going to do in the future? Is it being reshaped, remade?

Dr. Kurt Haas: Well, I mean, so you know, in the eighties, kind of this discussion, this is a curve by the way, I wasn't expecting us to talk about this. See you got me in full geek mode!

Katlin Birdsall: You got to be on your toes with David.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Yeah well, hang with me listeners. The literary canon is simply those groups of works that people decide are worth reading, a lot of times in a school context, right? So, our notion of what is a canon needs to be flexible but also, I think for me, respectable of tradition as well, right, so we got to find ways to get folks to, like Toni Morrison who passed away not too long ago, who's probably, for me, the most important American writer of the last 100 years, we got to make sure to make room for that, as well as, not shunning off to the side folks like (inaudible), Shakespeare, and making sure that we continue to maintain that connection with history and also with those beautiful usages of language that will fall into disuse and gradually make us dumber if we don't stay engaged with them.

David Ludlam: I could keep going Katlin, but I'll differ.

Katlin Birdsall: Don't worry listeners I will cut them off.

David Ludlam: This could go for a while. I have so many questions to ask.

Katlin Birdsall: I am going to redirect them back to CMU for a minute. You do have your undergraduate, your graduate, and your doctorate all in English. You've taught everything from composition and literature to Hamlet text and context. You've worked with probably countless student and faculty throughout your tenure, but what is kept you at CMU? I'm always really interested in faculty members and administrative staff who have stayed with CMU throughout their tenure and are really evolved with the institution but what has kept you there personally?

Dr. Kurt Haas: Well, I mean, particularly at CMU that answer is always students, right? I mean, you know that we are a very student-centered kind of campus and that's certainly what keeps me there. For me as a teacher, I always said the going to class, that piece of it, I do for free. Grading papers maybe not so much, but ya know going into a classroom and having interesting conversations with a bunch of bright people, that's just a privilege. In some sense I mean that as an administrator was well. My current position is a lot more faculty focused, it's a privilege to walk into meetings and talk with faculty and solve problems and run into this incredible diversity of really smart folks. And that's one of the really exciting things about, you know most people will say that that's and exciting thing about being on a college campus but also a thing that helps you maintain a career in higher ed, which allows you to, ya know, the cool thing about being a college professor and the track I have taken is, for a while I can be a college professor, at times I can be a writer of sorts, and then I can be a manager, I can be a visionary, I can move into all kinds of spaces. For me, that's the exciting part of it from a personal perspective.

Katlin Birdsall: Right

David Ludlam: As we wind down on the segment here, I don't know if the phrase Turnabout is fair play is Shakespearean or not, but I got to turn something back on you, because I had you for class your first semester as an instructor at CMU and you put me on the spot one time and caught me not having not read my Shakespeare.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Good! I'm glad I caught you on the spot, I'm not glad you didn't read it.

David Ludlam: But now I am going to put you on the spot and ask you to tell us, what is your favorite Chaucer or Shakespearean passage and why?

Dr. Kurt Haas: So, this is a bit dark and I'll probably get a word or two wrong, but it's from MacBeth, and he says "Life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing", which is a really horrible quote when you've just been talking on the radio for ten minutes.

David Ludlam: Way to uplift our listeners.

Dr. Kurt Haas: I guess this is my tale told by an idiot I guess but bear with me. But there is something, especially in the context of that play, kind of the desperation of MacBeth and the sadness and trying to make sense of, what in his mind, is the horror that has been done to him but is not necessarily true. It always just speaks to me and the language there is just so beautiful.

David Ludlam: Okay

Katlin Birdsall: Perfect. Alright well we are going to end your segment on that note there. Thank you so much again for coming in today and chatting with our listeners and with us. We appreciate it.

David Ludlam: Thank you.

Dr. Kurt Haas: Yeah thanks for having me.

Katlin Birdsall: Well don't go anywhere. We are going to take a short break and we'll be right back with assistant professor and program director of the Physician Assistant program, Amy Bronson.

SEGMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable things happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our second guest today, Assistant Professor and Program Director of the Physician Assistant program, Amy Bronson. Welcome to the show!

Amy Bronson: Thank you! Thank you for having me!

David Ludlam: Yeah and thanks for being with us. One of the things that I noticed just by looking at your bio, and I think this is true of many people at CMU, is that you don't quite fit the mold perfectly and you kind of break the stereotypes and your background is really interesting. You've even been involved in reconstructive surgery and now you're running a PA program at a university. Can you kind of give us the thumbnail sketch of your life and how you got from here to there. What brought you to CMU?

