

“Student Affairs Talk” • Libby Kehn, Executive Assistant to the Vice President • November 23, 2020

Q: Libby, thank you for joining me this week. We go a long way back, but now let's give others a chance to hear your Clemson story. You grew up in Saline, Michigan; how in the world did Clemson University end up on your radar?

KEHN: I did grow up in Saline, Michigan, it's less than 10 miles outside of Ann Arbor — where the University of Michigan is. Grew up a huge University of Michigan sports fan. I just loved Ann Arbor. But when I was looking at where to go to school, everyone I knew was going to Michigan or Michigan State, and I wanted to do a little something different. Also playing a role for me was I had never been a fan of cold weather or snow. It was a no-brainer for me to look at schools that were a little further south with better climates. My dad and I did college tours of several schools in the South, one of which was Clemson. We left Michigan in February and it was maybe 10 or 15 degrees and we ended up later that day in Clemson, South Carolina at Kingsmore Stadium watching a baseball game and it was about 70 degrees. It must have been a season-opening series. Sitting at that baseball game, I said, 'Dad, I'm going to Clemson.' The rest is history, I'm still here 22 years later.

Q: I think I'm right by saying this ... you were involved with the sports information department during your undergraduate career, right? Tell us how that came about.

KEHN: I did, and that was another reason that drew me to Clemson. A really good friend of my family, she's now Amy Yakola, she's the assistant commissioner of the ACC. She went to Clemson and introduced me to Tim Bourret that same visit. Tim nicely offered me a job as a senior in high school if I came to Clemson. So in the fall of '98, I started working for Tim in college and worked for him the next six years of undergrad and grad school.

Q: This story often comes up during staff meetings ... you graduated in May 2002. It was an eventful day in Clemson; how do you describe it to family and friends?

KEHN: I was a graduate in the School of Management in May of 2002. That spring, Littlejohn Coliseum was under construction. It had been decided that the May commencement ceremonies would be

held in Memorial Stadium. Which sounds like a really neat idea; who doesn't want to graduate in the football stadium? It was such a huge part of my undergraduate experience. It seemed like it was going to be great. My parents and grandparents were in town from Michigan and Indiana, and we were in the stadium. They called the School of Management down to the football field to walk across the stage and get our degree from President (Jim) Barker. They go by alphabetical order by last name. They were calling the last names from management that started with the letter H, and my last name starts with K. When the university lightning sirens went off. They made an announcement over the PA system graduation was canceled and everyone needed to leave the stadium, take cover, because there was a severe storm in the area. It was not my best Clemson moment. Looking back, things are better now. But it was pretty devastating at the time. Later that day, I ended up getting my diploma from a concession stand under the football stadium. So, it was not the happiest moment of my Clemson career, but luckily I was able to do it again and walk across the stage in Littlejohn two years later when I got my MBA.

I've shared that story a lot the past six months as they've had to change Clemson's commencement ceremonies from May and August. I certainly put in my two cents about why an indoor location would probably be best for everyone.

Q: Full disclosure --- I joined the sports information department as a student assistant and became a graduate assistant in 2003 and we worked alongside each other. What do you remember about those days?

KEHN: I don't remember a ton of specifics. I worked really closely at the time with the volleyball, tennis and swimming & diving teams. I didn't know much about tennis and swimming & diving coming into it; I learned so much about those sports and met some incredible people. And of course, everyone in our office helped out with football and men's and women's basketball. We had a lot of long hours working together, sometimes doing great, fun tasks and sometimes menial tasks. What I really remember the most is

just the camaraderie we had with the people we worked with. It started with Tim Bourret, who you and I have so much respect for. He led our office with full-time employees, graduate assistants and student assistants in such a way that the culture was incredible. It's a group of people where you and I are still such good friends with so many people from that time in our lives today. That's because of Tim, his influence, just the way he treated people and how he taught us. Of course, we bonded over our love of Clemson sports. That's really what I remember most about those days as a student and grad student, more than anything else.

I do remember one time — and I think this was when we were both full-time — we were working a volleyball match and a volleyball hit your screen and shattered it (laughs). I don't know, that was one of the first things that I thought of when you asked me.

Q: You graduated with an MBA and left for Charlotte for a period of time; when did you return to Clemson?

