CATCHING UP WITH...Visions Alumni Panel 2024 (Part 1 of 2)

[Catching Up With…theme pops in]

[Opens with Cold Open]

Joe Aidonidis (cold open):
I think looking back on where I've found success is just like getting into really, um, professionally uncomfortable situations. So like, just being in a spot where you just don't know what you're doing, and being like, I gotta figure it out. I'm gonna embarrass myself, fail, and learn. I didn't push myself into that kind of sphere that forces you to learn.

Scott Kurland (cold open):
I took a hour long train every day to New York to work at the Daily Show with Jon Stewart and my day would start at 5:00 AM and the guest on was James Bond, Daniel Craig, and I knocked him over. That's the end of my career.

Dan Daly (cold open):
I am not in the 5 or 6 am club. Theater is kind of nightlife. So when you're working in theater, your schedule is pushed later.

There's many times where I haven't, I've been working and not gotten home until three or four in the morning, but then I get to sleep until whenever I want. So if you want to wake up late, work in theater.

Adam Fournier (Host):
Welcome to *Catching Up With,* where Fitchburg State alumni reflect on their time here on campus, celebrate their accomplishments and discuss how they got from here to where they are now. I'm Adam Fournier, and this is a special two part episode featuring not one, but five Fitchburg State graduates who participated in the alumni panel in the 2024 Visions exhibition.

Visions is an annual event at Fitchburg State that showcases the best original work from the students in the communications media department. The event includes an alumni panel, where graduates are invited back to campus to talk about their careers and their paths to success, a gallery art exhibition featuring student works in photography and graphic design, a game design showcase where guests can play video and tabletop games designed by the students, a theater showcase where theater students perform their talents on stage, and a film and video screening, showing the best fiction and nonfiction student films.

The 2024 panel was hosted by the comm media department chair, Jeff Wormuth and features Fitchburg State alums, Joe Aidonitis, Scott Kurland, Matthew Kroll, Dan Daly, and Jasmine Cordeiro. Thank you all for joining me as we catch up with these Fitchburg State grads.

[Catching Up With…theme fades out]

CATCHING UP WITH...Visions Alumni Panel 2024 (Part 1 of 2)

Jeff Warmouth:
Hello everyone, it's really nice to see the crowd. Welcome to the kickoff event for Visions 2024, the Student Honors Exhibition and Festival of the Communications Media Department here at Fitchburg State. For those of you who do not know me, I'm Jeff Wormuth, the Department Chair of Communications Media. But we're not here for me.
We are here to talk to this assembled panel of I'll embarrass them by saying esteemed alumni, but just awesome, cool alumni who have been doing interesting things.

I'd like to introduce Joe Aidonidis. Class of 2012, film and video, founder of great sky media, Scott Kurland, class of 2009, also film video. He is the executive director of Leominster Access Television.

Matthew Kroll, class of 2005, who is the show runner, narrator, and co owner of extra history and extra credits. Dan Daly, 2009, who is in technical theater and Dan's the scenic designer at Dan Daly design.com. And Jasmine Cordeiro class of 2019 graphic design alum. And she's the senior graphic designer and production manager at Jade. Please join me in a quick round of applause to welcome.

[applause]

Thank you. Can you tell us a bit about finding your first job and the transition from college to the profession and or the transition from college to the professional world?

Joe Aidonidis:
Out of my senior year, I had internships and when I was asked, where do you want to Go, what do you want to do for an internship? I was like, I just don't want to get coffee.
I'll do anything if I can get my hands on a camera. Like, it was a lot to ask, I think. And they're like, okay, we got a spot for you. And I worked at a place called Carl Nurse Communications and it was just one guy. And Carl was amazing. Carl was like an executive producer at the local Fox for years.

He had chops, he was in his 70s, and he taught me everything. He taught me everything, and he expected me to do everything. He expected me to figure out lighting, and how to mic people, and how to have decor, and to present myself well, and to edit and to shoot, and he was on me. Because I was his whole company, essentially. And I worked for him for, you know, my internship, and then he took me on, on kind of like a contract level, and every project, he'd just be like, you get half.

