

NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 302 Transcript

OTC Inside The Beltway: Justin Signs Off

Justin Draeger:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to another edition of "Off The Cuff." I'm Justin Draeger.

Karen McCarthy:

I'm Karen McCarthy from NASFAA's Policy Team.

Allie Arcese:

And I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Megan Coval:

Hi, everyone. I'm Megan Coval, former "Off The Cuff" podcaster and current Interim President at Butler County Community College in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Stephen Payne:

Hey, everybody. Stephen Payne, Executive Director of External Relations at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, other side of the great commonwealth, and a former NASFAA staff.

Justin Draeger:

And former podcaster.

Stephen Payne:

Former podcaster, "Off The Cuff" original.

Allie Arcese:

OG podcaster.

Stephen Payne:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, that's right.

Megan Coval:

OG.

Justin Draeger:

Welcome back, Stephen and Megan. What a pleasure it is to have two OG podcasters back with us. And we're going to do some news at the top of the podcast and then we're going to just devolve. And a couple things have changed since, Megan and Stephen, you've been on the podcast, which it feels like just yesterday you were here at NASFAA, but it's been, I can't even, it's been like a long time.

So Megan, you left after the pandemic, and in that time, you became the president of a community college?

Megan Coval:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

That's quite a climb.

Megan Coval:

Yes. Well, I've actually been-

Allie Arcese:

Is that a slam on NASFAA?

Justin Draeger:

Well, its just me like, "Wow."

Megan Coval:

Yeah. I kind of say, "Wow" myself too. I've been gone almost three years, so we left in August of '21 is when I left NASFAA. So I started this job, started at BC3 in September of that year, and I started as the executive director of our foundation and external relations, so was doing that role up until about a month ago.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. And then your president left, you've been named interim president?

Megan Coval:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. And they're doing a search of some sort, I assume?

Megan Coval:

All TBD. Stephen will acknowledge we've got a lot of stuff going on in the commonwealth as it relates to higher education and proposals at the state level.

Justin Draeger:

This is how you refer to yourselves in Pennsylvania as, "The Commonwealth?"

Stephen Payne:

Yes.

Karen McCarthy:

Justin, we're a commonwealth.

Stephen Payne:

Yeah, one of three.

Allie Arcese:

Isn't Virginia a commonwealth too?

Stephen Payne:

Yeah, and Kentucky.

Justin Draeger:

I refuse to say, "The commonwealth" in Virginia. Maybe that's because I'm not from Virginia originally, but is that how you refer to it, Karen? You say, "The commonwealth"?

Karen McCarthy:

It depends.

Justin Draeger:

On what?

Allie Arcese:

I say, "The State of Virginia."

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, Allie's a Virginian as well. What does it depend on, Karen? Is it... Karen, well, Megan and Stephen are employed by Virginian schools-

Allie Arcese:

Pennsylvanian.

Justin Draeger:

Or Pennsylvanian schools, so I think there's some accuracy they have to stick to.

Stephen Payne:

And we're both from Pennsylvania, so it's not new per se.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, that's true. I forgot that. Right. You were raised with the Pennsylvania curriculum, I guess is the point.

Stephen Payne:

Yes.

Megan Coval:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

And Karen, you are not from Virginia, neither am I, and Allie definitely isn't.

Karen McCarthy:

No, but I'm from Massachusetts, which is another commonwealth.

Megan Coval:

It is!

Justin Draeger:

Wow.

Megan Coval:

Yes, yes.

Justin Draeger:

Well, in Ohio, we were not. We were a state and-

Megan Coval:

Just a state.

Allie Arcese:

What's the point, guys?

Stephen Payne:

It's a fun fact. It's a fun fact that I've used. I've only ever lived in commonwealths, which people really love that for me.

Justin Draeger:

Dazzled.

Stephen Payne:

Yeah, dazzled. Exactly.

Megan Coval:

That's a very Stephen common fun fact to have, I feel like. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Stephen, I just want to know, when you lay that out for people, how do you know they're dazzled? Is it just in their eyes or...

Stephen Payne:

Well, it's interesting because they don't actually show it on their face, but you just have to assume that they're dazzled.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, internally.

Allie Arcese:

They're so dazzled that they can't speak.

Justin Draeger:

Internally, you know.

Stephen Payne:

Exactly, exactly.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. It's sort of like how I am right now.

Stephen Payne:

Yes.

Allie Arcese:

It's like a blank stare. You're like, "I've done it."

Stephen Payne:

Yep. And I'm used to that response, so it's fine.

Justin Draeger:

Stephen, since you left, you went and studied in Karen's home state. You went and got a master's at-

Karen McCarthy:

Commonwealth!

Stephen Payne:

Yes. Oh.

Allie Arcese:
Home commonwealth.

