

Dr. Kasie Whitener (00:02):

Welcome back to the Moore School podcast. This is Kasie Whitener. I'm your host for the show. And with me today, Dr. Dirk Brown, who runs our McNair Institute for Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurism. And just this past weekend, we had a chance to go to Hilton Head and spend time with our USC Bufort Campus buddies, and this was the Intercampus Alliance Initiative. So I thought I'd bring you on the show. We'll talk about that. Talk about all the things the McNair Institute has been doing to spread entrepreneurship across campus at the University of South Carolina. Welcome to the show, Dirk Brown.

Dr. Dirk Brown (00:32):

Great, Kasie, thank you for having me. I'm glad

Dr. Kasie Whitener (00:34):

To have you here. So last week we interviewed a couple of students who are pitching at Proving Ground this coming Friday. And you know this well, we've got our International Business 50th anniversary coming up on Friday as well. This is a department that you're in, you're in the International Business Department, so you get to be part of that celebration, but also part of Proving Ground as one of the judges because entrepreneurship is your jam. Tell us a little bit like what's your background, how did you get to Carolina? And then kind of walk us through what does it look like to build entrepreneurs here at the university?

Dr. Dirk Brown (01:03):

Well, <laugh> Yeah, it's

Dr. Kasie Whitener (01:04):

All of it. Just monologue. Go for it.

Dr. Dirk Brown (01:05):

Great. Well, it's a very busy week, as you just pointed out. Uh, and that's a very big question. So I'll, I'll start at the beginning. Uh, I moved to South Carolina in 2011, uh, to run the Faber Entrepreneurship Center that you work with. Yes. And that's done great things at the Moore School and, um, had the opportunity to move to the provost office, um, and work on the McNair Institute in 2017 through a gift from, uh, the Robert and Janice McNair Foundation. And the idea there, uh, Kasie was to try and harmonize or align all the entrepreneurial activities across, uh, the campus at that time. Uh, you know, we have, we have entrepreneurial initiatives going on at every school and college on campus, as you know, uh, with obviously the business school taking a strong leadership position in all things business, including entrepreneurship. But there's lots of stuff going on in engineering, arts and sciences, music.

Dr. Dirk Brown (01:56):

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> Pharmacy, you know, journalism. So the idea was to try and push stronger communication, alignment and collaboration between all the various entrepreneurship initiatives that are going on, on campus. Uh, and that was fun. We did a good job of that. Actually, you know, we started that back when we were running the favor center at the, the Moore Schools Favor Center is the one that really Right. Started that. Uh, and then more recently we got a grant from the Department of Commerce's Relentless Challenge Grants to expand that concept to the entire USC system, which is a big deal. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, we have eight campuses across the entire state, uh, with 20

locations. Uh, we have, um, uh, over 300 degree programs that we're, that are at the USC system that the USC system offers and entrepreneurship sort of touches most of them. Right. As you and I both know. So this idea is a very big one, is to try and get this Intercampus Alliance, um, working in which various folks from different campuses are going to collaborate on, uh, entrepreneurial initiatives across the entire state.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([02:59](#)):

So academia in general has a reputation for being siloed. And we think about things like, you're in the business school, or you're in a certain major, or you're in a certain discipline, this or that. And what I loved and have loved since I got here in 2017 is when these harmonizing meetings started happening, you were inviting people who had any level of entrepreneurship at all. Like if they own their own business and they were also teaching, come in and let's hang out and let's have a conversation about how you can contribute to the entrepreneurship conversation on campus. And this seems like the right time to be having that conversation because we have a very entrepreneurial generation coming through school right now. A lot of them run side hustles. A lot of them have these ideas for apps and that sort of thing. There's a lot of kind of tech startup excitement coming through.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([03:42](#)):

And I think a lot of 'em, too are looking for ways to be able to pay for their own education by building their own businesses. So it's been really exciting since 2017 to watch how all the different people that are maybe full-time employed or engaged in, I always call it my big girl job at the university, right. That this is the thing they do full time, but they have all these other things they're doing on the side. And we're bringing all those things visible to our students and helping them engage with, with professors who are doing more than, than just working at the uni. And I don't mean to say just working in, in like minimize working at the university, obviously that's a full-time role. Uh, but a lot of us are also all side hustling on the side <laugh>. So it's cool to bring it forward. Um, talk about the harmonizing meetings. How did you get alert or awareness of who was working in what capacities? 'cause I know I met like David Cutler through you, he's in the School of Music. Um, and then of, so how did you find these people? How did you know that that's what they were doing? Was it just like going out, knocking on doors? Or how do you bring that inner camp, that alliance on campus here at the Columbia campus together?

