

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM CMUnow: June 18, 2020

Katlin Birdsall: Remarkable accomplishments are happening every day 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 new monthly segment of 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, and we'll have two guests on the show today. And our first guest is recent alumna and former CMU Residents Hall Assistant, Brooklyn Buhre. Welcome to the show Brooklyn!

Brooklyn Buhre: Hi!

Katlin Birdsall: Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to come speak and with David and I, and to let the KAFM listeners here a little bit from you!

David Ludlam: Yeah thanks for joining us!

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah! I'm glad to be here!

Katlin Birdsall: Great! So, why don't we go ahead and just jump right in. So, you graduated from CMU this past May, and while you were a student, you were really involved in campus life, including both with Resident's Life and with Theater Program. So, can you just tell our listeners maybe a little bit more about yourself and your background?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah! So, I was born and raised in Johnstown, Colorado, which is over on the front range. And I have always been the leader type, and I've always sought out positions that could help me make a change and have the peoples' voices heard. And I also was really involved in theater in my community and really, really enjoyed that. So, when I graduated high school, I was determined to be a musical theater major and graduate debt-free so that I didn't have to

pay more for a degree than it would give me. And so, CMU really provided everything I could have ever wanted. I was offered a lot of scholarships to help pay my way, and the Theatre Department here is a hidden gem, and the leadership opportunities on campus are endless. Anywhere from, like you said, I was a Resident Assistant to a student worker in the Vice President's office at Student Services, and I was president of a club, the Mesa Thespian Society, and a student director of Mesa OutLoud! Which is a performing, touring group for CMU and the Theatre Department. So, CMU was exactly what I wanted and needed. And I got an ideal education, and even better experiences and memories, and I'm just really thankful to have come to CMU and had a great experience.

Katlin Birdsall: You know, I always love getting to talk to students, because, you know, you often think, they're here, they're earning their degree, they're in their classes. And then when you learn about all of the extracurricular activities that students are involved in, it literally blows my mind! I mean, you just rattled off about five, six different organizations that you were involved with, and I just always find that really impressive in our college students.

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah!

David Ludlam: And speaking of the extracurricular activities, Brooklyn, I was watching back the "I Have a Dream" Commemoration Event last year, and I saw your performance of a U2 song, and it was just so powerful, you really are talented, we're lucky to have you. And I wanted to talk to you about what your experience has been like more recently? You, I think, have lived on campus all four years, so you've had the opportunity to have that traditional campus experience as a university student, but you've also had the experience of what it's been like to be on campus during COVID-19. So, you know, you left for Spring Break, thinking you're going to come back and experience the end of your university career in a normal kind of way, but that wasn't what happened. What was it like for you? Tell us what it was like to be a student on campus during this, sort of, unprecedented pandemic. And, were there some good things that came out of it for you, too?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah, uh, I actually had a trip planned to go to New Orleans during Spring Break, and I was *determined* to go. And I think there were a lot of us students who didn't quite grasp how big of a deal this whole thing was, until that halfway through break when President

Foster sent out that email about the new plans for the semester. And I think that's when it really hit. And so, I canceled my trip, and it didn't take long to realize the list of things that were going to be canceled as well. And, you know, things that I wanted to do and cherish as I did them for the last time as a senior. And, you know, we have a lot of different events that happen during the spring. And so, everything changed! And even the Resident Assistant position that I'd known for three years changed, to where I couldn't interact in person with my residents. And most of them had moved out before I even returned back from the extended break, so, we had a drastic decrease in the amount of residents on campus. And so, it was really lonely to have to isolate ourselves, and quarantine ourselves, and make sure that we maintained safety and a healthy environment on campus while still doing what we do as RA's and facilitating a fun environment on campus. And so, it's been really interesting seeing the ways that Resident's Life has adapted to these changes, and making sure that we're maintaining a healthy and safe and fun environment for us to still be able to make the memories that we would have been if COVID was never a thing. So, it's been very interesting, and I think the professional staff has done a great job at hitting the ground running on making processes that would make, you know, the checking out process easier and safer, where we could do it virtually. And they've really done a great job of keeping us Resident Assistants safe, while still doing our job.

Katlin Birdsall: Perfect! Well, you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is recent alumna and former CMU Residents Hall Assistant, Brooklyn Buhre. So Brooklyn, I wanted to dive a little bit deeper into your role as a Resident Assistant. So, you know, we know that's an important job here on campus, let alone during a pandemic that none of us have ever faced before or had to deal with before. But, I was wondering how you felt prepared to lead your residents during the end of the spring semester? And maybe some of the positive things that ended up coming out of the changes that were happening due to COVID-19.