Justin Draeger:
Oh my God. You really open a can of worms here. You've studied in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. You went and got your master's at Harvard.

Stephen Payne:
Yep.

Allie Arcese:
Casual.

Justin Draeger:
But he didn't drop it in. I just want to point out, unlike every other person I know who went to Harvard, Stephen didn't bring it up.

Allie Arcese:
No. I'm bragging on his behalf.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah, that he didn't bring it up because how do you know someone went to Harvard? They bring it up. But Stephen didn't, and I just want to, kudos to Stephen-

Stephen Payne:
Thank you, thank you.

Allie Arcese:
Just so everyone knows.

Stephen Payne:
Thank you.

Justin Draeger:
And then you went off to where?

Stephen Payne:
So then I landed, in the middle of the pandemic, landed in Allentown, PA, at Muhlenberg College, a small liberal arts college, which is really about an hour and plus from my wife Christina's family, and about a little under two hours from my family, so kind of in between, which was nice to ride out the pandemic and take on this role.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. We're going to circle back around to both of you. Let's get to some news real quick, and then I want to catch up with... Megan and Stephen were both originals, as I recall, on the podcast. We'll catch up on what's going in that, some of your memories from the podcast. This is my final one, so I'm signing off here and we're not going to do a lot, a ton of nostalgia on me, but I want to hear about what you all remember, and then we'll sign off before going into our national conference, which will be in Milwaukee in just a few short days.

So Karen, catch us up. What's going on? It's got to be FAFSA-related, I assume.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, most of it is.

Justin Draeger:

All right.

Karen McCarthy:

And I do want to preface by saying when we were all talking about how we were going to do this podcast and what we were going to do first and that some of it would be more directly work-related, some of it would be fun stuff with Stephen and Megan, it was all decided that I would go first to do the boring parts.

Justin Draeger:

Well, or the part that our members actually tune in for, yes.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, and then the fun will happen.

Allie Arcese:

That's not... I mean, that's not what we said. That's what you inferred.

Karen McCarthy:

I know!

Justin Draeger:

Well, to be clear, Karen first contacted Allie and I and asked if she could... Whether she was needed.

Allie Arcese:

Not be here.

Justin Draeger:

And we assured her she was very much needed at this podcast-

Karen McCarthy:

Well-

Justin Draeger:

... because neither Allie or I wanted to report on the news.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah. Oh, that's the whole reason.

Allie Arcese:

I was like, "Wait, we've been doing stuff."

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, we've been busy. And mostly your department, Karen has been leading the charge on several things.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Which you're going to report on right now.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, we have been, I would say in letter land over here on the policy team. We have several letters going out just this week we'll be talking more about them here and at the conference next week running TNs. We don't even have all the TNs just out there just yet. That's how new they are. But the first one was that we worked with NCAN, the National College Attainment Network, to send a community letter with other organizations signing on that went up- oh yeah, gosh, it was only three days ago. That was the first of the letters though, three days ago officially, to the Department of Education officially asking them to either commit to an October one release of the 25-26 FAFSA or lay out the timeline, which as I have been saying, this feels a little bit like deja vu all over again. If you're a Yogi Bear, Stephen, you probably know that Yogi Bear quote, that seems like a Stephen thing.

It's like deja vu all over again because I feel like we said the same exact thing last year. Things won't be out on time then we need to know exactly what the timeline is, what the plan is because, and we felt like it was a good time to send this letter. We had been asking the department behind the scenes for many months, what about 25-26? But we were also very much mired in 24-25, and it feels like there's a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel on 24-25, so it seemed like a good time to be officially on the record with that ask of the department. So we did, I mean just recently this week, sent that up to ask for a commitment around October one and what will happen for 25-26.

Justin Draeger:

Great. We'll wait and see. And the department will be at the conference, so I'm sure we'll be pressing them in person on how likely they will be ready to not only put the FAFSA up, but then deliver ICERS to schools right on or around October one.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, and I mean kind of related to what the department will say at the conference, we've reported several times in the past about Secretary Cardona's comments when he's been asked in various settings about October one, and his words seem carefully chosen, I would say where he says that it is his expectation that it will be released on October 1st, and he has communicated that to his staff. He hasn't addressed any of the in the weeds type questions that our members would want to know. What does it mean? Does that mean that just applicants will be able to complete it? Will you be processing FAFSAs? Will schools get ICERs? When is all that happening? So we don't have any detail on that as well. And as you said, I'm sure the department will get this question next week at the conference and people will have their ears perked up for the exact words when they respond to this question. So yeah, stay tuned on that.

Justin Draeger:

All right. What's next?

Karen McCarthy:

What's next in the order of things? I would say GE-

Justin Draeger:

Yup.

Karen McCarthy:

You want to talk about GE?