Amy Bronson: Yeah. That's a really great question. So, I have definitely in life embraced the quote that really that life is a journey, not a destination and I really feel like that sort of captures who I am. When I thought about, I've always loved medicine, always wanted to be an apart of medicine but I never really had anyone in my path to forerunner that that was a possibility. So when I started out in my educational journey, I have great women in my life who had sort of broken bonds and gone beyond what I thought was possible, from my grandmother who immigrated from Denmark, ran the family farm when my grandfather passed away at a young age, and then my mom who was the first one in our family to go on and get a college education, to leave the farm and to go off on this new path that has inspired my walk and journey. I started off, went off to college and played volleyball, and thought that I was going to be in education and turned into science education and it was really that time, and during my undergrad, when I volunteered at a Shriners Hospital that I realized that I really need to pursue medicine but I did not know exactly what that path would looked like. So to get my degree, I ended up in speech language pathology, because it was a nice mix between education and the sciences but really found, working at Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning and, as a mountain backpacking guide, still holding on to that wilderness medicine piece, man, medicine still ran deep. So, I finally had some people in my life encourage me to go for it. Instead of going on to medical school, I had a few people in my life that were PAs and encouraged me to take that route. And so, I ended up as a Physician Assistant! Came out here to Grand Junction during clinical rotations and ended up working in otolaryngology and facial plastic surgery. I think it was one of those moments of my life when you get on the peak and you realize looking down on the trail that it had been very circuitous to get there but realizing all of those pieces are really important in that journey. And then I had the opportunity to start at PA program in Minnesota, my first foray into education. I finished my doctorate in Educational Leadership while I was there. And then my husband's job brought us back to Grand Junction, a place that I had lived and worked for many years and at the same time CMU was starting to explore what it would look like to have a PA program. I feel like I've gotten to marry some of my two favorite things in life. I love education but I love this community and I've really seen the power of marrying those two things and what we can do to impact our community and to make it a healthier and whole place to live.

Katlin Birdsall and David Ludlam: That's great.

Katlin: Well you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Assistant Professor and Program Director for the Physician Assistant program, Amy Bronson. So, you kind of talked about your journey leading up to your time here at CMU and that it was ultimately your husband's job that brought you back here but it seemed like it was pretty fortuitous that you were able to meld your passion for education and medicine to start the PA program here at CMU. Can you talk to

us a little bit about what the process was like with, ya know, starting a program from the ground up and one that is really important, not only for our local community but for the regional community as well?

Amy Bronson: Absolutely. It was only because of the community and the support we have in the community that the reason that we have this here. Ya know, I think it took some folks within CMU to see that this as an incredible opportunity to allow students to go on in their training and to actually stay here in western Colorado and the impact that could have on our communities. We need more providers. We need better access to care, especially in rural and underserved frontier areas and really being able to train folks here, there is good literature out there, that those who train, will stay within a fifty mile radius of where they train and so, in order to be able to facilitate having more providers in these areas, we are passionate about being able to have a training program here so that people will likely stay and service this community. And so, it has been a big lift, a big heavy lift to get this going from accreditation, the investment that the university has put into this process, bringing in faculty, to now having our second cohort that just started in January, which is our second group of students. It's just been fun to watch the mission and vision of what this could be start to breath life into that and have students there apart of it and I would say that is what continues to drive our passion to make this a very successful program.

David Ludlam: So, there's something I have to ask, a story that is circulating around campus, and I've heard people say that you've got this highly competitive program that people inspire to be in and be involved in. And on the first day of class, students arrived, and they thought they were going to jump right into learning about being a PA but, instead, they volunteered, I think, with the Salvation Army. It was stocking shelves. Tell us about that. How did that come about? Why did you do that? What was your thinking there?

Amy Bronson: Yeah. That's a really good question. Community service is one of the biggest pieces and components of our program. We really feel like that if we are going to be a part of this community, students need to learn the importance of learning to give back right away. And so, yes, the first day they show up and we have this rigorous, right, twenty-seven-month training program which we take medical school and squish fifteen months of learning in the classroom. Students come ready to tackle that, but we really feel like one of the most important things students need to do, and why I love education, is the transformation that happens for people while they go through the educational process. So yes, we are about disseminating knowledge and students showing they can be competent medical providers, but more than that, we want to make sure they can be compassionate medical providers. Part of that is getting them invested in the community right away as they enter Grand Junction.

David Ludlam: I like that story and I think it's a neat approach.

