

## December 2020 SAN Podcast Transcript

Dan Silverman: Good day, listening public!

Today is December 2nd, 2020. Thank you for listening to General Disclosure, the podcast from SAN. My name is Dan Silverman and I'm joined as always by cohost, Cheryl Dowd. Cheryl-

Cheryl Dowd: Hi everybody! [crosstalk 00:00:18].

Dan Silverman: Hi, Cheryl.

Cheryl Dowd: Sorry, Dan. Jumped all over it.

Dan Silverman: That's all right. I had another way of asking you, but that's fine.

Today our guest is Lindsay McKenzie. She's the technology reporter at Inside Higher Ed. Although given the broad variety of articles she writes, I guess her editor defines that position pretty broadly. But anyway, Lindsay is one of the ace reporters on state authorization and we're so glad to have her.

Lindsay, welcome.

Lindsay McKenzie Thank you for that very sweet introduction. Yes, it is an extremely broad beat. I cover pretty much anything to do with digital learning, anything that could conceivably involve computers, which is pretty much all of higher ed. So it's extremely broad.

Dan Silverman: Exactly. And I've often wondered about that. I mean, is a professor of sending an email about a hybrid course?

Lindsay McKenzie Yep.

Dan Silverman: Anyway, hopefully we'll stay out of those waters, but I'll start with two questions that I start pretty much all of these conversations with is... Defining your career, however you define it. You clearly have a lot of talents and ideas. Why do you do this?

Lindsay McKenzie Why do I do this? Oh, it's tough. I mean, I really wanted to be a doctor and I didn't get into medical school. And I was like, what do I do now? And I loved science and wanted to write about science and through reading a lot of great science journalism, got really interested in journalism. So it was a really roundabout way of getting into what I do.

Now I write about higher education, obviously. So I get to talk to professors all the time, which is amazing. I can just call up people who are world renowned experts and they very generously give me their time. So it's great. Is learning something new every day. It's being able to help people understand complex

things like state authorization. And it's really fun. It's a really interesting job and I'm so glad that I get to do it for a living and I get paid.

Dan Silverman: What's an example of a science journalist who inspired you?

Lindsay McKenzie I really like the work of Ivan Oransky. He started a blog called Retraction Watch, and this is so neat. I don't know if anyone will have even read it, but it's tracking all of the journal articles that are retracted from journals. And a lot of the time, it's the things like academic misconduct. It's just kind of an area of journalism that is so niche. Not many people care about it, but I think it's really important that scientists are held accountable and that kind of transcends into higher ed more broadly, right? Academics. I do a lot of academic work and it's really important that that academic work is valued. And yeah, I just think the work he does is really interesting. It's very nerdy.

Dan Silverman: Do you know of Brian Nosek at UVA? The Reproducibility Project?

Lindsay McKenzie Yeah, I do. I do.

Dan Silverman: I followed him a little bit and that's the same idea. Very interesting. We'll put links to those.

Lindsay McKenzie [crosstalk 00:03:38] at the Atlantic is also great. He's a fantastic storyteller.

Dan Silverman: Okay, great. We'll have to put a couple of those names in our show notes, so our listeners can-

Lindsay McKenzie Check it out.

Dan Silverman: Can have their horizons expanded. But if journalism were to vaporize tomorrow, then what would you do?

Lindsay McKenzie I think I would like to be a librarian. I talk to lots of librarians and they're fascinating people. And the more I learn about that profession, the more interesting I think it is. The way that it's sort of linked to such an ancient practice, but so forward looking, so technical. It's a lot about business as well as just digital archiving and working with people. It's a kind of service profession. I just think it's a really interesting job and something I never would have considered as a young person, but the more I find out about it, the more I think, "Oh, I think I would actually really enjoy that work."

Dan Silverman: You have a piece today on Inside Higher Ed about the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices meeting and vote yesterday on how to prioritize COVID vaccines. And at the end of the piece, you write that, "Although the CDC committee are widely watched, US officials have previously said states will have the final say in who gets early vaccines. And I promise there's a state

authorization link here, too. So, this federal/state dynamic that you see here, do you see any similarity with higher ed regulation more generally?