Justin Draeger:

Let's talk about GE and financial value transparency deadlines.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, you sound so excited. Yes, Karen. Let's talk about GE. So GE and financial value transparency reporting right now, it has been extended once by the department, but only until October 1st. It was originally a July deadline, end of July, and was extended until October 1st. And we have been hearing from the community that October one deadline is not enough, that we need a further extension of that deadline. So we have made that request through two different vehicles recently. One is that we are right now in the middle of the second public comment period for GE financial value transparency reporting. And those comments are due Monday on the 17th and those comments go directly back to the Department of Education. So we made a request in those comments that we need a further delay until July of next year, 2025, and that request goes through the public comment process through the Department of Education.

So to cover all of our bases, and because we do not know how Ed might respond to that request, we also sent a letter up to Congress making the same exact request, basically saying, laying it all out. There's a lot of the same words in both places, but the letter to Congress says we've made this request of the Department of Education, we're asking for your help in urging the Department of Ed either behind the scenes or through legislation. I don't think we really care how it happens, but asking for Congress to help out with the Department of Ed to basically mandate that the department extend that October one reporting deadline.

Allie Arcese:

There were some zingers in that letter. Yeah, when I was copy editing it, I was like, dang. Yes.

Justin Draeger:

Well, to be fair, we are not asking the department to prolong implementation of any of the teeth of financial value, transparency or any of the consumer disclosures. We're just asking for equal time here. So give schools an extra year and then the department will have a year. What they originally were going to give was schools less than a year and then give themselves two years.

Karen McCarthy:

Right.

Justin Draeger:

We're just asking for equal time, give us a year and you'll have a year. So we're asking them to give up their own time.

Karen McCarthy:

Right.

Justin Draeger:

And give it to us.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, the metrics. That's an important point that the metrics and the full implementation of GE is not addressed at all in here. That we're really just asking for an extension on the deadline for schools and that they can still from that point follow their plan to do creating the website and collecting all the info that schools are reporting and running the metrics and doing all that would happen.

Justin Draeger:

Now if they can't pull it together in a year, that's not our issue. That's their issue. Our issue is how long schools have to do it because-

Allie Arcese:

Seems like the heavier lift is getting the data together, and the actual reporting then.

Justin Draeger:

Right. So anyway, thank you. So that's going to require some pressure. Karen, if we were to call the odds, would you say you're optimistic or pessimistic this date, October one date is going to move?

Karen McCarthy:

I think that it's possible. I don't think that the department is just going to Willy-nilly say, sure, NASFAA sounds great to us. Let's extend that. We will be, after the NASFAA conference, asking for assistance from our members in putting some pressure and reaching out to their congressional members to ask

them to support this effort, because we do feel like we will need assistance from our members if this is actually to happen. I do think it's possible. What do you think?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I agree with you. So I'm not optimistic they'll do it on their own. I think with enough pressure it can move. So I agree with you.

Allie Arcese:

Like 60/40?

Justin Draeger:

I think that it's possible, I'm optimistic with enough pressure and that Democrats and Republicans with enough pressure that they will say schools need reprieve and because the FAFSA primarily schools can't pull it together this quickly. So it's not possible. So it's got to move and this is a problem of your own making. The department created the issue. So it's not possible and you can't hold schools accountable for not getting it done by October one.

Okay, thank you very much, Karen. Tomorrow we'll be reporting in Today's News that we also sent up a technical corrections letter to Congress that if they are going to make some changes to the FAFSA and we're talking around the edges, the margins here, right Karen, like some technical corrections, they should address them in what ways?

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah, I mean you pointed out the biggest thing is that these are technical corrections. I mean they call these bills technical corrections bills. So they are not looking for big substantive changes to the FM formula. So we limited our scope to the technical corrections suggestions that we have for both the FAFSA Simplification Act and for the Future Act because those, remember those were two separate pieces of legislation. And then we also, I would say plan to reserve the right to dive in a little bit more in the near future once we start doing, and all of our members start doing, a full analysis of the impact of the new formula. So we may at some point in the future have further recommendations that kind of dive down into the formula itself and changes that we would like to see. But these are smaller things that have less of an impact on the actual federal methodology. So the big things that we've heard from our members, being able to prorate the student aid index for periods other than nine months, getting the housing question back on the FAFSA. So some of those items that have been big ticket just annoyances, I would say, that people have realized we're not in the FAFSA Simplification Act, trying to get those back in there.

Justin Draeger:

Lawmakers have checked in with us on these, so I can say we're pretty optimistic that many of these will be taken up. It's the vehicle, like how or when. We're not exactly sure what bigger bill this might be attached to, but I'm pretty confident that when something moves, a lot of these will.