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah, I think, it was a lot of figuring out how to guide my residents through this unknown time, with all their questions, and how I was finding those answers in real time. And, you know, even the professional staff was figuring out those answers in real time. And so, you know, it took me three years realize that a group chat for my floor was the way to go, just in general with communication. But then during this time, and once COVID hit, it made the virtual communication key and just so much easier. So that, if there was a concern with one of my residents, regardless if they were back home or still on campus, they could reach out to me, and so I think that is a huge, you know, advantage of being prepared to lead them through this unknown time, and just keeping the spirits up, that, you know, it's meant to be this way and something better is going to come out of it. And so, I think the hardest part for me was not

getting the closure that I expected. I mean, I didn't really get any real goodbyes to any of my residents, or even my fellow grads who are saying goodbye to this campus for good. And, to my friends who would be returning next year, you know, there wasn't really the closure of goodbyes that I would have wanted, but ... the good that's coming out of all of this, is that, I think we're all figuring out new ways to do our processes, and I think that a lot of that is going to stick. And, so, figuring out ways that we can take advantage of this virtual time. And the ways that I've done that is I've realized that I can hone my skills by... there's masterclasses by these Broadway performers that I never would have had the opportunity to do if they weren't also stuck at home. So, you know, these masterclasses that, you know, that I would have had to travel to New York to go take, but now I can literally do it from my home. And, you know, I can work on my audition notebook and the tools for whatever comes after. And so I think that's some of the good that's coming from a lot of people, is they get to kind of explore, self-exploration of how they can better themselves, and then also how can you better the processes of what our daily life is? And I think that that's really cool, and something that's really great that is coming out of this whole pandemic.

David Ludlam: Well Brooklyn, you mentioned saying goodbyes... I hope you actually never get to say goodbye because I want you to continue performing at all of our Alumni Association events. And hope you stick around for those. But, you know, since you are graduating, and you are saying goodbye in one respect, what is in the next phase of your life? And has the pandemic, or is the national crisis that we're experiencing now affecting your plans for your future?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah! It's made it a little bit more unknown. You know, when I came in as a freshman here at CMU, I literally had my four-year plan of every class I would take, with every professor, you know, organized by semester, and... I had the four-year plan. So then, I had my five-year plan, and what would happen after graduation. And I think that's the lesson in it for me, that COVID has given me, is that sometimes you can't really plan "to a T", like I would want to and prefer. And so, what's kind of cool about this is it's opening up doors that I didn't expect. There's actually, um... hopefully I won't have to say goodbye to CMU just yet; there's some openings that are happening on professional staff across campus that I am going to be applying for. And, so, a lot of them are short-term, positions here, so it's kind of ideal that I can not have to say goodbye to CMU, I can get a little bit more closure, and then I can also wait for the theatre world to get back on its feet. I have no doubt that theatre will be back, and it's always bounced back, it's always had its ups and downs, and I have no doubt that it's going to be here to stay. But, for the time being while, you know, people can't really congregate in a theatre, it's

kind of nice that I am able to explore some other options. So, hopefully I'll be able to stay here at CMU but, um, we'll just have our fingers crossed and we'll find out soon enough!

David Ludlam: So that means that there is a chance that you're going to be performing at some of our events? At least, in the short-term?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yes!

Katlin Birdsall: [laughing]

David Ludlam: Good, because I want to hear you sing!

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah, I would love to collaborate for sure.

Katlin Birdsall: He's got you saying that publicly [laughing].

Brooklyn Buhre: [laughing]

Katlin Birdsall: Well great! Well, you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our first guest today is recent alumna and former CMU Residents Hall Assistant, Brooklyn Buhre. So, Brooklyn, we're already getting to the end of our time today with you. And I think before we let you go today, I know for myself I've spent a lot of the last couple of weeks and months actually reflecting on, you know, myself personally and professionally. I feel like we've all just had a little bit more time with COVID-19 and being stuck at our houses to just spend some more time reflecting. So, I'm wondering if maybe you could maybe talk to us about one of your fondest memories at CMU? And then, what excites you most about the future?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah, I think, oh, a fondest memory is so hard, because I feel like I have so many, and in so many different departments... And, uh, I think my ultimate is all of the leadership opportunities and personal growth that I got in being in Mesa OutLoud! And being a student director was a great challenge for me. And performing in general is such a great joy, that being able to share my love for performing with the campus, at all of our campus events, has been such a blessing, and I just am so very grateful for it. And so I think that, if I had to choose one [laughing], I think that it would probably be Mesa OutLoud! Although there's so many in abundance that, even comes to the top of my head when you first asked that, but...