Lindsay McKenzie I do. And coming from the UK, it's something I think is really interesting to me because we just don't have the same kind of level of state independence. I mean, the UK obviously has independent countries and devolution, but it's a completely different system.

I was quite surprised by how contentious some of these issues are state by state; how differently states approach different topics. It's really been interesting. I feel like I've learned a lot about American politics through following higher education policy at the state and federal level.

Dan Silverman: What was your first state authorization story and when was it?

Lindsay McKenzie I think it must have been the year I started, which was 2017. I'm trying to remember. I think it may have been about the fact that California didn't seem to want to participate in NC-SARA, which is still the case and kind of exploring why that was. I think it's still a really interesting topic and there's a lot of tension there between the institutions that want to be part of NC-SARA and the groups that really feel strongly that NC-SARA isn't providing strong enough student protections, which is a really interesting dynamic. So I think that was the first one, but I may be wrong.

Dan Silverman: What are other regulatory beats that you enjoy covering and how do they tie in or not tie in with state authorization?

Lindsay McKenzie Yeah. I don't cover a huge amount of policy. If I do, it tends to tie into data or cybersecurity breaches, that kind of thing. So it's pretty niche. I have written a little bit about the GI Bill kind of in the context of online learning. But most of the time, if there's a policy topic I'm asked to write, it is about state authorization.

I'm not quite sure how it kind of fell on my shoulders, but it's become my thing, which is great. I mean, I love that I'm considered the person to go to within Inside Higher Ed about that topic. I think it's very flattering when people ask you to do something and I think it's quite a challenging topic. So I'm proud that I've become that person.

Dan Silverman: Well, I think your story there and mirrors that of our members.

Lindsay McKenzie Yeah.

Dan Silverman: It kind of fell on their lap and they took it. I don't think anybody grows up dreaming of doing this. But you just touched on a couple of other topics that SAN has worked a little bit on. And two areas in particular in Cheryl's

wheelhouse, which is cybersecurity and GI and military issues. Cheryl, do you have any follow-ups on either of those?

Cheryl Dowd: I understand where she's coming from. Lindsay, you're addressing these as very interesting, intricate, nuanced sorts of issues with a lot of things that you can really dive into.

I do want to point out though that one of the things that I appreciated being interviewed by you, and I think it's been almost two years ago, we were talking about state authorization and you were talking about how fascinating you thought this topic was. And I remember going, "Oh, God bless you." We need people to find us and find our work interesting.

But you're right. And you know, in all of these, you find such fabulous nuances. So they aren't very black and white. There's so much gray and trying to make that work. And then you were talking about how the states vary so widely and California is not participating in reciprocity at this time. And the states even vary in terms of how they look at this.

I think it's interesting too that Canada, they have a very strong sense of their provincial and territory management of their work, not necessarily education specifically, but just in general, how they manage their province or territory.

I find that very interesting that the United States and Canada contrast what you were saying about the UK. So, I guess you're sharing with us that the UK has a strong nationalist government structure.

Lindsay McKenzie They kind of do. It's just very different. We don't really have an accreditation structure. And actually, I would say the online learning landscape in the UK is not as developed as the US. It's just a very different landscape and obviously dominated by state-funded institutions. We don't have so much of a private system. It's very different and that's part of why I find it so interesting. I don't know if an American would find this topic maybe quite as interesting as I do, but that's where the interest comes from for me.

Cheryl Dowd: Well, you're absolutely right though. When you compare and contrast the priorities of different countries, how they manage it, which is why we talk about institutions in the United States that might have students who are wishing to take online courses from other countries. And we talk about how the oversight by those countries could be very different and it's a different... Not only might they have different oversight rules, but they have different culture and expectations. And so in the United States it varies, but I think we still have a common culture about education, where I think the variety of international opportunities is very different.

Lindsay McKenzie I do feel sorry for the US institutions trying to deal with things like the GDPR and the European regulation.