Karen McCarthy:

And that was part of it, is that we don't really know when exact things will happen. So we wanted to make sure that we were on the record with the things that we want to see so we're not caught off guard

and have no requests and they haven't heard anything at all from NASFAA. At least that way our requests are kind of in the queue, so if anything happens quickly, then they can pull those off the shelf.

Justin Draeger:

All right, thanks very much Karen. Appreciate as always the work of you and your team and everything you're doing to keep all of our advocacy work moving forward. Let's bring back in Stephen and Megan.

Karen McCarthy:

Now back to the fun.

Justin Draeger:

Karen.

Allie Arcese:

Well, we have to say that up front because sometimes people understandably really want to get down to business and don't love when we talk about not financial aid.

Justin Draeger:

Some things have changed, some things haven't changed. The complaints about when we don't talk about all business still come in sometimes Megan, I remember some of the-

Megan Coval:

I do remember that.

Allie Arcese:

Every week.

Justin Draeger:

Yes.

Allie Arcese:

Sometimes.

Stephen Payne:

That was literally one of the things in coming in today that I was, one of a couple memories is just the sensitivity, especially at the beginning to whether there was too much chit-chat, and when I would go on the road, especially when we first started the state conferences and they're like, "oh, I'm listening to the podcast." And I was always like, "is there too much chit-chat? Do you feel like we're getting to it?" And they're like, "no, I love it. You could keep going."

Allie Arcese:

It's not a webinar. It's not a webinar, it's a podcast. There's a difference.

Justin Draeger:

Well, this takes me back to the very, very beginning and, so first of all, Allie remind me who was on in the very first episodes, which I imagine are just so cringe worthy.

Allie Arcese:

They're pretty bad. I think we went-

Justin Draeger:

Whoa, wait, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a sec. I wasn't expecting you to agree.

Allie Arcese:

Well. Okay, here I'm going to explain why it was, I'm going to explain why.

Karen McCarthy:

I think he was fishing for a compliment here.

Allie Arcese:

Because no one had really audio editing experience. I think I got set up as like you're going to do the podcast because I had edited one in college at our student newspaper and so I didn't know this was going to turn into a weekly thing, whatever. You edited I think the first couple episodes in GarageBand.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, it was like, see how easy this is.

Allie Arcese:

No one knew what they were doing. So we were just learning on the fly and anyway, the first couple episodes were you, Stephen, and Megan and I was sitting there just lurking and recording because we used to all record huddled around one microphone.

Justin Draeger:

And it was the best time of my life.

Allie Arcese:

I do remember, but I mean it was bad in terms of just none of us really having the experience because I remember one time I accidentally deleted an entire episode and we just couldn't have the podcast that day because it was just gone. I think one time you did a phone interview, you did a phone interview with someone Justin, and this was actually a couple years in, but you were like, I never hit record.

Justin Draeger:

Another great one. Hopefully that was with someone in Congress, although I can't remember.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, great interview. No one ever got to hear.

Justin Draeger:

What's that, Megan?

Megan Coval:

It just took a while to learn how to communicate on the podcast. I feel like if you listen to the first ones, at least for me, I felt like I just sounded like I was presenting, getting into the idea that this is a conversation and I remember that we learned the trick that we would kind of start before we hit record just like we did still today, but it's a totally different medium. I mean in terms of how you connect.

Stephen Payne:

Yeah, I remember Justin being very clear with Meg and with me about "you're not on the road presenting."

Allie Arcese:

Don't prepare, don't prepare.

Karen McCarthy:

Did you actually say don't prepare?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, he did. He said don't prepare.

Justin Draeger:

Because I think people did show up- we had been doing webinars for so long and I think, so this was the impetus as I recall, and maybe part of this is now infused with folklore, but as I remember, we would have these policy meetings.

Is this true? We had policy meetings and I remember the policy meetings being fun. At least for me, I thought they were fun. We would shoot the bull a little bit. We would gossip a little bit, which I always loved, and a gossip about the Hill and maybe some other government relations stuff. And I just thought it was fun and it was like there was stuff in there we wish our members had context about because sometimes our members would be like, "Hey bozos, did you ever think about doing X or Y?" And we would be like, yeah, but we can't always tell you about X and Y. There's stuff happening but we can't always, so maybe we could just record segments of our policy meetings and publish them. And it reminded me of this thing that Dallas Martin used to do, who was the longtime president of NASFAA, where he would do this thing, he would record it and then people would call in and listen to a recording. But I didn't want it to be that buttoned up. That's how I remember the podcast starting. Let's just do like a policy meeting. Am I making that up?

Allie Arcese:

No, that was the idea, like if someone was just sitting in the corner during a policy meeting or hanging out in our break room.

Justin Draeger:

But as soon as you hit record, everybody's like, "uh."

Megan Coval:

Yeah, yeah. Also, I remember that Stephen- I know you'll remember this. I feel like Justin, you will not remember this- that you would be like, we're all so busy. Let's record the podcast. Let's come in at 6:30 AM and record the podcast.

