

## Prepare to Pivot 24-1 Lisa Fast

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Prepare to Pivot is a series of conversations with Dr. Andrew Barnes, Dean of the School of the Arts, Communications and Global Studies at York College of Pennsylvania. Dean Barnes talks with leaders in the college, YCP alums, and members of the York community about the importance of the liberal arts in preparing students to build careers where essential skills like critical and creative thinking, effective communications, and analytical reasoning make all the difference. And now here's Dean Barnes.

Hi, this is Andy Barnes. Welcome to the podcast Prepare to Pivot. I'm very excited today because I have one of my friends on the podcast, Lisa Fast.

Welcome, Lisa. Thank you very much for inviting me, Andy. First of all, I have to tell the story of how we met because you were one of the, you don't remember, you were one of the very first people I met in New York when I came here and we were at downtown at Market View Arts and there was a, there was a, there was a show going on and our provost, our intern provost grabbed me said, oh you have to meet this person.

So I met you, lovely meeting you, and then every meeting I've met, every person I've met afterwards was always trying to introduce me to you and we kept going, yeah we know each other, we know each other, we've met. So I feel like I've known you for years and years and years and it's only been a year or so. Yeah, that has happened to me several times with various people and part of it is because York is the way York is and a part of it is there must be some sense that we share some interests and once that happens, York being what York is, it just tries to put people together.

Yeah, I'm sorry, but I also think it's, you're so involved in York City, you're so invested in York City and I want to talk about that in a little bit, that you're everywhere because, I mean you are in a sense, because you're so, you're so personally invested in it and in the city and seeing that the city grows and seeing that the city kind of comes into its own, so I see you at a lot of places because we are kind of running into the same people and going to the same events because I think we have similar kind of goals for what York City can be and I think that's part of it, but maybe not. What do you think? Well, I sort of have to, I have to take a little bit of exception to what you say because I look around me and see so many people who have done so much more and have been so much more invested over so much longer period of time. I've only been around York for three and a half years, so I think the fact that I've gotten involved in the things I've gotten involved in as quickly as I have has been sort of a surprise to people.

Has it been a surprise to you? Yeah. Has it really? Yes. You know, we had, I think that's something we share in common because really I've been here a year and when I came here I just started meeting everybody and York is a kind of place where you start

meeting people and they want to introduce you to other people and sooner or later you're meeting everybody.

Exactly. And I think that's what, because when you tell me you've only been here three and a half years, it's hard for me to believe because everyone knows and you know everyone else, but I think you're right, it's part of York. The embarrassing thing is I don't know everybody else.

You just know more than I do, so I think that you do. Somehow, I don't know how a lot of people seem to either know me or have heard about me, but again I think it's the fact that I'm new to York and want, I want to make a difference. Yeah, you do.

And so I'm like the new shiny toy. The shiny objects everybody wants. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah, and which is great in a lot of ways because it's opened a lot of doors to me and I've had a lot of people say, oh I've heard about you and I want to meet you, which is different from growing up in an area and everybody sort of knows everybody and has kind of preconceived notions of who they are and what they do and what they're capable of. And I'm just, yeah, I'm the shiny new toy. I think you're exactly right because I think that's kind of the reception I got here too is that, yeah, shiny new toy in town, let's see what he can do.

And so a lot of people, there aren't any kind of preconceived notions. I'm just this guy that came into town with this job and really interested in community building and so yeah, Andy will do that. Hey, do you know him? Do you know him? Exactly.

Well, let's step back a little bit and maybe you could tell me a little bit about how you came to York, your journey to York. You were in, for a long time, in Boston, I think, right? In the Boston area. Suburban area, yeah.

I counted it and 50 years. 50 years! That's a long time. Yep.

Went to college, went to law school, got a job, there goes 50 years. Yeah, well, in 2015 my parents both died and my dad had set up a foundation for the benefit of the York College, specifically the chemistry and engineering departments. I decided that as a representative of the family, I should attend the annual meetings of that foundation.

And when I did, I was instantly enamored of the kids who came and did their little dog and pony show. At that time, I met some of the faculty from engineering and from chemistry. I met Pamela.

Who was our former president here. Former president. And I was so impressed with the students and I think my enthusiasm for that was pretty readily communicated to Pamela.

And the next thing you know, I get this phone call, gee, would you be interested in

joining the York College Board of Trustees? And I said, let me think about it. And a couple weeks later, Pamela, again, former president, called and said, congratulations, you're a York College Board of Trustees. That's a great story.

Well, new kid in town. I had sort of this indoctrination a couple of days that July and I was just so impressed with absolutely everybody that I met. I had come to the couple of days with the idea of, well, you know, I can always say no.

Right. But there was no way I could say no after I had met the people I had met and just had the experiences that I did. So that was part of my introduction to York.

But I'd had an earlier introduction to York. What was that? I grew up in Maryland, but my dad's first company, and it was actually a company his dad had started, it set up its manufacturing in York. Oh, really? Over in East York.