- Cheryl Dowd: Yeah.
- Lindsay McKenzie It's very different and it does get very complicated. I don't envy the people that have to think about that.
- Cheryl Dowd: You're absolutely right.
- Dan Silverman: So Cheryl mentioned, Lindsay, that you interviewed her at one time. How do you find and cultivate your sources?
- Lindsay McKenzie Most of the time, I start with Google... Google searches. I find people that have written about the topic that I'm interested in, or I look at other reporters' writing, who have they spoken to. I'll go to my editor and my colleagues, and ask who they would recommend I speak to. It's really a case of just kind of crowdsourcing the best people to speak to, and then hopefully trying to build a relationship with them where if you call them up, they're kind enough to give you some time. And most people are, which I do really appreciate.
- It's difficult with state authorization for me to speak to individual administrators at the university level, because often they can't really say how they're doing. Like quite a lot of my stories are about implementing regulation. And I know from what I'm hearing that a lot of people might be struggling with implementation, but no one wants to put their hand up and say, "I am the one who's struggling," because then they become a potential focus of scrutiny. And I totally understand why people would be hesitant to speak to me.
- So that is the challenge. So I speak to people like Cheryl, who has a really good bird's-eye view of what's happening. I also speak to consultants sometimes who might be paid by universities to do some of the leg work. But it's a challenge sometimes. And I'm always, whenever I speak to people, I often ask them who else should I speak to? And I really appreciate contact suggestions.
- Dan Silverman: Well, it's interesting. We have some outspoken members and Cheryl, we'll have to put our heads together and see if we think any of them would ever be willing to... Because while, Lindsay, that dynamic you're describing is very reasonable and very common about not wanting to raise your hand to attract scrutiny of any regulators. I don't know. We may have a few in the group, Cheryl, that might be willing to speak their minds. So we'll have to think about that.
- Lindsay McKenzie I would love that. Yeah, that would be great.
- Cheryl Dowd: The funny thing about that, though, I should share with you, Lindsay, is that whenever we meet, we often go, "Safe space here," because we're all working towards compliance. And so sometimes they're willing to share within the group because we're all trying to figure out what are the best ways to move forward correctly? So people share what works and what doesn't work. But yes. I mean,

what Dan's describing, I'm sure we have some folks that will share and some of them that do share.

As a matter of fact, on our website, we have what we call the SANSational Awards. And those are people who have done really good work, have submitted their work for review by our SAN Awards Committee. And they're awarded and willing to share that this is how they've worked to solve different problems. And so we often point to them as the volunteers, if you will, of how work can be done. And so they may be people that you might want to chat with.

Lindsay McKenzie      That's a great tip. Yeah. I will check it out.

Dan Silverman:      But another challenge too, is that oftentimes the people implementing these regulations are kind of lower on the organizational chart and therefore might not necessarily feel comfortable speaking for their university or be used to being approached even.

Lindsay McKenzie      That's certainly true. Yeah.

Dan Silverman:      And you may see that in it.

Lindsay McKenzie      And also, sometimes I contact an institution and if I can't find the right person, I'll go through the press office and the press office might not know who is working on this issue; or have never heard of this issue. So you have to kind of spend some time explaining and kind of throwing out some job titles. And sometimes it's a dead end, but absolutely; I don't expect everyone to be super media savvy. So that is something I run into.

I try and reassure people that I'm not trying to make them... Trying to trip them. I want everyone to sound smart in my articles. I don't like making people seem foolish. I think that's not my objective. And I think that's the concern people have that they might say the wrong thing.

Also, too, when I'm reporting on something brand new, people might be uncertain about it and that's totally understandable, too. I mean, you want to be certain about what you're speaking about, so I totally get where people come from on that.

Dan Silverman:      This is it the last question I have and Cheryl, you're welcome to come with any other follow-ups.

In your time, Lindsay, in higher ed, have there been some trends in higher ed regulation or policy that have emerged that have surprised you in some way?

Lindsay McKenzie      Yeah. I write quite a lot about online program management, which is when institutions outsource the management of online programs. Maybe they need help launching new programs or running an existing program and growing it. I

think that's a really interesting area. And I think there may be some focus on that with the new administration.