Justin Draeger:

What? I would never. That's not true.

Allie Arcese:

Great idea.

Megan Coval:

I feel like I'm using a little hyperbole with 6:30, but there are definitely- Stephen, Allie, am I right? It was like we couldn't find a time. You were like, how about 7:00 AM.

Stephen Payne:

Yes.

Megan Coval:

And of course we all were like, yes, because-

Justin Draeger:

I was the boss.

Megan Coval:

Because you were the boss.

Justin Draeger:

What an ass, I was so terrible.

Megan Coval:

And then at some point you were like-

Justin Draeger:

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Stephen Payne:

And it would just jump around, so it'd be like 7:00 AM this week -

Allie Arcese:

I think if you guys ever did that, I wasn't there and it was just like Justin recording and you handed it off to me after, because I definitely never came in at 7:00 A.M. to record the podcast.

Justin Draeger:

I was so Rambo the first four or five years into this job. But to be fair, is that why you started having children? You were like, I need an excuse to stop coming in so I have children. I can't come in anymore.

Megan Coval:

I think I already had a child.

Justin Draeger:

No. Now I sound like a terrorist.

Megan Coval:

But the thing is I think you just were excitable about it. It wasn't like you were like, let's come in at 7:00 AM to get this done. You were like, "Hey guys, I have an idea. Let's come in at 7." And so Stephen and I were like, "okay."

Karen McCarthy:

That does not sound like Justin today at all. This is why I have my own sort of unwritten Justin rule and why I always get really nervous whenever you go on vacation because you come back full of ideas and you're like, let's do this, let's do this. And I'm like, okay. For each one of those things, what are we taking away in their place?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I think if people who work with me now know you just let me spin out for a day or two and then real work and life catches up and I'm like, forget those things. Maybe one of those is a good idea.

Karen McCarthy:

And now with Asana, well yeah, related to what you just said, Allie. Justin will come back and there'll be five new things added on to for us to talk about and then it kind of peters out. Because I would get on my one-on-one, he was like, yeah, I put that on there. I'm not really ready to talk about that.

Justin Draeger:

I'm too crushed. I'm crushed now. I'm too crushed by the real world. Forget it.

Karen McCarthy:

It was a good idea last week.

Megan Coval:

I feel like you're pretty chill. I remember especially toward the end, Karen you'll know because sometimes things would happen and Karen and I were like, "ugh." And then I report back, I was like, Justin said he is not worried about it, so why are we worried about it? And so we were like, Justin's not worried about it. I'm not worried about it.

Justin Draeger:

Well that's good because my impression of myself is I'm chill. But it sounds like I was a monster.

Stephen Payne:

No, I didn't have anything. I wasn't thinking any negative thoughts at 6:45, 6:55 running into the office to come in for these podcast tapings. I had no negative thoughts. Trust me. I was like, Justin is so chill.

Justin Draeger:

The flip side of this though, so people know the first two years in the presidency I was doing 12 hour days, but after that I'm an early riser but I'm also done by three. I'm logged off. I start early, but I also log off early and then I'll log back on at the end of the night and now with all these tools, I actually save a lot of stuff and just schedule them to hit you all at eight or nine in the morning. So I do that. I don't like-

Megan Coval:

Email bombs.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I don't send everything at night anymore or on weekends. So there you go.

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

All right.

Allie Arcese:

Sometimes I still, well not, I haven't really talked to you the last couple of weeks, which is weird-

Justin Draeger:

The FAFSA thing notwithstanding.

Allie Arcese:

Yes. My Slack for a while, there was three weeks where it would be blowing up at 9:00 PM every night because something had happened.

Justin Draeger:

That's normally-

Allie Arcese:

I would pick up my phone and I was just like, not again.

Justin Draeger:

That's unfortunately when I would end up connecting with the department. So that's literally when it was a nightmare between 8:00 and 9:00 PM was when-

Allie Arcese:

I would just be getting into bed. I go to bed early now and my phone would be like, "pew, pew, pew, pew," I have to get back out.

Justin Draeger:

Those were unfortunate weeks. December and January were unfortunate.

Karen McCarthy:

March, April.

Justin Draeger:

March and April were also unfortunate months for all of us.

Megan Coval:

Sounds like an unfortunate year.

Justin Draeger:

It was an unfortunate year. Yes, that's true.

Megan Coval:

It's a lot, it's been a lot.

Allie Arcese:

It was just high adrenaline constantly for months on end. That's true.

Stephen Payne:

Did something happen. I've been out of this space for a little bit.

Justin Draeger:

Let's not talk about it.

Stephen Payne:

We'll catch up later.