I was like, great. You know, so I was working with them, working with them, and we served an organization called the GNE MSDC, the Greater New England Minority Supplier Distribution Council, and we served minority owned and women owned businesses. And not only did we, you know, make good video, I think we did a pretty good job.

We also, you know, I was just around people who were successful. People, and people who had gone through it, to get successful. And I, I, I just really took that in and the way that everyone carried themselves and you know, I was like the little boy in the room, like, I'll get

the microphone on you. You know, like, I just felt outclassed every day and we just didn't pick up any more work, you know, after a few more months.

And that, that was my time with him. But I owe everything to that guy and I really appreciate my time with him.

Scott Kurland:
My final year my internship, I moved to New York, moved to Brooklyn, and I took an hour long train every day to New York to work at the Daily Show with Jon Stewart as a PA, an intern, and my day would start at 5 a. m.

[00:06:00]

Um, I would get there before the other PAs would because a ritual would be to get the bagel basket, the new newspaper. And it wasn't just one, it was every single newspaper from New York to Seattle, the Sacramento B LA times, Hong Kong press, like every single newspaper they were reading at the daily show.

And I'm like, this is going to be great. And then on my second day, they're like, you're doing great. Take this giant stack of Betamax tapes. Bring it down to the edit bay, and they handed me 15 Betamax tapes to go down three flights of stairs. And the edit bay was right next to the green room, and the guest on was James Bond.

It was not Pierce Brosnan, not Roger Moore, not Sean Connery, it was Daniel Craig, and I knocked him over. And I'm like, oh, well, it was great to have this internship for one whole day. That's the end of my career. And he's like, he saw how scared I was, and he is six foot four, and I am five foot six. And he basically towered over me, and he's like, it's fine, it's fine.

He helped me pick up the tapes, and he's like, I won't tell anyone. And then I stumbled again, and he's like, I am not helping you.

[00:07:30]

But then from there, I basically learned repetition and the importance of, you know, studio life is honestly like an office. You need to make sure that, you know, the scripts go from the writer's room to the talent.

And then you need to transcribe. Thousands of hours of C SPAN. I never want to see another Assembly again. But also, you also have to transcribe weird stuff. Like, know how they do movie clips on the Daily Show? Yeah, I was transcribing, like, Goodfellas and, like, Captain Planet and all this weird stuff. And from there, I ended up freelancing because I loved it so much.

But then I realized for a year of freelancing, working on a lifetime movie here or a week at NBC nightly news, I missed community access TV. And I realized that I could make. More

money in community access and have a better title and more reliable hours than I could at the Daily Show when, where I am running 16 blocks during rush hour to get tickets for Jason Jones to go to Iran.

That's a true story. I ran 16 blocks because no cab would pick me up at all So I ran, and I was covered in sweat, and I'm like, I got you your tickets, and they're like, that's great, these were due tomorrow.

[00:09:00]

Okay, I wanna die. But, that pressure from that job, and the pressure from all the freelance jobs, made me thankful for the pressure from, you know, being in community access, being able to cover meetings, being able to cover sporting events basically without working for Jon Stewart, I would not have the appreciation I do for community media.

Matthew Kroll:
So – I interned at MTV so I was jumping kind of all around the different Viacom channels back in the day before the three or four groups that own it now. I don't even, it's all over the place. And between my internship and my first gig, I think the way I got my first gig after the fact was I became really good friends with a gentleman in the tape room.

Back when there was a tape room um and so i'd you know help him out here and there and i'd stay later and do some stuff if he had to run out while I was doing my internship i'd make sure that I could you know do whatever dubs needed to be done before they had to send tapes back to a place called iron mountain and then basically I became every time he had my first gig was like, oh i'm the opt in tapes tape room operator.

So like basically because I've helped this gentleman out he basically hired me on to do it whenever I needed to do it and then that got me seen by all the different departments that needed tapes dubbed and remembered me from internship and then that sort of is the way that I maneuvered into first PA-ing then A PA-ing then editing etc.