But from a regulatory perspective, the basis on which the companies exist or are allowed to operate is really kind of, what's the word I'm looking for? Technical. It's not a really strong foundation. Like it's something that the Education Department could potentially overturn at some point. I don't think they will because there's such an infrastructure around these companies and all of the degree programs and some really great partnerships between these companies and institutions. But I think that has been a really interesting area to learn about and something I will be watching moving forward.

Dan Silverman: Cheryl, do you have any other questions for Lindsay?

Cheryl Dowd: Let's see. With having covered state authorization, you talked a little bit about California not participating in reciprocity, but what do you think is the most surprising thing that's come out of this kind of back and forth, as you've probably seen the history of the federal regulation. It took 10 years to get us to a point of an effective regulation and it came from consensus. What do you think is the most surprising thing that you've seen over this time period?

Lindsay McKenzie I mean, it is literally a decade of back and forth. And I actually go back into the archives sometimes and read stories from the early days of Inside Higher Ed relatively by my predecessors. And it's often the same discussion topics, which is really interesting. It's interesting how much longevity the issues have; how these continue to be things that people rarely care about and discuss closely and carefully.

I think that's really interesting that this issue, it keeps coming up again and again, and it continues to be really difficult. So I think that's interesting. I'm always struck by how carefully worded language around state authorization is. It does make it quite challenging to write about sometimes because you just have to be really specific.

So talking about something like what state is a student in? What is their location? You have to really pinpoint. You can't just be vague about it. So as a writer, that's something that's kind of top of my mind when I'm writing about this issue. And I don't know if it translates into the most exciting reading, but I try and I'm certainly inspired by your blogs, Cheryl. They're really good. I like how you try and build a pop culture into it... The sports analogies. It's a really hard topic to make super interesting, but I think you do it really well.

Cheryl Dowd: That's nice of you. Thank you. We do try to have fun, right, Dan?

Lindsay McKenzie Yeah.

Cheryl Dowd: That's something... We try to inject humor where possible, and I always appreciate Dan's sense of humor, too. He adds a lot to what we do.

But I mean, it's rather dry. And so we try to find the humor in it where we can, and it also helps you remember things if some humor is tied to it.

Lindsay McKenzie That's true. I would add that's one thing I have been kind of surprised by that every time I write about state authorization or I think I wrote in the summer about the new professional licensure disclosures, and I had tons of emails from people like, "Hey, does this apply to me?" It's just constant surprise. And I'm like, "I think it does. I'm not the right person to ask but yeah, I think so."

It feels rewarding that I'm helping to spread the word about these things that people need to be paying attention to. It's not an area of my beat that gets the most clicks, as I'm sure you might imagine, but I feel like it's really important to cover and I hope I help in explaining it to some people that might not have understood it before or been aware of it.

Cheryl Dowd: Well, we appreciate the work that you do, that's for sure.

Lindsay McKenzie Thank you.

Dan Silverman: Very much. Thank you so much, Lindsay. And we will we will leave it there as far as our conversation with you. Please do stick around for our last two very short segments if you'd like.

The next one we have here is out of left field, which is when I take something that I've come across and it doesn't seem like it has any relation to higher ed policy or regulation or technology and try to tie it in.

I realized as I've thought about the last couple that they've turned into almost mini sermons. I'm not going to go as long this time or as didactic. But I'm going to post a couple of questions for our members and listeners.

So I don't know about you, but I read the car review column in the Wall Street Journal every weekend by Dan Neil. I am not interested in cars. And when he starts writing about torque and suspension and cubic inches of this and that, I skip right over it. But I read it because it is a humor column, masquerading as a car column.

And I've just been wondering about that. Why don't they call it what it is? Getting a little closer to education, my daughter's preschool recently had it's Grandparents' Day, which when you first think about it, "Oh, what a nice way to include the whole family."



But then you look a little closer and it's run by the development office and is simply a development opportunity, which is fine. Schools need money. I get it. But I'm wondering why these things get called by something else.