Dr. Dirk Brown ([04:42](#)):

Yeah. Wow. Another big question. So, first of all, I totally agree. Uh, break the silos. Let's just get those silos broken down, uh, especially with the future of higher education, which we can talk about in a whole nother uh, discussion. But, you know, interdisciplinary, uh, courses and interdisciplinary education is really almost necessary now in order to prepare our students for the kinds of career paths that they're going to be pursuing. And entrepreneurship inherently is largely an interdisciplinary field. Uh, leveraging sort of domain expertise to create sustainable value through, um, business processes that we teach that you and I both teach, uh, in terms of finding the people that were involved in that early on, it was largely early on word of mouth. But then as these things grow, people find out about, you know, where these things are happening. So, uh, it was grown very organically.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([05:31](#)):

The first meeting we had, uh, when we were trying to do this sort of collaboration effort was back in 2011, 2012 timeframe. We probably had 10 or 12 people there. And now we know we have a group of

over a hundred folks that are really interested in collaborating from all the different schools and colleges and campuses now around this idea of entrepreneurship. And we, we define entrepreneurship fairly broadly, as you know, it's, uh, it can be running a small business, it can be starting the next high tech, uh, you know, super scalable company. Or it can be just doing entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial entrepreneurship and innovation within a larger company or even a nonprofit. Right? So it's a fairly broad definition of entrepreneurship that we use.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([06:11](#)):

There's a great, uh, mindset that connects everybody though. It's this like say yes mindset, right? Which is, uh, yeah, of course we can try that. Of course we can give that a shot. Absolutely. You know, there's this kind of, I'm in, let's, let's give it a try. And I think that entrepreneurial spirit in terms of people who are willing to like, yeah, sure, let's try it. Like how can I support that, even if it's gonna fail, or even if the likelihood of it Yeah. Is like absolute failure. This podcast alone is like my effort at like entrepreneur entrepreneurship inside the university where I'm like, Hey, we should be doing something like this. Let's talk about entrepreneurship. Let's talk about, you know, all the things entrepreneurial that we're doing externally, but also internally how we're trying to, uh, be innovative and trying to create, uh, opportunities for our students and for our faculty and for our, our staff to really get out there and talk about the things that they're passionate about. You bring passion into this entrepreneurship conversation. Talk a little bit about why you're so passionate about entrepreneurship.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([07:03](#)):

I am, I'm, I'm extremely passionate about it, and, uh, largely because I strongly believe that it's needed. And, um, what's been interesting, as you were just talking earlier about the, the sort of the, the zeitgeist to the feel of what's going on at the university right now is the leadership is really, I think embracing the idea that the students need to graduate with some knowledge, you know, whatever they're studying, accounting, finance, marketing,

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([07:28](#)):

Their discipline, yeah.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([07:28](#)):

Their, their, yeah. And the, the domain expertise for what field they're gonna go into. But this next layer of teaching 'em how to solve problems and be innovative and pivot and, and shift gears when the world around them changes, that's, that's gonna be really important for their careers. And I think it's really important, by the way, for our university and for our faculty and staff too. Uh, you know, the world is changing fast. Generative AI is one simple example, but lots of other examples of how the world around us is shifting. And, uh, all of us are gonna be needing to be innovative and reinvent what we're doing and solve problems in, in new ways. And so these tools that you and I teach in this whole field of entrepreneurship is really all about that. It's really at the largest, highest level. It's around identifying a problem and solving it in a sustainable way. And all the tools and techniques and best practices and case studies that we teach and support and the events we, we host and the, uh, meetings we held hold. It's all really around that fundamental concept. And what I'm excited about right now at the University of South Carolina is just the fact that the administration is so much on board with that across the board. It's really an exciting time to be here.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([08:42](#)):

The, uh, I want, well, I wanna come back to the leadership conversation too, because certainly our new dean at the business school, Dean Verma, has been really supportive of all the entrepreneurial things that we're out there doing. We're going to Lake City for this Maymester two week class. He's like, how can I support that? The Faber Center, uh, the Proving Ground being part of this IB 50 celebration on Friday. Like, all these things that are really supportive of what we're trying to do in terms of building that skillset. I love that you said it's like the second layer up, because that first one being "I'm in school to learn about a particular thing." It's accounting, it's marketing, it's management, and then I'm going to get the skills that are expected out of those majors, but then how do I apply those skills in sort of a bigger, grander critical thinking kind of way? And entrepreneurship provides that piece, which I think is really exciting. You, we talked about the harmonizing meetings, which is you kind of bringing together all these people who are moving in their own kind of entrepreneurial circles into one circle to be working there. What are some of the other initiatives that the McNair Institute has put into the university community to try to foster that entrepreneurial spirit?