[00:10:30]

So it was like a kind of a cool like It was it always felt very sideways moving and it was very interesting to see how that worked

Dan Daly:
My first job out of – well while I was still in school here was at the Winnipesaukee Playhouse up in Laconia, New Hampshire, where I started off there just as a scenic intern. It was the stuff I had done here, all of the work that I had done showing my carpentry skills, my electric skills, my design skills, and took me on for a summer.

The next summer, they asked me to come back as a another carpenter. And I was like, I don't know, I need to find a full time job because I'm graduating. I, you know, I don't know if I

can just do a summer job. And they went, give me two seconds. And they called me back the next day and offered me a full time job.

So, they were not expecting to hire someone full time. I ended up being their first technical director working there all season long, all year long. Um, another thing that happened so I was doing that for a while, and then I was sort of at the place where I could make the most money I could make.

I was the set designer and painter and props person and carpenter and technical director and doing all of this work and not making enough money doing it. So I was like, I think it's time for grad school. So I went to grad school at that moment, but kind of the reason I got in was because of Fitchburg.

So I designed a show here called The Runner Stumbles. And we used to have something called the Kennedy center

[00:12:00]

American college theater festival. I don't know if we still go to it or not. But I had presented my set design there and it went pretty well. I didn't win or anything. But I, when I was applying for grad schools, someone that went there was teaching at Carnegie Mellon and remembered me, um, and then brought me into this school there for grad school.

So all of the stuff we're doing here, whether it is a job or not job, can get you to that next step, even if you don't know what's going to happen.

Jasmine Cordeiro:
So I got hired from my internship that there was an opening, which was incredibly lucky for me, that two weeks into my internship, the graphic designer that was on staff actually left, so I became the full time designer during my internship and I got a lot of experience.

At the end of my internship, I asked my boss for the job and she gave it to me and it was also probably the quickest someone had probably been hired from an internship and laid off. In July, I got laid off from my job because the the company kind of dissolved a little bit and the people who I had originally worked for during my internship started their own company and they asked me to work with them and so then I started with them and that was a great experience for me to gain so much you know, world experience, not just in the academic and professional way, but also the world sense of marketing is a scary industry. If you work for a very large company and you lose a giant client, they're going to lay off the whole floor of people.

[00:13:30]

So it was really good to have that experience in a safe space that I would be hired very quickly and it was still very young in my career. I am now at a different agency because that

company also split and I am now, you know, where I am today, senior designer, because I've been with them for so long since the beginning.

Jeff Warmouth:
Fantastic. Is there anything about your college experience that you wish that you had done differently?

And this could be, you know, any classes or projects or activities that you wish you had taken or tried or the opposite, I suppose.

Jasmine Cordeiro:
I think the one regret I have is not taking more electives. I always chose to take one elective per semester with you know, if my schedule allowed, but I really wish I took more because that's really what feeds the fundamentals of your design skills that that's what you take into the world is your actual skill and your ability.

Everything else can be taught and gained through experience, but your skill is the most important thing that you can take away from here. So take all the electives you can.

Dan Daly:
I'm gonna kind of jump off of that one a little bit and say I took lots of classes when I was here. I got my major, plus I had a minor in art and I was really exploring what art was.

And I think all of us are kind of artists in one way or another. But I wish that I had taken a business class. I wish I had learned a little bit more about the structure of how art is made out in the world versus just the the beautiful parts of it. Some of that harder, deeper stuff is something that I wish I had taken one class in to set myself up a little bit better as opposed to having to learn it on the fly.

[00:15:00]

Matthew Kroll:
That was an excellent answer. I didn't even think of that when I was like, Oh man, that's good. I should have done that. I think weirdly I took as many you know comms courses as I could. And I think weirdly, I might say. I wish I did a little more of the theater courses because part of my job now is, is like partially acting and I was, I did one play when I was here, but I didn't, I only took like one or like one and a half classes.

I don't remember. So I wish I did that a little more, but cause I definitely loaded up on the on the Comms Department.

Joe Aidonidis:
I don't know if there is a thing that I regret or not. I think looking back on where I found success is just like getting into really professionally uncomfortable situations.

