Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. Today, I am without Greg Gause, which is always a disappointment for me when Greg is not here with me, but I do have a wonderful guest today. And today with me, I have Lisa Brown. Lisa is the Director of Extended Education here.

What I'd like to do before I jump too much in, I'm going to give Lisa an opportunity to give a more full introduction of herself, tell us who she is. But one of the cool things about the podcast is we've gotten to highlight some live taping events where we have academic experts, we've gotten to work with some and talk with former students, but we haven't brought up some more individuals who are part of the Bush School family making this stuff work here for us.

Lisa and I have been working together for, I don't know, at least two years now, maybe three, and I teach for the Executive Master's in Public Service Program what we have, which I'm sure you will hear about from Lisa that for those of you that are listening to the podcast, that program, among some of the certificate programs that Lisa will talk about, highlights some opportunities for you to take classes from some of our world class faculty here at the Bush School without having to make all of the relocation decisions to come here full-time. I think Lisa and her team bring some really cool things as strengths to the Bush School and I wanted to take an opportunity to highlight some of those.

Now, I am rambling on. Lisa, welcome.

Thank you, good to be here.

Yeah, thanks for taking the time. Maybe just tell us a little bit about your background and who you are and how you find yourself here as the Director of Extended Education.

Absolutely, I'd love to share.

Well, as we say in Aggieland, howdy. Welcome everybody. My name is Lisa Brown and I'm Director of Extended Education here at the Bush School of Government and Public Service. As Director of Extended Education at the Bush School, I am here to help lead online initiatives and online education over at the Bush School of Government and Public Service. Some of the things that we work on doing is we have these great graduate opportunities here at the Bush School. Our office works to facilitate those opportunities and translate them to the online environment.

What we do is we work with faculty to help get their courses online and we also do things like marketing and recruiting our online graduating programs. We offer four online graduate certificates in Advanced International Affairs, Homeland Security, Nonprofit Management, and Public Management. Those are a short path to earn a standalone transcript recognized graduate credential. We also work to assist the faculty in developing courses for other graduate courses such as in our online Executive Master of Public Service and Administration.

We assist in those areas, marketing and recruitment, like I said, faculty services, and also in advising our online students. We serve as an advocate for our online students since they can't be in College Station Texas, we're here to support them and help them navigate Texas A&M University and the Bush School and its processes.

I've been in online education since 2000 here at Texas A&M University. I started out working with one of the first online programs here at Texas A&M University and just absolutely loved the format. I love the ability to reach students who couldn't make their way to Texas A&M University physically. We're offering great graduate education opportunities online for students. I just like opening those worlds of possibilities through online education.

Yeah, that's one of the things that's been really fun for me to partner with you in providing some of these courses, both as the subject matter expert designing the course and teaching them.

One of the things that I think is cool about the EMPSA, which is where I've done most of my work, is these are people who are out working full-time, they've already demonstrated a commitment to public service, they're trying to find a way to do what they do better or to have some opportunity for advancement. For lots of people, they don't have the choice of dropping their life throughout the state of Texas or throughout the country and just coming to College Station for two years for a degree. I really like how it expands the pool of people who can have access to us, have access to the education, and have access to the same types of rigor that our students get here in-person.

One of the cool things that Lisa's team does for the Executive Master's Program is that even though they're in an online format, they really try to develop cohort effects so that the students feel like they have a team or group of other students that they work with. They keep classes along together, we do a big graduation ceremony for them when they're done. They do a year, I believe it's a year-long capstone experience as well.

Correct.

Where they have to work together with a small team and believe it or not, the technological tools that we can use actually allow for a lot of group work collaboration in ways that they maybe wouldn't have expected that they could do in an online program. The faculty also work with them in a live virtual setting as well.

One of the other cool things that I got to do, now that I'm talking about me, but one of the things that I had to pilot this past year working with one of your team members, Rebecca Burgner, was developing new types of videos with these light boards. It was really cool because I stood behind a clear, plastic board doing statistics, wrote all the funky Greek letters and formulas on there, and the production, they were able to flip the mirror of me so that the students see me. Well, it looks like I'm just writing right on the camera screen.

The different ways in which you can deliver the material in this format, I think, are a lot of fun.

Yeah. Online learning, it's amazing how much it has advanced since 2000, since even earlier than that. It's amazing. We have great new tools. There are recording tools which you can easily record and deliver content. For example, a light board is one of them.

One of the things you were mentioning too, for the online Executive Master of Public Service and Administration program, or as we term, the EMPSA program, is we also two separate one-week residencies throughout that program. You get to still have your experience here in College Station, Texas at Aggieland and you get to meet your professors both virtually and you get to meet them in-person, network with your peers. That's just one facet of the program is that even though the majority of your coursework is online, you have this one-week residence experience twice so you can really connect with your colleagues and your professors as well.

Yeah. I can also attest to that. I've been here for their week in residence and it's a lot of fun. It's fun watching them bond, all the different activities that are planned. It's a really packed week for them.

Yes, indeed.

But it's a really good, I think, bonding cohort experience for them.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

I wanted to ask about the types of students that end up in the program. Who are you attracting for this program in general? And then what are people going on to do once they receive this Executive Master's Degree, for example?

In the Executive Master's Degree, we do have applicants and they have a lot of professional experience. Now, we do have a minimum requirement to apply. You must have five years of public service experience. All of our admits into the EMPSA program have at least the five years experience. However, what's interesting is the range of experience is very great. I'd say most of our students probably have about 20 years experience. It's a very rich environment. It's a great opportunity to talk with others who do have experience in public service.