And my first real sort of adult job, of course it was the summer job, was at what was called Top Flight Corporation. I've heard of this, yes. And I worked in the lab testing adhesives.

Wait a second. How do you test adhesives? Stick them on yourselves and pull it off? No, no. Much more scientific and high-tech than that.

This isn't the only way, but the way I remember most clearly was I had this little sliding board kind of thing, and extended out from the bottom of it was a ruler, and next to that was a piece of basically tape. So a backing with adhesive on it, and the adhesive was up, facing up. And I would roll a ball bearing down the sliding board and across the piece of adhesive and measure how long it took to stop the ball bearing.

Okay, that's far less scientific than I thought it was going to be. Well, I was a senior in high school, I guess. Oh, that must have been fun.

So yeah, that was fun. It was one of the tests. One of the tests.

Right. You're listening to WVYC at Prepare to Pivot. Sorry, and my guest today is Lisa Fest.

Okay, so you came in. This story is not unusual. I hear people who come to York, and similar to me, and found something unexpected in this city, or kind of warmth in this city.

And I've heard the story over and over, and people kind of stay. They kind of said, yeah, this is kind of a cool place. I'm gonna stick around.

And they have, and it's... York to me is interesting, the downtown scene is interesting, because it's much more vibrant than I thought it would be when I heard about York. And I live downtown, as you know, and it's a pretty vibrant place with restaurants, but also

there's an art scene down there. Yes.

And you're part of that art scene. Well, you're a supporter of that art scene. At least I've been to Friday jazz concerts with you a few times, and that's a big support of that.

But I guess my question is, because I am trying to talk about the arts and the liberal arts, and we're going to talk about the humanities and the supplied humanities idea that I have that you're interested in, but what do you see as the role of arts in a city, or for a city? Wow, that, you know, that's only a huge question. That's what we deal with here on this podcast, huge questions. The arts tell us who we are.

Mm-hmm. The good and the bad and the ugly. And they communicate, the arts communicate that in such a wide range of ways that sooner or later everybody can kind of get the message.

You know, the symphony is capable of communicating joy and pain and love and hate, and that, those things get communicated to some people, but not everybody. Visual arts can do the same thing, and, you know, communicate just the highs and the lows of who we are as people. Performing arts, obviously, you know, the same thing.

It's all telling stories and communicating emotion and story that kind of help us be the best that we can be, and that's just a band of what is communicated. That's an excellent definition. I don't think it will surprise you, here at your college, we have, you know, we have a theater department and music department, and a lot of those classes, like our music ensembles, our musical theater, is open to everyone at the college.

So it doesn't matter what your major is, you can participate in the musical theater, you can participate in an ensemble. It won't surprise you, or it may surprise you, that we have a lot of engineers who come to do these, and a lot of scientists who come and participate in these electives, because I think, in the in the fields they're studying, they don't have a lot of ways to express themselves, express their inner selves. And so they look for those avenues.

So they go to musical theater, they do participate in our theater, or ensembles, to allow themselves to express what they can't sort of express in a lab, as it were. Yeah, I think that's probably very true. I remember several years ago, after I retired from practicing law, I got involved in a variety of things.

One was an art studio, and I remember people being shocked when I said I saw correlations between the arts and the sciences. I was like, what do you mean? God, how can you not see it? And invited everybody who was a member of the studio to come with me to MIT's museum. You know, they had their own art museum.

And to just, because seeing that would communicate the connections far more effectively than me trying to explain it. Well, there's a reason that in many, many

institutions of higher education, there are schools called the School of Arts and Sciences, because they are connected, and historically they are connected. When science became legitimate, it was a form of art, as it were.

And so they've kind of become disconnected in our sort of Enlightenment period. But in the beginning, they were combined. They were seen as the same thing.

They still are, in my opinion. They are. I think they still are, but we have kind of a society separated them.

And said these two things are different, and they really aren't. They share a lot of commonalities that we have to try to sort of connect. Medicine in particular is one of those areas where everybody thinks, well, this is science, and it, you know, there ought to be clear-cut answers to the problem, whether the problem is COVID, or broken hip, or heart disease, or any number of other things.

When you are dealing with people who are seriously ill, and you have multiple medical specialties who are conferring about, yikes, what do we do here? You know, in the end, a lot of times, it's, it is the art of medicine, not the science of medicine, that tries to answer that question. And it's also that in the medical field, it takes a lot of creativity, a lot of creative thinking to tackle some of the biggest issues. It's not, people think that science is just black and white.

It's not black and white. It's this process of discovery, that involves a lot of creative and analytical thinking, that is a kind of an art, an art discipline, an art approach to it. It's always asking that question, what if? That's right.

What if? And we have to, and really, in the arts, we teach that kind of imagination. Try to imagine what this, this, this, this solution could be. This is Prepare to Pivot with Lisa Fast as my guest today.