So like just being in a spot where you just don't know what you're doing and being like, I got to figure it out. I'm going to embarrass myself, fail and learn. Like, I think I played a little too safe when I was here. Got great grades, had some good relationships, but I didn't push myself into that kind of sphere that forces you to learn and kind of at the end of school, post school, I was really thrown into that in a big way, and I still seek that now, and I was just, you know, maybe if I was younger and I was facing some of those problems.

I just I didn't know that I was gonna be successful going into it. Maybe if I faced more of those things, I could have learned more while I was here and kind of like a safer more fertile environment to do that

[00:16:30]

Instead of like out in the world where it's like very vicious when you when you fail or when you embarrass yourself It's like very sharp.

Scott Kurland:
So the odd thing i'm gonna say is I wish I did more than one internship When I went into new york And was working for the Daily Show at Comedy Central. All the kids there had already done five to ten other internships. So I wish I spent my summers interning and my breaks interning at, you know, different locations, WGBH, going to New York to intern at, you know, the Tonight Show, all that stuff.

So I wish I did more internships.

Jeff Warmouth:
These stories are just getting better and better, so I'm really psyched to ask you all to describe what a typical day is like in your current job.

Joe Aidonidis:
First I get up at like 5 am and I down male supplements and I work out and take an ice bath. No I wake up at 5 am and I make lunch for my daughter. That's like the most important part of the day and it's like my ritual. Get everything she needs for the day. Then I just take care of myself. My kid wakes up, my wife wakes up. And we have a ritual. I drop her off at her daycare. And then I go in my studio. And I spend – if it's a morning where I have to edit – I spend the first three hours editing.

My best time in the morning is like nine to twelve. Or if I have a, you do a pitch

[00:18:00]

I take a meeting right at nine o'clock. Just get my best stuff. Typically, I do three things. One is preparing for a shoot, one is shooting, and then one is obviously post. And I'm serving usually between five and seven clients at a time.

And I'm alternating between like where we are in the production process, where we're, you know, beginning, or where we're polishing and sending things out. Reliably, I'm like, I'm just trying to keep my day pretty consistent. It's just serving someone else serving a different project wherever it is in that stage.

So a lot of my time. A lot of my time it''s just talking to people. Whether we're in pre production and like, trying to get a narrative kind of strung out or just people. You know, working with an institution or a business and being like, this is what the project is going to be and selling like a lot, a lot of sales and took a while to get good at that.

I think I'm okay at it now. So typically what I'm trying to do is make a project happen and finish project every day. And sometimes it's slower, sometimes bottlenecks, and sometimes, you know, you're working longer hours, but the key is just being consistent. Yeah. And showing up every day, even when there's not a lot to do and showing up when there is a lot to do and just pacing yourself.

So, yeah, that's my day.

Scott Kurland:
I am also in the 5 am club. I wake up. I take out my dogs, make sure they're walked and then because they don't let me sleep.

[00:19:30]

And then when I get to the office, I make sure that everything is on schedule to go that my staff knows what projects they're working on what meetings are covered for the city.

I'm in meetings with the mayor with, you know, local businesses around town, making sure events are getting films and that everyone has something to do myself included. Basically, my main goal is to make sure that the community is served, that we are covering things that we are out there because it's called community access television.

We serve the community.

Matthew Kroll:
I get up at six. When my cat walks on my face but then as far as work is concerned once I get started we have people sort of my company is all basically over the globe the two farthest being we have a writer in Hong Kong and we have um an artist in Spain and Madrid So in my mornings, I try to touch base with them actually this morning before jumping on a plane here.

I had my meeting with our writer Rob for the History Show and then if it's, on some days we get to do some fun stuff in the mornings, like live shows on Twitch, which I do like a daily talk a Monday talk show thing there in the mornings. After that, I try to do any script work that I need to do in the mornings, because I find if I'm giving notes on scripts or doing any

revisions in the later parts of the day, I'm in a worse mood, and I don't want to do that to my writers.

[00:21:00]

I want to make sure that I'm being as fair as possible. Then, sort of like, right before lunch, I try to make sure I've done every record that I need to do. The shows that I work on are all animated, and I need to do the narration for them. So I want to make sure that gets out especially early, because then the audio editors won't have to work late.