Dr. Dirk Brown ([09:45](#)):

Yeah, great question. And, uh, but we need a lot more time for me to answer that properly. But, uh, let me resonate with one of the things you just talked about with, um, the dean of the Dean Verma at the business school and, and the administration. Just to get off that topic, one more point. Uh, and that is that as we look at the, um, as we look at the landscape for students right now, historically universities have been trying to get them their first job, really. Right? So let's get, let's get them a job and get them, get them going in their career. But I think more and more we have to play a stronger role in, in setting them up for a brilliant career. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And I think that's what you and I are doing and many others are doing with this, these entrepreneurial initiatives.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([10:23](#)):

And so some of those that we're doing at the McNair Institute are around connecting students with more experiential learning opportunities. So you and I have collaborated, as you know, on, um, connecting students to startups. And so we're doing a lot of work around how do we get students either through their classroom projects or even through internships or more formal, uh, engagements, how do we get them some real world experience so they can apply the theoretical frameworks that they're getting in the classroom to a real, real world experience before they graduate? Right? Right, right. Um, so we're doing a lot of work in that area. We're also doing a lot of work in trying to connect the university with the community. So we've been doing a lot of, you know, our historical efforts have been around trying to get tighter communication alignment and collaboration between the schools and colleges, and then between the, the various campuses. Uh, and now it's sort of with the broader community, and there are a lot of great community organizations that are, uh, really doing great work across the state. So how do we as a University of South Carolina have a stronger, and, and in some ways more authentic collaboration with them? Which what I mean by that is we collaborate with them, not not looking to get something from them, but to help serve the state, which is our job as a flagship university of the state. Obviously.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([11:37](#)):

We have a great opportunity with the Boyd Foundation here in Columbia. Um, they operate outta five points. And we mentioned Caroline Crowder on our very first episode. I hope to have her here eventually too. She's a Carolina alum, a Moore School alum, um, somebody who worked in our incubator here. And we've, we, so we're seeing that some of our graduates, Sean Powers is another one who graduated out of this, uh, sort of very early stage entrepreneurial conversation at the Moore

School, either through the Faber Center or through McNair, and is now they're coming back around to like, help build the ecosystem here in Columbia. And the Inner Campus Alliance as an extension of that is looking at these other campuses, what they're doing and how they're encouraging entrepreneurship in their local communities. And so we had this great opportunity last week to go down to Hilton Head and spend time.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([12:21](#)):

I gotta tell you, Thursday was my favorite part. <laugh> of the, I mean, Friday was great. We had a lot of, we had good meetings, we had good conversation talking about planning and that sort of thing. But on Thursday, our hosts at the USC campus of it's USC Beaufort, but it's the Hilton Head campus, and they're focused on hospitality. They took us to three businesses and helped us spend time with the entrepreneurs themselves. One of them, Andrew from Hudson's, which is a Creekside seafood restaurant. Great. And he talked about how he owned his supply chain in oysters and shrimp and crabs, and he had these big tanks where they're letting the soft shell crabs get ready to shed their shells. And we watched these crabs fight their way outta their shells, and he picked 'em up and let us squish their backs and all that. Like, it was, it was wild, but it was super cool. And, uh, it was just a great experience to, to watch this person give this whole kind of beginning to the end, um, this is where we are, this is what we're doing, and this is why we're thriving, kind of conversation.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([13:17](#)):

Yeah. No, it was great. I, I, and, and we need to be doing more of that. I think, uh, as faculty and staff, we really need to understand that part of our role as service to the state. And, um, so, you know, you talked about Caroline Crowder and Sean Powers, they're great examples of two individuals who've really made a difference coming back and supporting the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Uh, and they are two among, among many dozens of examples that they're similar to that. And one of the exciting things to me is that now is that is the appetite for not just the schools and colleges to collaborate within a campus, but the campuses to collaborate. The, the, the biggest thing I got out about the, the biggest thing I got out of our trip last week was just the enthusiasm of the Hilton Head community and the Beaufort, uh, campuses and the Hilton Head campus to, um, really tie into the rest of the campuses across the entire state.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([14:13](#)):