Allie Arcese:

With this being Justin's last episode though, obviously we've had to be doing some thinking about who's going to host the podcast moving forward. So we have figured that out. Yeah. I'm going to share with you all, I'm going to play this. You tell me if you can hear it. I'm never sure with how Riverside works, but tell me if you can hear this.

Katie Arcese:

Hi, my name's Katie. I'm the new host.

Allie Arcese:

That's my offspring. Yeah, I was telling her, I was like, okay, now say this. I was like, or you could say "Hi NASFAA." And she was like, what's NASFAA?" Well, we don't have time to get into that.

Justin Draeger:

That reminds me of a favorite memory, which doesn't involve any of us, but Jill, who's on the podcast once a month out of retribution, one of her kids came in and upset at her parent, unplugged all of her stuff right before a NASFAA webinar.

Karen McCarthy:

Like everything.

Allie Arcese:

Oh my God, I've never heard this story.

Karen McCarthy:

Like her modem, everything.

Justin Draeger:

Everything. So Jill sat down to do a NASFAA webinar. I think this was during the FAFSA stuff too. So there were, I don't know, 6,000 people ready for this webinar and Jill we're like, "Hey, are you going to log in for this webinar?" And she's like, "I'm trying to log in. My kid unplugged everything." And I, first of all to know Jill is to know cool and collected.

Allie Arcese:

It takes a lot to rattle her.

Justin Draeger:

Yes, it takes a lot. She's like a smoldering fire. So a lot of the really hot letters that go up are first and foremost written by Jill. She's like our next Joan Berkes, who if you remember Joan. So to see her sort of rattled is like a lot. And I pity that child and what probably occurred after that webinar. But anyway-

Stephen Payne:

But I think the point of all of this and to the point of this podcast is that the strength of this team and all the folks here is just being able to pick things up and run with it. And I think that's what made the podcast so fun to do.

Allie Arcese:

You should be in communications, Stephen, that was a spin.

Stephen Payne:

Thank you.

Justin Draeger:

It was a pivot, a very good pivot.

Allie Arcese:

I was like, there's a point to this podcast?

Megan Coval:

I agree. I agree.

Justin Draeger:

I agree as well. And this is what I've always loved about policy in general is that it fits a lot of personality. It takes a certain personality to fit into policy because you are constantly pivoting and sort of working on the fly a little bit. And it's not always a great fit because you can be working on one thing one day and then you're going to have to shift to something else another day and maybe multiple times a day. And it can be maddening if you're looking for routine and project plans. It just is so hard to do that on the government relations side, and you all come attached to this. You all make it look really a lot easier than it's, and I've had so much fun.

Allie Arcese:

I think it's been nice too because otherwise I wouldn't have spent this amount of time with you, Justin or the policy team in general outside of meetings. So that's been a fun experience.

I think my all time favorite "Off the Cuff" memory, and this goes back to the banter because the way that this actually came up was we were on the episode talking about how people were upset by our banter and Megan was explaining sometimes you just want to come in and hang out and just let loose. We're catching up with each other. And this was how the whole Netflix and Chill debacle came up where Megan learned what it really means. And it was so funny. I'm not saying that we plan banter, but sometimes we say what topics we're going to touch on, but this was 100% organic. No one knew it was coming. And you can hear in the clip that we're going to play where me and Justin were like, what? No, no.

Justin Draeger:

All right. Can we play the clips that we can hear it?

Allie Arcese:

We have gotten some feedback from some people who would prefer that we just get straight to the point at the beginning of the podcast, straight to the policy.

Justin Draeger:

They don't like what we're doing right now.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Was it specific towards any one person? Are they tired of Megan's travel stories? Stephen's past days?

Megan Coval:

You ask those questions. There are certain topics that seem to trigger these responses.

Justin Draeger:

Triggers.

Stephen Payne:

Okay, such as?

Justin Draeger:

Okay, so these are the triggers such Pizza Hut, obviously.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, I mean we've always kind of in the last year had these-

Justin Draeger:

All right, here's what I have to say. Here's what I have to say about this. Okay, this is not a webinar, I can't come in and just sit down and talk about policy because that's my whole life. So when I see you guys, I want to talk.

Allie Arcese:

It's like a break for us.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, this is-

Megan Coval:

It's like Netflix and chill at work. It's the version of-

Justin Draeger:

There's a sexual connotation of that.

Megan Coval:

Is there really?

Justin Draeger:

What? Do you live in a cave?

Allie Arcese:

Netflix and chill means watch Netflix but hook up.

Megan Coval:

No, it doesn't.

Allie Arcese:

Yes, it does, it absolutely does.

Justin Draeger:

Wait, Allie, you've got to talk in your microphone. So yes, you are so far out of touch Megan that I don't even know what to do with you anymore.

Allie Arcese:

Just to be clear, there is no Netflix and chill going on at NASFAA.