Basically, I try to structure my entire thing so that everyone who works with me isn't waiting on a thing that I need to give them. And then end of the day is mostly meetings. I try to make most of my actual meetings for planning things or, or projects and whatnot happen past 3 or 4 pm. That does tend to suck sometimes because again, especially if it bleeds into my like 7 or 8, which I shouldn't let it do, but because then you're talking to the West Coast, you're doing other things over there.

So, that's kind of it – It's sort of like and he scripts, then records, then meetings, and then rinse, repeat.

Jasmine Cordeiro:
And I don't wake up nearly as early as you guys, but I still roll into the office before ten. So my day starts around nine when I go into the office, and because I'm also the production manager, I run a meeting every morning with the entire team.

And we go over the tasks that are due for the day, make sure everyone has what they need. And then everyone goes off on their merry way and they does their things. And I design a little bit in between. And then everyone submits all their tasks that they've been working on for approval. So I have to go through and review everything, make sure there's no typos, make sure the design matches the brand of all of our clients.

[00:22:30]

Sometimes I'll be on a status meeting or a creative meeting for the team. And then I will also design projects like merch or emails, flyers, and anything that really comes our way, we'll, we'll design it. And that's pretty much rinse and repeat every day.

Dan Daly:
I am not in the 5 or 6 am club. 10 am club is my place.

I don't really have a typical day in, in design, in freelance design world specifically for theatre. And that's one of the reasons why I kind of have stuck with theatre and not moved into film or TV is because I don't wake up that early. There's kind of like four ways to make a living doing theatre design.

You can do a ton of shows and make a living getting a little bit of money doing a lot of shows, the year before the pandemic. I designed 27 plays which is a lot. Another way to do it is you can assist someone so you can there could be a major Broadway designer that you then go and assist them because they're doing five or six shows and they don't have enough hands to do all that.

So you are one of the people helping them with it. You can work for a theater company and then you are just part of their company doing what they need to get done and helping them work that way. Or lastly, you can have a day job. So you can work somewhere else and then do theater work in the evening.

I've done all four of those things. And right now I'm kind of halfway between the do a bunch of shows and have a day job thing.

[00:24:00]

So I do some teaching work as my sort of main bread and butter work right now. And then around that I'm designing massive shows here and there. I just did a show down at South by Southwest with a group called Freedom Form, who's trying to help further First Amendment rights and help people understand what their First Amendment rights are.

And we worked with this theater company that – we built a giant six or seven room immersive theatrical piece that led you from place to place. So I was doing teaching in the afternoon and then I was drafting and model making in the evening and then at night I was going and you know working at a nightclub or at another place helping them do their lights or their sound or their scenic pieces.

So you know, theater is kind of nightlife. So when you're working in theater, Your schedule is pushed later. There's many times where I haven't, I've been working and not gotten home until 3 or 4 in the morning, but then I get to sleep until whenever I want. So if you want to wake up late, work in theater.

[Catching Up With…theme fades in]

Adam Fournier (Host):
Thanks for listening to part one of the special two part episode of Catching Up With. If you know someone in comm media at Fitchburg State and want to support their work, or even if you're just simply interested in the event, Visions is held every April and is open to the public for anyone and everyone to enjoy.

You can find more information about the Expo at fitchburgstate.edu/visions. That's fitchburgstate.edu/visions.

[00:25:30]

CATCHING UP WITH...Visions Alumni Panel 2024 (Part 1 of 2)

Admission is free and refreshments are served. Tune in next time to find Joe Aidonidis, Scott Kurland, Matthew Kroll, Dan Daly, and Jasmine Cordeiro in part two of the 2024 Visions Alumni Panel, where they talk about their experiences in the world of freelance work, the importance of networking and how it helped them fuel their careers, and what it means to be a Fitchburg State grad.

[Catching Up With…theme fades out]

[Perseverantia network theme fade in]

Lily Woodruff (student)
This is Lilly Woodruff, Game Design major class of 2024. And you're been listening to *Perseverantia*, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.

[Perseverantia network theme fade out]