David Ludlam: And Mesa OutLoud! ... could you tell our listeners what that group is?

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah! So Mesa OutLoud! is housed in the Theatre Department, and it's a touring, recruiting group for CMU as a campus, but then specifically the Theatre Department. So, we essentially are the entertainment troupe, for, if, you know, there's an event on campus that needs a little bit of entertaining at the beginning of the event or during the event, whatever that may be. That, we come, and we perform our set, and we even do it around the community. We've done it for, you know, the Parade of Lights, and all that. But then we also do tours to high schools to be able to, you know, kind of expose the fact that our CMU Theatre Department is a hidden gem! So many people think of UNC's Theatre Department, and I think that it's very easy to forget us, and I think that that's why we remain a hidden gem, but we do want to still share that with high schoolers, and that's what Mesa OutLoud! allows. So, it's really great!

Katlin Birdsall: I love that! I feel like that's a really great way to end our show today, is on a high note, *pun intended!* [laughing]

David Ludlam: Nice.

Katlin Birdsall: [laughing] You like that? [laughing] Alright, well Brooklyn, thank you so much again for taking the time out of your day, and for coming on our show, we really appreciate it!

Brooklyn Buhre: Yeah! Thank you so much for having me!

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well don't go anywhere, because after a short break we'll be right back with Associate Professor of Economics, Dr. Nathan Perry.

SEGMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable work happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our second guest today, Associate Professor of Economics, Dr. Nathan Perry. Welcome to the show!

Dr. Nathan Perry: Hi! Thanks for having me!

David Ludlam: Yeah, thanks for being with us, and you know, Dr. Perry, when I think about your career, it extends beyond the classroom. I mean, you're involved in the community, well beyond, I think, what your teaching requirements would require. And, you know, I think about healthcare, you know, professors who maybe do clinical work, and it helps keep their skills sharpened. Is that the same, when you're talking about the Business Department economics, does doing the kind of research you do out in the community, being involved and helping the community make economic forecasts, does that help you in the classroom? Keep your skills sharp, just like it would in, sort of a healthcare discipline?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah, definitely, I mean, there's a variety of ways you can keep your skills sharp and show that you're at the top of your profession. A lot of academics like to focus on publishing and academic journals, which I do a lot of actually. But another way that you can stay active, so you can enhance the classroom experience, is to actually do what you're teaching. And so, I like to do both. I like to publish on the academic side, but then I *really* like getting involved as an actual economist. I love doing regional economic work, and forecasting, and economic impact reports, and just trying to solve some of these problems. You know, the Western Slope, Grand Junction, is such an interesting place. It's a place that's really focused on

economic development and trying to grow and improve everyone's standard of living. And so, it's just kind of an interesting opportunity for me to apply my skills to a place that I think appreciates them.

Katlin Birdsall: Great! Well, you are listening to CMUnow on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Associate Professor of Economics, Dr. Nathan Perry. So, we've talked a little bit about what you do here outside of CMU within our community, and I know you've completed Economic Impact Assessments for a lot of different local entities like Country Jam, The National Resource Center, the Health Department. I know that you've done work for how natural amenities and trails impact home values in Grand Junction, the economic impact and willingness to pay for mountain bike trails, so it kind of spans all different areas and arenas. And I'm wondering if this local relevant research that you're doing for the local community makes its way into the classroom, and how it actually creates learning opportunities for students?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah, definitely, so I'll use my Summer Macro Economics class as an example. You know, I'm teaching an introduction to macro economics course, and I write these quarterly economic newsletters for Mesa, Montrose, and Delta Counties, and, uh... They had to get through a couple weeks of the course before they could understand any of the terms, but, I've assigned that newsletter to them – well, they don't know it yet, but it's going to be assigned very soon – because it allows them to see how economists actually take all this stuff that they're learning in a textbook and turn it into a tangible, useful document that businesses, and governments, and people use. So, you know, and when I teach Econometrics, which is advanced statistics applied to economics, and a bunch of other things, uh... I have so many of my own data sets, that we can actually go through and repeat a lot of my studies that I've published or that I've done for grant work. And that's kind of a cool experience because then I can Google my paper and they see this report, and I make them read it, which I'm sure they hate, but then we can go through, and I can walk them through exactly what I did, and I think that's, you know, that's a good experience for students I think.