Right. And great stuff comes outta that. So you asked earlier what types of things we're doing at the McNair Institute. So one of them is to try and create a support network for entrepreneurs across the state. We have an online tool that we've been using called Startup Wind to do that. And the idea there is to have these new ventures, or even established companies like, you know, many of them are, um, small business companies. How do we get them help from the University of South Carolina, whatever that help might be. Right? It might be, uh, helping them think through their business model canvas. It might be helping them, uh, look at fundraising financing opportunities. It might be getting them student internship support, uh, marketing support, uh, finance support. So how does the University of South Carolina help small businesses and, and, uh, new ventures in the state of South Carolina? And so putting in place an infrastructure where we can tap very quickly tap into the USC resources across the entire state as a, as a powerful tool to help the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem, uh, develop.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([15:12](#)):

And let those business owners know that that's the case. I mean, we're here at the 100.7, the Point office, which is a, a studio a a live radio station here in Columbia that's all local. They support all local businesses, all the advertisers or local businesses. And to think about being able to offer support at the university for all of these businesses. And it could be something like you mentioned, some of these smaller little projects that we have in our, uh, at our Management 479 class is a consulting class, and we, it's part of our entrepreneurship sequence for the concentration of entrepreneurship in the management major. And what we have there is four classes in a row, and the fourth one is consulting. And in this last class, students work with real entrepreneurs who are out in the world doing the thing. They're building their business, they're looking for customers, they're changing their products over, they're trying to test different markets.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([16:00](#)):

They're all these different ideas that they have, and they just need maybe a little bit of extra help sometimes. And so our students come in, they work on all kinds of cool things. We had one project this semester with Circular Farm, which is a mushroom growing entity, uh, an organization. And they were, they're kind of going in five different directions as a lot of entrepreneurs do, where they're like, we have these cool mushrooms and this process to grow these cool mushrooms. How should we get this out into the world? And so my students are making some recommendations and then following the research along the path, like, if you went in this direction, here's what it would look like if you went in that direction. Here's what it would look like. And then presenting those options to the entrepreneur in a way that, that business owner doesn't necessarily have that ability to do it because they're so busy selling stuff, right. I'm just trying to make this thing work. And they're like, you know, riding the pedals as hard as they can. So you get the students that can come in and look in from the outside and make some recommendations. And that's their business school education. Yep. Being applied in a real world context and making a real impact on a specific business. And they're so proud of the experience that they have, they're so proud of the difference they're able to make for these business owners that it's just a win all around.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([17:05](#)):

Yeah. I I, I, I totally agree with that. The, what's interesting, what you just talked about, it, it spans both extremes of the kinds of things that we do as an Institute, and I think as you do as a Center as well. So on the economic development side, uh, you know, we all both work closely with the Department of Commerce, their Relentless Challenge program, and we also work closely with the Office of Economic Engagement now under new leadership with, uh, Steven Cutler, who's, who's a great leader for that organization. Uh, Chad Hardaway is working there as well. And so their, their focus is really on how do we build the knowledge economy in the state of South Carolina? How do we build economic development in the state of South Carolina on the opposite end? Uh, you know, we do a lot of traditional curriculum development. And so we have the, the entrepreneurship minor that we stood up a couple of years ago, which now has, Kasie, over 140 students come from across 36 different, I

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([17:52](#)):

Can't brag enough about the entrepreneurship minor. I want you to tell, like, give more details about this, about standing this up. How many students are engaged with it now? Yeah,

Dr. Dirk Brown ([17:59](#)):

It's about 140 students. But, um, but we've done very little marketing. It's just, it's just, there's a strong demand for it. And, uh, the thing that's more impressive to me is, is from 36 different academic pathways. This is not business students. This is, we have a dance major in there. We've got biology majors, we've got arts majors. So what's exciting to me is we have, and by the way, the point I was gonna make earlier, earlier is why is that, uh, entrepreneurship minor so compelling to these students? Because we have courses from all the different schools and colleges, they can sort of make their own minor that's relevant and engaging for them and accessible to them. They, they sort of can take their background now. They, they can't get outta that minor without a pretty deep understanding of entrepreneurship, as you very well know. Right.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([18:42](#)):