Now, for the EMPSA program, we offer tracks in Homeland Security, Nonprofit Management, and Public Management. If you apply and are admitted and you get admitted to the Nonprofit Management track, for example, you'll get to visit and have colleagues in your classes that have this immense level of experience. That's a plus and a very great benefit as well.

Yeah, I can tell. I teach or have been teaching our Foundations of Public Service course, both in the in-residence students and in the Executive Master's Program. It is really cool, the different focuses that two groups have.

Our in-residence students are generally much younger with much less experience, so they really jump on different parts and have different types of questions. Whereas with the EMPSA folks, they have more experience than I do often, so being in the classroom with them is a learning experience even for me as the professor because all of the rich detail they have from the public service work they've been doing for the last, to your point, I think the average is around 20 years or something, which is a pretty cool bunch to be around.

Yeah, it really is. It brings a great dynamic into the classroom. Because our students have that public service experience, they come to the classroom with their experiences, but they're also completing rigorous academic work. I think it's a great combination. It helps them go out and be very successful upon graduation.

I think one of the best benefits of this program is the students who are in the program and who have completed the Master's program are already going out and doing amazing things in public service and they're having a great impact. We've had graduates who are now Fire Chiefs. We had one individual who obtained her dream job to be an Executive Director of nonprofit. To go out and see these students earn their Master degree while they're working full-time, and then be successful and obtain advancement in their career, it's so rewarding both the faculty, but anyone who helps the students, the advisors, to see them go out and do these great things. It's outstanding.

Yeah, I had the pleasure of attending graduation. I guess we've had three of them now. Is it three total graduations? Maybe four?

I believe we've had a couple, yeah.

A couple? Yeah. The first group graduated not that long ago and then we had another one this past December. I was standing with some of the students and it's fun to see. We were walking in, they're waving to their families that have had to sacrifice and make time for them, and hearing their stories about the ... One student that I worked with, she had me for statistics and she was telling me all the different things that she did to prepare for statistics and how her daughter helped and how the people at worked helped and all these different resources of people pulling together, rooting for her to be able to get her Master's, which is just really cool to see, I think.

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that is one thing that sets our program here at the Bush School and Texas A&M University apart is that all the staff, all the faculty, we're excited to see our students excel and succeed. I think the caring is really demonstrated through all the extra assistance that we give to our students. We want to hear them and how they've been successful. That's a fun thing to see and it's exciting to see that at graduation time and when they're alumni as well.

One of the other things or outstanding points about our students is we have a pretty high percentage of military who apply to the Master's program and take our courses as well. Approximately 30 to 40%, depending on which class you're looking at, is military. Either they've served active duty or they've served in the past. That's another neat thing, to see our military be successful.

Yeah. It's cool to see all the different perspectives too from civilian life to armed forces to then law enforcement. We get people in Texas that work for all different types of law enforcement. The issues that they see really brings a rich environment to the class discussions, to the discussion boards that are a big part of the online environment. It's a lot of fun.

What are your hopes for this program as it continues to grow? It's still a relatively young program and you've been at the helm of help pushing it forward. How do you hope to see this program grow and develop over time?

For me, the best measure of success is to see our graduates be successful. At the end of the day, if I go and i hear someone who's successful in public service, whether it be in Homeland Security, Nonprofit Management, or Public Management, and to know that they're making a difference out in public service, I think that's our best reward. Definitely.

Yeah, I agree. That's one of the things that's fun about teaching here and doing research here is I think there really is this noted emphasis on public service. I mean, it's in the name of the school which is a different than a lot of MPP or MPA programs. It's this actual focus on how to be a good public servant rather than just a good analyst or just a good administrator.

Absolutely.

There's this focus on the service piece, which I really like.

Absolutely. I think it takes in-depth knowledge to be a great public servant or to be great in any area that you're striving for. You have to have an in-depth knowledge, but you also have to have the problem solving skills, the leadership skills. Leadership comes no matter what level you're at. I believe that the Bush School and its graduate courses help the students and provide that. Definitely.

Yeah. If people were interested in a certificate or the Executive Master's Program, how do they go about finding out more information about the programs?

To find out more information, see our website, and that is Bush.TAMU.edu/online.

Cool. Is there anything else from the cool things you're doing over at Extended Ed, stuff in online education, anything in particular that you think would be fun to leave the listeners with?

Yeah, absolutely. I also would like to mention about our online graduate certificates. As I mentioned earlier, those are short path, four to five courses, and you can earn a transcript recognized standalone credential. Those areas that we offer graduate certificates are Homeland Security, Nonprofit Management, Public Management, and Advanced International Affairs. The great part about those graduate certificate credentials is they standalone in industry, but they're also graduate courses. You can potentially transfer those to Master's degree programs.

If you're not quite sure about taking the plunge into a full online program, the graduate certificates are a great way to start. We'd be happy to tell you more about those as well.

Excellent. Well, thanks for taking the time Lisa. One of the fun things is they gave me a microphone so now I get to make decisions about who to interact with and who to interview. It's a lot of fun. I think it's really important that not only do we take stock of what some of the students think and some of my fellow research faculty. It's really good to bring Extended Ed in on the conversation; you all are doing some cool things out there. I've really enjoyed working with you and your team.

It's cool to teach a different type of student. It's cool to embrace 21st century technology and all the potential benefits of taking what we do in this one location and spreading education further throughout anyone that has access to internet. The types of tools that we have now and your department is doing and using are cutting edge, interesting ways to lower the barrier of cost of spreading education to people who couldn't be in here person. And I certainly, for one, applaud that work.

Excellent. Thank you so much for being a part of that effort. We appreciate that.

We have fun with it. Thanks so much Lisa. Thanks for your time.

Your welcome.