I want to turn briefly to this idea of applied humanities, which I've talked to you about. I'm very interested in, in finding ways to take the traditional humanities disciplines, history, English, philosophy, political science, take them out of the classroom and put them into community to see how our philosophers can work with our nonprofits in the city to understand issues, problems that are, that affect our cities and how we can come up with solutions to it. Now I have this idea of a grad, an undergraduate degree called Applied Humanities, that brings these students into York City and talks to and converses with and works with our nonprofits and our NGOs to solve homelessness problems or gun violence or food insecurity problems.

Because I think there's a place for humanities in community, solving problems in community. And I've talked to you a little bit about this. What do you think? What do you think of my idea? First of all, now, what do you think of this idea of, of bringing

humanities out of institutions, out of the classroom and into community? I think it's critical for the future of mankind to be as broad as I possibly can be.

And the reason I think that is because we are an increasingly technological and specialized world. Solving problems, you know, other than math problems, for example. Solving most problems is a matter of a holistic approach.

If you're going to avoid unintended consequences, of which there are lots. There are. I think that this concept of applied humanities and a degree in applied humanities is the sort of thing that equips people to now bring other people together, to deal collaboratively, to come up with solutions that are holistic solutions rather than siloed solutions.

And you mentioned a number of kinds of problems to be addressed. Housing is a good example. Public health issues are another good example.

I happen to have a pet problem that I want to address, and that has to do with lead poisoning. And clearly, some of the solution comes from the medical community, but they can't initiate all the policy solutions that have to be in place. They can't create all of the housing issues.

They can't solve the housing issues associated with it. They can't solve some of the educational issues. They can't come up with the money to do everything that needs to be done.

So I see applied humanities as creating people who can bring people together. I mean, in this example here, in getting rid of lead in houses, we have to have an understanding of what the history of it is, what the sort of economic impact of this abatement is, what the sort of philosophical is. We have to understand, like you're saying, the holistic and not just the sort of the root causes in order to sort of address the problem.

And that's what applied humanities is trying to do, get a holistic understanding of the problem, and then we can actually solve it rather than just putting a band-aid on it. Exactly. Which is what our current kind of approach is.

Yeah. Yeah. So let me, one more question for you.

What in five years, five year question, I love the five year question. You're walking down in through York City and what do you see that's new and different and exciting because of the work we've been doing, people like you and me have been doing? There are no big X's on any buildings. That's an awesome one.

There are a lot of those, aren't there? A lot of vacancies. It's not vacancy. These are condemned.

Oh, condemned buildings. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Okay. So that's, that's one thing. Yards that children are playing in.

Or green spaces. Yeah. Well.

Green space or just. No, I'm talking really about yards that are healthy places for children to play in. There's not a lot of that when you walk around.

I'm going to have to keep my eyes out. I have not noticed that. I have to look at that.

People walking around in the city. Yeah. That and a walkable city.

A walkable city. There are walkable blocks. It's not a walkable city.

That's a good point. That's a good point. And I'd like, you know, in that vein, I'd like to see, and we, we, we struggle with this at the college.

I'd like to see far more college students walking around the city and seeing it as, as their home. Yes. As part of their home.

I mean, we're less than a mile, maybe a mile. No, less than, I walk it. It's less than a mile.

We're less than a mile. I walk it. Less than a mile from York City.

And we don't get enough of our students going down there and seeing it as part of their home. Right. And they, I think that I would like to see that in the next five years.

I, I would like to see that. It's going to take some work. Yep.

But yeah, I would like to see that. But I think it's going to take work like from people like you and me who are invested in the city, who see the city as, as vibrant and viable. And invested in the college.

And invested in the college, yes. And I think part, part of what I would love to see from students' experience at the college is that it is no longer go to college so I can get out of town. Right.

It is go to this college so that I understand why I am staying in York. And I'm equipped to make a difference in York. And, and not surprisingly, we have a number of people who are, who are part of downtown New York that are alums of Kelly Gibson, who was on this, on this podcast.

She's an example of, we have a number who came to York College, who fell in love with the city. And when they graduate, they stayed. Right.

And they've made, and they've really given back to the city. And I'm hoping we see that

in, as part of York College's mission and vision. And I think we will.

And I think there are some students, recent students out there who, who do have that perspective. I think so too. And there's one student in particular, I'm not going to name him, but if he hears this podcast, he'll know who he is.

Well, you can push it to him and he'll know. Who, you know, I know one day, maybe 30 years from now, he's going to be mayor. Oh, good.

And he is a York graduate. And I just, that's what I want to see. I think I know who you're talking about.

Excellent. Lisa, thank you for coming on this podcast. I really appreciate it.

It's a joy to speak with you and it's always a joy to see you. So thank you. Thank you very much.

And this is a whole lot easier than I thought. I told you it would be. All right.

Thank you. And we'll see you next time. This program is produced in the studios of WVYC-FM, the voice of York College and produced by WVYC radio station manager, Jeffrey Shiffman.

Join Dean Barnes monthly for these ongoing conversations about essential skills in the liberal arts.

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