Katlin Birdsall: That's what I love. I mean, that's something, you know, we always tout here at CMU; that student's are going to receive that hands-on, real world experience at an undergraduate level, that they may not experience if they were to choose to go to a different college or university. So I love getting to hear actual examples of how that's happening in the classroom.

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah, well, you know, it's really good to do that. You know, I've seen my teaching change and improve. You start to think differently when you're actually performing tasks in your field. So for me, as a professional economist, I think more about why is this useful? What do students really need to know? How do I approach this differently than maybe 10 or 15 years ago in graduate school when I was just learning about these things? And so, it's definitely changed my approach, and the things that I think are important in the classroom. And I think it has provided a more vibrant and useful experience for the students.

David Ludlam: Well Dr. Perry, I don't know if it's possible to get an economist to stop talking about numbers, but I want to talk to for a minute about the man behind the numbers. Tell us a little bit about who you are. What are your interests outside of economics? Do you have family in town, and how did you get to Grand Junction?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Well, uh, I'm from Salt Lake City, born and raised. Um, I uh, uh how far do you want me to start? I mean, just tell a boring story? [laughing]

Katlin Birdsall: *All* the way back. [laughing]

David Ludlam: Before the numbers, before the numbers... [laughing]

Dr. Nathan Perry: I can either be boring with numbers, or I can be boring with stories... so you've got your choice. [laughing] No, I was born and raised in Salt Lake City and I got a scholarship to Westminster College out there, and studied economics and philosophy, actually...

David Ludlam: Economics *and* philosophy?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah, I was a double –

David Ludlam: Is that kinda rare? Is that a rare combination?

Dr. Nathan Perry: I don't, I don't know? But uh, I really liked philosophy, but I wanted something that, you know, was more quantitative also. I kind of wanted to hedge my bets. I wanted to be a clear thinker, but I wanted to have numbers and graphs, kind of, behind that thinking. So I did a double major. And then, I thought about what I wanted to do next. I was working at American Express, doing some accounting stuff, and some tech support stuff, and I thought, well I could do a master's in finance, or I could work and do an MBA, or, you know, I'm really good at Econ; these professors seem to have an awesome life. So, I applied at a few programs, and the University of Utah gave me funding at the age of 22, so I actually started teaching classes when I was 23 years old... So the first week of classes, when I taught my first class, was uh, it was a week before I turned 24. So... and I moved here in my late 20's. Basically drew a big circle around Salt Lake City, days driving distance, and said this is where I'm willing to work. And uh, you know, because we have family there, and I wanted to pursue this career, but I wanted to maintain my proximity and closeness to them. So, it was Mesa State College at the time, and I had a friend who actually went to Western, but his girlfriend was from Grand Junction. He said, "Oh, Grand Junction, that's the St. George of Colorado." You know, St. George, Utah, it's like the drier, but really, outdoor activity, and warm...

Katlin Birdsall: Mmhmm, beautiful, uh huh.

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah exactly! He said, "You're going to love it! If you go down, there, you're going to love it!" And so, I had an interview here, and I really liked it, and I've been here since.

David Ludlam: But Grand Junction is better, right? [laughing]

Dr. Nathan Perry: You know, they're different, I actually don't think it was a good comparison. I mean, Grand Junction has more of a rural feel. And basically, St. George is Salt Lake City, transplanted somewhere else, and it's just as dense, and, you know, it's got all the same city problems... [laughing] ... that cities have. Grand Junction has all the benefits of more open space, I don't know, it was actually a bad comparison, but that's how he sold me on the area, so...

Katlin Birdsall: Well lucky for us!

David Ludlam: Yeah!