Justin Draeger:

How do I know this and you don't?

Megan Coval:

I just thought it meant like-

Stephen Payne:

Watch Netflix and chill.

Allie Arcese:

It's code.

Justin Draeger:

Didn't you know where the joke was in that when people would say that?

Megan Coval:

No! I thought it just meant let's hang in tonight.

Justin Draeger:

Oh boy. Now you're going to reevaluate all the tweets you've seen in the last, five years.

Megan Coval:

Oh my god, I just said that the other day about something.

I stand by the fact that that is a very sweet sounding phrase.

Allie Arcese:

Well, okay, I thought you were going to say that's a very sweet sounding Megan thing to say. I was like, it was.

Megan Coval:

No, no, no. Just that it's a very innocuous, you know.

Allie Arcese:

But also that you said it's like Netflix and chill at work. And we were like, no, no, it is not.

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Stephen Payne:

Well that audio clip had it all because it also had Allie talking to the mic that just really spoke to that. Just really spoke to where we were.

Allie Arcese:

Because we were in person. We were in person then. And I think maybe by this point we all had our own mics, but-

Justin Draeger:

Own mics, own headphones. It was a constant circus. This is what I loved about the podcast.

Stephen Payne:

And Karen would do cameos from speakerphone. It would just be recorded off of the phone.

Karen McCarthy:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

And even then Karen, it was giving off a little bit of no nonsense. What do you need me for? What am I doing here? Yeah, even then.

Allie Arcese:

I mean we've come a long way. It was very duct tape and shoelaces sort of situation in the beginning.

Justin Draeger:

Exactly how we wanted it to be.

Karen McCarthy:

I do remember the first one. Well, there was one that I was there in person and we were all in the conference room and there were a limited number of mics. And I remember sitting next to Justin and Justin was like, Karen, we're sharing this mic. You got to get a lot closer to me. I was like, okay. Then you were like lean in. It's like you're my backup singer because we were both right on top of the same mic. I was like, all right, now whenever I have to get close to a mic like that, I think of that.

Justin Draeger:

Get right up on that mic.

Allie Arcese:

A backup singer.

Stephen Payne:

I mean I think the best part of the early days of "Off the Cuff" and that seems to be missing from the more recent episodes is the, "what was that" segment. And it was like every week it was like, all right, I got to find something weird to say for this "what was that" segment? It was like a groundhog got caught in a tree. That

Allie Arcese:

That was our assignment. Justin was like, okay, everyone go find something weird to talk about every week.

Megan Coval:

Yeah, totally not policy related.

Allie Arcese:

I mean, I have some thoughts on that. There was some podcast restructure when I was on maternity leave, which included me getting fired from the podcast, but-

Justin Draeger:

We just had to move on for a little bit Allie and then we brought you back and also you ended up with-

Allie Arcese:

And the people rejoiced.

Justin Draeger:

More responsibility and-

Allie Arcese:

I mean yeah, I was caring for a human.

Stephen Payne:

The writers, the writers on this podcast are ruthless, right? They'll just write you, I got written off and it's fine, here to tell the tale so, but I do think-

Justin Draeger:

I took myself out for a week. It's also a bit of a grind after you do it. Speaking for myself,

Karen McCarthy:

I can't believe you all did it every single week.

Allie Arcese:

It was a lot.

Justin Draeger:

Right around that time I also took myself out for a week, because I can't do it every week anymore.

Allie Arcese:

And then we started doing these different verticals. But back to when this first came up, I remember Erin, who was right here filling in on it and she was like, yeah, we'll do it occasionally. And I was like, okay, well how soon are we wanting to get this off the ground? And she was like, well, maybe next month. And then I talked to Justin, he's like, this was Monday. And he's like, how about Friday? And I was still very new at NASFAA, so I was like, sure, no problem.

Justin Draeger:

Great idea boss. And that's when I was like, Allie's going to be on the podcast.

Megan Coval:

I mean it was so much fun. It's a great memory. It's a great memory from my time at NASFAA and I think provided a good outlet for all of us. Things did get a little crazy and even continuing to do it through the pandemic, which was wild for everyone in different ways, but certainly on the financial aid front. I remember especially then looking forward to it as a little bit of a reprieve.

Stephen Payne:

And I think that there was a lot of, and I think to the earlier conversation about capturing a moment at NASFAA, and I think that speaks a lot to the culture at NASFAA. And the podcast really captured just a piece of that. I think what was nice, I mentioned talking with folks at conferences and elsewhere and hearing from people who maybe are the only person in their office who sort of viewed the podcast as an opportunity to kind of hang out with coworkers or something who were knowledgeable about financial aid but also chatting about random things. But I would cringe, I think someone told me once that they had their office in the break room on Friday mornings, they would put this on and they all sat there and listened to it. And it makes me, certainly the financial aid updates are relevant, but all the chitchat that people are just sitting on a Friday morning having to listen to us in the break room.