Katlin Birdsall: You are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and today our second guest is Assistant Professor and Program Director of the new Physician Assistant program, Amy Bronson. So I also love that story that where they were out and involved and helping out Salvation Army and out in the community and I know that's not the only thing that our PA program is doing because like you said that is a very integral part of this program, so I know you've hosted aerial clinical services, you've worked with WIC on capstone projects. And I know in pervious conversations we've had that you've mentioned the Round-Up River Ranch. I was hoping that maybe you could tell our listeners a little bit about what that program is and how the PA students are involved.

Amy Bronson: Absolutely, so, Round-Up River Ranch is an incredible camp in Gypsum, Colorado, just really right in our backdoor and it offers a camp experience for serious illness kids that wouldn't normally get to have a normal camp experience, get to come to camp and have a pediatric ICU full-time medical staff up there that allows these small children to be able to have just a normal camp experience that we take for granted every day. Our students got to go up and be a part of a family camp. And for them it was a really rich experience. They got to see after they leave a physician's office, what is life really like for these families that are caring for these kids that have multiple medical appointments in a week and they are navigating medications and, really, the fears that surround letting their kids go to try and break the bonds that have held them from being able to live a what we call a quote on normal life. And it was a really impactful experience for our students. I think walking away realizing just how much more there is to medicine than that first encounter that you have with a patient in the office.

Katlin: I love that.

Amy Bronson: Yeah.

David Ludlam: I do too. That's neat. I want to kind of end our segment where we began. You talked about your grandmother, and the listeners can't see it but your face lit up when you mentioned her and I think you said she sort of inspired this trailblazer that is in you. Has that connection with your grandmother help you build a program from nothing and tell us a little bit about her.

Amy Bronson: Yeah, it's really a great question. So, my grandmother, she was a woman that I have embraced so many of the disciplines in life that she had. She was driven, she was decisive, and more than anything she would dream big and was not afraid to fail. I feel like those are the pieces that I continue to carry forward. She got up every morning out on the farm and it didn't matter if it was a blizzard or if it was a beautiful day, she was walking, and she would walk her two miles every day. And that is what I have embraced. Move in the morning! It is when I do some of my best thinking and some of my best dreaming. And she has really been the one who has inspired me to think bigger and to go bigger. That's something I continue to take forward and continue to inspire students to do too. As we say in our program, we are crew not passengers and you really have to be an active part of your learning and I feel like that is what we do in bringing the program forward too. Because we are crew. It's about the community and the community surrounding this in order to make it successful. And that is what we are doing at CMU with the PA program and getting students involved to be able to make an impact in our community.

David Ludlam: Well when we hopefully do the dedication ceremony on the new building at some point, we are going to have to make sure that you include thanking your grandmother. That's a great story.

Amy Bronson: Absolutely.

Katlin Birdsall: Thank you so much again. We are already at the end of our time with you so thank you again for coming on the show today and talking to our listeners not only about yourself but also our new PA program at CMU.

Amy Bronson: Yeah. I appreciate the time.

Katlin Birdsall: Alright listeners don't go anywhere. We are going to take a quick break and we will be right back with CMU Head Softball Coach Erik Kozel.

SEGEMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable things happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our third guest CMU Head Softball Coach Erik Kozel. Welcome to the show!

Erik Kozel: Thanks for having me.

David Ludlam: Thanks for being here. Erik, I'm always amazed at the journeys that coaches tend to take. I mean, you have this passion for a sport, but you often have to move around. You have to start in a certain area maybe that's away from home. What has your journey been like? How did you land here at CMU?

Erik Kozel: What brought me to CMU was actually the baseball program. I started out of high school. I played at a junior college in Arizona and ended up transferring to California, did pretty well there, and then that got me an opportunity to come here as a junior college transfer and then after graduating, I was fortunate to play professionally, and so that was just in the summer time so when the fall and the spring, I needed a job and asked coach Ankes if there was any opportunities available and I actually got on as the part-time assistant coach for the softball team. Since then I've stuck around and moved my way up and now, I'm the head softball coach.

Katlin Birdsall: That's great. So, I think you've been with the CMU softball team for four season now. Is that correct? Five?

Erik Kozel: This will be my seventh years

Katlin Birdsall: I was close but a little off. So, seven, seventh season. So, like you said you started out as the assistant coach, I know were our interim head coach for a little while and this past July they officially announced you as the head coach. So, what did that feel like for you hearing that you were the head coach of CMU's softball team, and a really good softball team?

Erik Kozel: Very proud, very happy. As something I'd been a part of for a long time and I obviously was apart of great coaching staffs before then, and to have the interim positions and not know if I was going to get the head job was something, that from the standpoint of being in that position I felt like I had to give it 100 percent even though there was a possibility that I was not going to be there next year. I think that the program deserved that. I think that the girls more importantly deserved everything I could possibly give them. I gave it everything I could that season, last season, and with recruiting and with playing softball games and fortunate enough to pan out and get the position and become head coach.