If you could think about your institutions, are there aspects of the way tech is used or policies implementation that are really about something, but masquerading as something else. And if so, why?

So I'll just leave that as a lingering question. And now we move on to everybody's favorite, Cheryl on musicals. Cheryl, what are you hearing about any reopening plans?

Cheryl Dowd: Well, I heard that the West End in London will be able to open this month. I don't know the truth of that, but I've heard that that is a possibility.

Lindsay McKenzie [inaudible 00:00:24:30].

Cheryl Dowd: Okay. Well see, there you go. I'll let Lindsay go on that one. Lindsay, what do you know?

Lindsay McKenzie I don't know. As far as I know, London is still on lockdown because my brother is there right now and he's trapped in his house; but that would be great. I love musicals and have a lot of friends actually who are actors. So I hope that's true.

Cheryl Dowd: And that would be great because what I'm hearing too, is that Back to the Future: The Musical. Yes. This is a real thing. Back to the Future: The Musical is supposed to open on the West End, I think in March. And Roger Bart, who was the voice of let's see... Hercules in the cartoon Hercules when he was young and saying, "Go the distance." Family favorite in this house.

He was also Dr. Frankenstein in the movie musical of Young Frankenstein. He will play the crazy inventor part. And then I did hear also that speculation is that the first Broadway show that will open next summer will be Hamilton. But that's the internet. Who knows? But that's what I hear.

Dan Silverman: Yeah. Cheryl, I did quiz Lindsay on her sources. I'm not going to do the same for you. We'll just let those go.

Cheryl Dowd: We'll just go with the internet.

Dan Silverman: Remain confidential. So other than Aaron Sorkin, is there a screenwriter or a TV writer who you'd like to see dip into the musicals?

Lindsay McKenzie Oh my. Are you fans of Fleabag?

Cheryl Dowd: Oh, there you go.

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Lindsay McKenzie: I would love to see Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the musical. I think that'd be awesome.

Cheryl Dowd: That would be. There you go.

Dan Silverman: Okay. I'm not familiar with Fleabag. What is that?

Lindsay McKenzie: It is a British comedy, I guess? It's a little bit dark. It just follows this woman who's kind of, I don't know. Cheryl, how would you describe her?

Cheryl Dowd: Like a little bit eccentric?

Lindsay McKenzie: Yes.

Cheryl Dowd: Yeah.

Lindsay McKenzie: Yes. Phoebe Waller-Bridge also helped to write Killing Eve, I believe. And I can't think what else she's done, but kind of dark British humor, I think is how I would describe it. A little bit irreverent.

Cheryl Dowd: And they won many awards about a year ago. I think the Emmys like maybe a year ago and it's on Netflix.

Lindsay McKenzie: It's very good.

Cheryl Dowd: It's very good. Yep.

Dan Silverman: Well, Lindsay, we'll let you have the last word here. Is there a musical... What's been your favorite musical of the last five years?

Lindsay McKenzie: So hard. I mean, it's really embarrassing. I don't know if it really counts as a musical, but I really love Frozen II.

Cheryl Dowd: Me, too. I love it. Yeah.

Lindsay McKenzie: If you have Disney Plus there's a fascinating documentary about how the animate is made for Frozen II. I made my boyfriend watch it and we ended up watching it twice because he loved it so much. And I don't know how that happened, but it's so interesting to see how they made it. It's very good.

Cheryl Dowd: I'm right there with you. Right there with you.

Lindsay McKenzie: It's worth watching, even if you don't like Frozen, I think you would enjoy The Making of Frozen documentary that's on Disney Plus.

Cheryl Dowd: Fantastic.

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Dan Silverman: All right. Well, Lindsay McKenzie, thank you so much for being with us. Cheryl, thank you as always for co-hosting.

Lindsay McKenzie Thanks, Dan.

Cheryl Dowd: Thank you, Lindsay, for being with us. Really enjoyed this conversation.

Lindsay McKenzie Thank you so much. You too.

Dan Silverman: Talk to you guys later. Bye-bye.