KEHN: I finished my MBA in August of 2004. I moved to Charlotte, worked with a startup company there doing business operations and some minor accounting stuff. Through that two years I was in Charlotte, I still continued to come back to Clemson and work football games and help Tim out whenever I could. In August of 2006, I got a phone call from Tim and he said a position had just opened up in the office managing ClemsonTigers.com — the official athletics website. Which was fairly new at that time. He thought I'd be a good fit for the role, so I jumped at the opportunity to come back and work in sports information under Tim Bourret. I was gone about two years and came back to work full-time in August 2006.

Q: Fast-forward your time with Clemson Athletics; it began with mostly web services but expanded to primary communications responsibility for several sport programs... do you have any favorite memories that stick out?

KEHN: I got to know so many good people — coaches, student-athletes, other athletics staff members. Definitely some of the best memories that stick out were the trips I got to go on. I got the chance to go on

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two international trips — to Italy with the women’s basketball team and Argentina with the men’s soccer team. Both of those were just incredible learning experiences and something I quite frankly would never have done if it weren’t for my role in sports information. I also got to do so many cool things with the women’s tennis team. They were always one of my favorite groups and of course had an incredible head coach, Nancy Harris, who I’m still close friends with today who just retired back in the spring. It was a really neat group of people. Many of the students on the team are international; it was always neat to hear their stories, their upbringing, just to learn about them and see them go through the college experience.

A couple of other cool trips I got to go on. I went to Disney World for the College Football Awards Show; actually, I went there on three occasions with three different Clemson football players. As the media liaison and to help them get around because they were in college and needed help with the travel. I went with the late Gaines Adams; that was my first trip. I also went with C.J. Spiller when he was up for the Doak Walker Award. The other one was something that’s recently been in the news. I went with Ray Ray McElrathbey and his brother, Fahmarr. He was up for a humanitarian or sportsmanship award. I went with Ray Ray and Fahmarr to Disney World, and people will recognize them if they don’t already from the movie “Safety,” that was filmed on campus about a year ago and is coming out in theaters or Disney Plus soon. That was something I never would have dreamed of, but the role in sports information was such a great opportunity for me.

Q: I don’t know that I’ve ever had a chance to ask anyone this publicly ... one of my favorite memories was after leaving Athletics, I had the chance to fly down to attend the induction ceremony of Tim Bourret into the CoSIDA Hall of Fame. What has Tim meant to you personally and professionally?

KEHN: That was a really, really special trip. And it was neat to be share it with you, too, because we’ve known each other for 17 years. We have shared interests and shared friends, and a bond working together for Tim Bourret for so many years. Just being there

to see Tim inducted into the CoSIDA Hall of Fame — obviously such a deserved honor for Tim — being there for someone who was there for me over the years. Whether it was my work career or my family being out of town, I spent numerous Thanksgiving and Easter holidays with Tim. He taught me so much about the profession, certainly, but also he’s such a role model in the way he treats people. And he always influenced us to do this when we were working: always treat people with respect. Of course, our role in sports information often meant treating the media with respect. But also coaches, student-athletes and administrators. Of course, my parents taught me as well. But to have Tim to always instill doing the right thing and treating people with respect — to see him have his career celebrated — it allowed me to show my respect for him and what he’s done for me over the years. And like you said, Tim retired coming up on three years ago. But I have continued to stay in touch with him and know he’ll be a lifelong friend and mentor to me. And I know you feel the same way.

Q: How and when did you first learn about an opportunity to join the vice president’s office in Student Affairs?

KEHN: I have to credit Lisa Bona, who is our chief business officer in Student Affairs. She helped me find this opportunity. I was kind of looking for something new and she knew the position was open. She called me and told me about it and thought I’d be great. She introduced me to Almeda Jacks and George Smith, and it worked out to be great.

Q: You were hired by Almeda Jacks and George Smith; what do you recall about early conversations you had before making the jump?

KEHN: Even before I interviewed with Almeda and George — working in athletics — I knew how respected she was across campus. You heard people talk about her and the way she worked and handled situations with such respect. It was obvious people across the university felt that way about her. I knew — before I even met with her — if I had an opportunity to take this job, I was going to have the opportunity to go from working with one legend to another, like you said. I had the chance to interview

with her and found her to be exactly what everyone said. Well-respected. Professional. Treated people the right way. Things that you want from a boss. As she described the role I would be filling as executive assistant, it sounded like the perfect job for me. I’m an organizer and a planner. I want to make people happy and their lives easy. It sounded like this role was going to be a perfect fit for me, and I feel like it has been. Although, as we will discuss, things changed a little.