Allie Arcese:

Well, but then Stephen one time, and this is why we now put out warnings when we're not going to have an episode on Friday. People have come to expect that, because one time people were traveling and I don't know, we just couldn't do it that week and we didn't warn people. So Friday TN gets sent out and someone emails us and they were very distraught. I wish I would've known because we all, my whole office sets aside time to sit down together, and we listen to the podcast every Friday and I was just like, oh man. That's when I was like, wow, people actually listen to this. I was like, I think we'll be lucky if we can get a hundred downloads a week. I was like, who is going to listen to a podcast about financial aid? But now we have reporters quoting our podcast.

Karen McCarthy:

Justin, didn't you say once that you assume nobody listens?

Justin Draeger:

I go into it. Well listen. Okay, so let me try to wrap this up. I know we are running into time, some final thoughts. We started this podcast with the idea that it would hopefully be useful to some people, but

there's something I read in Amy Schumer's, I guess autobiography. I don't know, it was a lot of years ago, but it resonated with me. I think I've shared it with maybe a couple of you maybe. I think I have, but if not, I'll share it with everybody. But it was sort of, it's how I look at giving speeches. I'm not a stand-up comedian. I don't pretend to be, that's not me. But some of what we do, I think you can probably relate to Megan and Stephen, Karen, maybe Allie too. But it's something in what we do is performative and we go out, we give speeches, we're doing some podcasting.

There is something performative in that we're not just reading. And certainly when we show up for the podcast, we're not just reading. When you're presenting in some way, you're listing off facts and figures, but you also have to connect it to a story in some way if you want it to land. I mean, that's the truth. Amy Schumer writes, in her autobiography, she was writing about how when she does her stand-up, she's performing first and foremost for herself. So if she's not connecting to her work, how would she ever expect others to connect to it? And the applause may come or it may not come, but it first has to be for her. So when I'm going out and doing something, whether it's speaking or being on "Off the Cuff", it sounds very selfish, but first and foremost, it's for me. And if I'm not enjoying it, then why would I ever expect anybody else to connect to it? So the podcast really was like, I wanted it to be useful. It was part of the mission, but I really felt connected to you all throughout all of this. And the times when I didn't, that's when I was like, let's ramp it down a little bit. Let's reformat. Let's find somebody else to fill in for me. Let's find something like the ask Gregs one. Let's still do something useful, but it can't be me because I can't do the grind anymore.

So it was sort of selfish and I thought the listens would come and we joke like I do, at least with people like, oh, you're our listener, great. But we do have thousands of people that listen. We hear about it on the road all the time. I'm so glad it's been useful to the community. And during COVID, it was a lifeline to the NASFAA members. We heard it over and over again. Same thing during the FAFSA issues. And then I don't know that we ever thought we would have like USA today quoting from the podcast. I don't know that we ever thought we'd have reporters. I heard from reporters over and over and over again throughout the FAFSA one the last couple months saying, your podcast is how we get information every week. That's a lot of pressure. But I just keep going back to I'm doing it for us. It's part of the mission. That's what we connected to. So I've loved that it's been helpful to our members, but I've mostly loved connecting with you all and the others who've been on here, John and Jill and the other folks that we've had on here. It's been a great way to connect with you all over and over and over again. So thank you for making "Off the Cuff."

Megan Coval:

Thank you and congratulations.

Stephen Payne:

Congrats Justin.

Justin Draeger:

Thanks so much. And it's going to continue. It's going to be different, but it's going to continue, it's going to be great. And it's going to continue to be a lifeline for NASFAA members. So Allie, Karen, good luck to you and Maria and Hugh. Thanks for producing week after week. I know it's a big lift.

Maria Carrasco:

So a few community members submitted their favorite "Off the Cuff" memories. This is from Francisco.

The COVID Times: "As COVID hit hard and we were all sharing and working hard to get emergency grants to students, Justin and the OTC team invited me to participate in a couple of podcasts to share what we were doing and how we were surviving. Thanks to Justin and the OTC team, I found it to be a great experience. Doing something like that had me pretty terrified and my colleagues who were also participating made it enjoyable, interactive, and free-flowing.

And then this is from Erin. "I've appreciated Justin's leadership and voice for the financial aid community, especially throughout the FAFSA simplification season. However, when I was new in financial aid, his casual, fun-loving yet appropriately serious communication style and "Off the Cuff" showed me the kind of dedicated and joyful people that work in this ever-changing career. Thank you for all you've done in our community."

Justin Draeger:

Well thank you to those two. Thank you to everybody else for listening. Remember to tell a friend, remember to subscribe, remember to leave a rating on your podcast app of choice that helps other people find the podcast and we will talk to you again very soon.