Katlin Birdsall: Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM Community Affairs and our second guest today is Associate Professor of Economics, Dr. Nathan Perry. So I think often, people think of CMU as a teaching university, and not a research institution, which is true. I mean, that's what we focus on, is the teacher-scholar method. But you conducted an analysis on behalf of the energy industry, that was really a first of its kind, and now is a model for others around the nation. Do you think there's more room for faculty research at CMU? And almost, how do we balance, putting teaching and students first, and balance that with the research and the benefits that come to our faculty members and students from that?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Well, I think even at a teaching institution, it's important to be conducting research, because you need to stay on top of what's new in your field, and that's really the point of the teacher-scholar model, is, you know, if you stop engaging in your discipline and you just teach for 30 years, by the end of the 30 years you're going to be very out of touch. And so, it's important to consistently engage with your profession, either through academic publications, through consulting, through some sort of activity, that, you know, qualifies you for your profession. You know, you get the big research universities where the professors, they don't care about teaching, and you can tell when you attend their courses, and their job is to just publish as much as possible, and their TA's do all the work, and, you know, it's a different type of experience. I think the teacher-scholar model is the right experience for students because you have the emphasis on teaching, and so they are getting a good product, and they're getting people who care, and they're getting professors who are student-centric. But then you also are requiring some of that publishing and some of that extra activity to keep you on top of your game. Maybe not as much as at a big research university. And, you know, the pressures change too. Some of these big universities, there's so much pressure to publish in these top journals, where, you know, in economics, they're just highly mathematical. Sometimes, the people who are publishing the top stuff are not even being useful to society, it's just off in math land. And so, I like this particular spot because there's not that pressure to have these, kind of, insane publications. I can more go for use value, does that make sense?

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah.

Dr. Nathan Perry: Instead of, you know, so many people in the top, top institutions, they have to narrow down to this one little topic that they're an expert at, and it just seems so boring to me. And here, I get to do things like, you know, I get to work on outdoor rec type studies, I get to work on oil and gas studies, I get to do whatever is really useful. And it expands my skillset, and, you know, makes me feel like a real economist, versus, I think, a lot of the research institutions where, I'm not so sure some of those guys could be a real economist.

Katlin Birdsall: Mmhmm, and too, I think it's a real benefit for our community to have professionals like yourself who are living here, working here, and then contributing to our community as a whole. I think, you know, it's a really great symbiotic relationship.

David Ludlam: For sure, and, you know, I want to go back to your philosophy. He's a double major, economics and philosophy, and I want to ask you this question to use both of those halves.

Dr. Nathan Perry: Uh oh... ok... [laughing]

David Ludlam: So, you stare out across the landscape in our country today, and you know, politics, and invective, and hyperbole, and all these things that make having empirical discussions really tough. And I imagine, if you're an economics professor, it's hard to keep, you know, the politics out of the discussion. But that's, in some ways, what you're trying to do I think, with economics; you're looking at the things you can measure. How do you keep politics out of economics? Should you? Or is there a role that they play in your discipline? How does that all work?

Dr. Nathan Perry: Well, you know, I think, um... I think it's impossible to keep some politics out because so many economic issues end up being political issues. And so, I think, you have to

approach it as, showing the students both sides, and being as up front as possible about the pros and cons of all arguments. And if you start thinking in terms of pros and cons, and have students help create pros and cons lists, then you're developing critical thinking, and you're not imposing political viewpoints on students. You know, we live in a world where everyone is, you know, sharing their political viewpoints very freely, and that's fine, but I just don't think that that's my job. I think it's my job to help students be critical thinkers and to not care what their political views are... But to also help them to use, you know, as an economist, I want them to not just have general opinions, but also use data to drive their opinions. And just because you have data doesn't mean you're going to end up with one opinion or another. There's a lot of data points that people have differing opinions on. But, the point is that you teach them to use tools and data, to use tools and critical thinking, to apply and to be the best possible thinker, and to always consider the other side, even if you have a strong opinion. And so, I think that's my personal teaching philosophy, and that's how I handle politics. You know, I've never had any student accuse me of being political in a teaching evaluation, and uh, I'm very up-front when I talk about topics that we need to talk about in class. That hey, you know, I'm not trying to impose my viewpoint, but I'm going to give you both arguments here. And so, I want you to feel like you can think clearly and freely. You know, that's the academia that I fell in love with, is the open debate and discussion, and open thoughts, and you know, I think society is kind of moving towards closed-thoughts, and uh, you know, people are afraid to hear the other side, and I think that's dangerous for society personally. So I try and show both sides, pros and cons, critical think, and not impose my viewpoint, I guess that's how I'd summarize that.

Katlin Birdsall: Great! I think that's a great way to wrap up the show today!

David Ludlam: Yeah, yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: So, thank you so much again for taking the time out of your day to come and talk with us, and, kind of let our KAFM listeners have a little sneak peek into what you do here at CMU.

Dr. Nathan Perry: Yeah, thanks for having me!

Katlin Birdsall: Well this was a special edition of CMUnow, on KAFM, and normally 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 at KAFMRadio.org. I'm your host Katlin Birdsall, along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we will be back next month for another edition of CMUnow on the Community Affairs Hour.

FIN