Q: Certainly not how you saw your first year going, but there was an abrupt change and a retirement and suddenly Chris Miller was moved from Dean of Students to the interim VP role ... what were you thinking as this was unfolding?

KEHN: That was about six months into my new position. I was very happy and loving my new role. I found out Almeda was going to retire and Chris would take over as vice president. It definitely caused some stress right off the bat, because of the unknown. Although I knew him, I didn’t know him well. But I knew Dr. Miller was someone I would enjoy working with. I was cautiously optimistic when that change happened. Things have worked out great; I’m still very happy with the role and really enjoy Dr. Miller.

Q: You’ve described Dr. Miller to me as the “Dabo Swinney of Student Affairs” ... some of us understand exactly what you mean ... but can you explain what it’s like working with him?

KEHN: First, let me explain where I think that comment originally came from. For those of us who have worked in athletics, and in press conferences and interviews, know that Coach Swinney is very verbose. He talks a lot and has a lot to say. Sometimes it takes a little bit of time to get his point across. I think that was when I first realized Dr. Miller was a lot like Coach Swinney. I would schedule a meeting for 15 or 20 minutes, and 45 minutes later, the meeting would still be going because Dr. Miller would still be talking. At first, the reason for comparing them was just how much they both liked to talk. But, secondly — as I started to get to know Dr. Miller — I found out how much they were alike in their personalities and how much they care for student-athletes and students, respectively. They just care

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so much about them and their well-being. That’s really why I continue to say to this day that Dr. Miller is like the Dabo of students.

Q: In terms of day to day responsibility, what types of things are you involved in?

KEHN: I do primarily handle Dr. Miller’s calendar, as well as George Smith’s calendar. Just try to keep them organized and on task; make sure they’re on top of everything and getting it done. I have to remind Dr. Miller especially, many times, that he simply cannot physically be in two or three places at once. You laugh, but he knows this. I’m really there to keep him on schedule and organized. It’s kind of the perfect job for me; it’s right up my alley. I’m an organizer, I’m a planner. I do quite a bit with scheduling meetings, lunches, creating PowerPoints — and that’s one of the things I like about the job. No two days are ever the same. Especially with Dr. Miller, you never quite know what is going to come up. So, it keeps me on my toes and doing different things every day. Talking to a lot of different students, staff members and administrators. I find it interesting, challenging and it’s something I enjoy doing.

Q: Has anything surprised you after moving to the University side of the house? It could be either something is more complicated than you anticipated, or — if you’re like me — just a lot of moving parts you had to figure out?

KEHN: Definitely the layers of things. Coming over here, I didn’t really know what Student Affairs entailed. To find out all the different things that are involved that fall under our umbrella, that was pretty eye-opening for me. It may not completely answer your question, but one of the things that’s been a pleasant surprise for me is — when Dr. Miller did move over — he brought with him the Dean of Students role. On a daily basis, many times a day, he’s talking to and working with students. They come in and out of the office, and that’s something I didn’t know I would miss so much in athletics. I loved that part of my job; getting to know student-athletes and their stories, interacting with them. We have so many neat students on this campus. To have the Dean of Students role now in the VP’s office, it’s been fun to get to know them, work with them and developing those relationships. It’s been a positive for me.

Q: Alright, let’s talk free time. I know Dr. Miller’s calendar and our seemingly endless Zoom meetings take up a lot of time these days ... when you do get away from work, what are you doing?

KEHN: Clemson sports are still a huge part of my life. I still really enjoy attending Clemson events, not just football or basketball. I love to go to baseball, soccer, tennis — really anything. I have some really good friends who live in the area who I enjoy getting together with, attending games or having a tailgate at our house. Which is what it’s been like this year. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to drive to Cary, North Carolina with a really good friend of mine and watch the men’s soccer team play for the ACC championship — a game they beat Pitt 2-1 and won the ACC championship. That’s pretty much what I do in my free time. That was a really neat opportunity to be able to do something like that, be there and witness it in person.

Q: Any big plans for Thanksgiving this year?

KEHN: My family is in Michigan. Even without COVID, a trip to Michigan for three or four days is a long trip. I’ll be staying in South Carolina this year. I’m lucky enough to have been invited to spend Thanksgiving with a really good friend of mine and her family. We’ll have a socially distanced outdoor Thanksgiving with masks, but I’m grateful to have some great friends in the area. When I can’t be with my family, I like to be with their families.