Katlin Birdsall: Nice, well congratulations again.

Erik Kozel: Thank you!

David Ludlam: So, baseball is known as America's past time. There about a million movies made about baseball. Everyone is familiar with baseball. Some people might not be as familiar with softball. But when I came to a game last year, I couldn't believe the energy and the culture that you have built with the softball team. What's unique about softball culture that results in that incredible energy that your team has at the stadium during the games? What is that?

Erik Kozel: They love what they do. I can honestly say that when they step in that field they are passionate about and something that they love to do and that translates into their communication and their energy that they have on the field. The difference between softball and baseball, is that softball portion is so much faster with the closer bases and the closer positioning, the closer pitchers circle. So, things happen, and things happen very fast. The flashiness is kind of not there because you don't have time to do that. You don't have time to show off a bit. You've got to get the ball and you have to get rid of it and that fosters more of an upbeat tempo feeling and sense of energy there

David Ludlam: Okay that makes sense.

Katlin Birdsall: I like that. And too, I don't know if it helps at all, we just added on the additional outfield, I don't know what they are actually calling it, the stands where we can seat another 120 people out there.

Erik Kozel: They are calling it the Beer Garden.

Katlin Birdsall: Oh yeah there we go. The Beer Garden. Don't forget, softball games now also have a beer garden. Which probable helps with the energy.

David Ludlam: A beverage garden

Katlin Birdsall: A beverage garden, thank you! That's probably more appropriate. Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our last guest today is CMU Head Softball Coach Erik Kozel. So, I know I've been following our softball team pretty closely, especially on social media for the past couple of years, and they seem to be building a dynasty and are a force to be reckoned with. I believe that they've won the past four RMAC Championships, they've gone on to the NCAA tournament for quite a few consecutive years. I believe there was one other record where they had thirty wins.

Erik Kozel: Yeah

Katlin Birdsall: I can't quite remember off the top of my head but I was like, I know there is another big monumental moment for the softball team. They have been building this over the past couple of years. So, what can we expect for this upcoming season when it comes to our players and what they are doing on the field?

Erik Kozel: This kind of goes along with our recruiting. We always recruit to not just replace or replenish. We recruit to get better. So, this season, same feeling in that sense, in the sense of what we've accomplished in the past, we've gotten to and we are not going to take a step back from that. We're not going to stay at that same level, we are always going to try and move forward and do something better. The thirty-win streak, we just lost the game, so we are going to restart that one right now.

Katlin Birdsall: Oh, sorry to bring that up.

Erik Kozel: We are going to restart that one right now. That start this season, we're not going to be able to do that one but we still have that opportunity. It's just getting better every single game and doing our best to make sure that we carry on the traditions and the culture that CMU softball provides and people throughout the state and throughout the nation understand when they talk about Colorado Mesa University and the softball program, they know that it's that elite program.

David Ludlam: I've got a quick one Katlin

Katlin Birdsall: Go ahead.

David Ludlam: What is your favorite baseball player coming from the baseball world and why?

Erik Koziel: Throwing me a curveball, yeah?

David Ludlam: Oh yeah. It's a fastball.

Erik Ludlam: Yeah that is a quick one. I'd have to say, other than my grandpa, I never got to seem him play. Somebody I'd get to see play would be probably Craig Biggio. I think Craig Biggio was a part of the Houston Astros, part of the Killer Bees and that era, and he was just tough. Something that I always liked whenever I went a watched baseball games or watch players play was just the toughness and grit and the guys that would give one hundred percent at all times. He played multiple positions, kind of like how I did, and I kind of looked up to that, in the sense that he played second base, he played the outfield, he played as the catcher as well. He was one of those guys that when you watched him, he wasn't afraid to get hit by a pitch. He wasn't afraid to whoever he was facing. I really enjoyed watching him.

David Ludlam: Well it seems like you've passed that toughness along to your players. You can certainly see it in their eyes as well on the field.

Erik Koziel: I sure hope so.

Katlin Birdsall: Well great! Well good luck this season and thank you again for taking the time to come on the show today.

Erik Koziel: Thank you guys!

Katlin Birdsall: You're welcome! Well this segment airs on the second Tuesday of each month on KAFM Community Radio. You can also listen to a podcast of today's show on KAFMRadio.org. I'm your host Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlum and we will be back next month with another addition of CMUnow on the Community Affairs Hour.

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