But a big part of what makes it compelling, I think, is the fact that we're doing a lot of this experiential learning back with, you know, real companies in the state of South Carolina. So you've got a more fundamental, a better fundamental education because you're doing economic development activities, right? So the, it's all the, the one hand feeding the other. And I think we've done a great job as a, as a group of us in the entrepreneurship network here at the University of South Carolina, of, of recognizing that and sort of planning it out holistically in that way.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([19:11](#)):

I think we were, uh, and I say we, I didn't show up till 2017, but I think we were a little bit ahead of it, because I think this push has really been a post-Covid push. And what I mean by that is, students that we have now that were in high school during Covid, things got shut down. Things got locked down. People lost their jobs, people lost their businesses. There was so much instability because of Covid that I think our students are hungry for some autonomy. They wanna have some control of their own destiny. And they see entrepreneurship, some of them see entrepreneurship as a way to be able to do that, even if it's not a full-time entrepreneurial thing. And you mentioned this a little earlier as far as the metrics, right? So metrics for business schools are very, very important. And one of the most important metrics has always been job placement.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([19:56](#)):

So as our students graduate, what kinds of jobs are they getting? What percentage of them are getting jobs? And then what are the degree programs? And what is the starting salary for those jobs? And we're really tied to those metrics. It's part of what made us one of the top business schools in the nation, and that's awesome, but entrepreneurship doesn't necessarily fill that, right? Like, if you go out and start your own business, you don't really hit that, you know, really high starting salary. And so this is data we don't want in the dataset, right? We don't want these people that are out there that are like living at home with mom and dad and not clearing, you know, \$10,000 this year because they're trying to get something up and going. And I understand that from an administrative perspective. I get it. Like, you don't want that data in the dataset.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([20:35](#)):

But the same time, if you can give these students a chance to see how they can build it on the side, go ahead, get your full-time. And I tell my students this all the time, go get your full-time gig. Go work for somebody else. Learn all the really painful lessons of business with somebody else paying you to do it. That's like the proper way to do this, right? But in the meantime, side hustle your little heart out, you know what I mean? <laugh>, like, build the thing you can do on nights and weekends that maybe

eventually will be your business, or it might fail, right? You might do it for a couple years and get rid of it, do something else. So I think they have such a capacity and such a hunger for this, partly because of their covid experience. And, and I think the McNair Institute by building this harmonizing piece, recognizing what was happening all over the, the campus putting together the campus-wide minor was ready to, to soak these students in when they came to campus, and they wanted something more than the traditional college experience.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([21:30](#)):

So I should have anticipated that this would not be an easy conversation with you, this <laugh>. So, um, you just went straight for the jugular on that one and, um, really opened up some wounds. But you're absolutely right in that business schools get measured by metrics like job placement rates and starting salaries. And you're absolutely right that if you, if your best students then go start their own companies, um, we, we count those metrics in very archaic ways, right? In my opinion. In fact, I had one argument, um, where I said, well, how about a 300% job placement rate? And, and <laugh> I was talking to, I won't say who, I was talking to somebody and they said, well, what do you mean that's impossible? I said, no, it's not. An entrepreneur goes and gives himself a job and hires two more people, right? Right. So, uh, you just have to sort of think about it in the context of a bigger picture than our traditional metrics measure. But it's worse than just neutral. It's actually, as you pointed out, if, if your best and brightest students leave and start companies and they can drag down your metrics as opposed to enhancing them. But I think part of it is semantics, Casey, I think, you know, when we say entrepreneurship, people assume it's gonna be two people in a garage with a dog hacking code and trying build

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([22:36](#)):

The old HP story,

Dr. Dirk Brown ([22:37](#)):

Right? Um, yes. Thank you for catching the analogy, <laugh>. Uh, but really what we're teaching is, uh, problem solving in a way that leads to sustainable advantages, leveraging innovation and creativity. It's, it's, it, uh, the word entrepreneurship is a bit of a loaded word, and I'll tell you this. I tell 'em, I tell everybody this. Our students will be entrepreneurs whether they want to be or not, no matter what field they go into. Because the broader way of thinking about entrepreneurship and what you and I both teach and, and, and, um, practice is just leveraging. We have all these tools to help you leverage innovative, creative problem solving to add sustainable value to your organization. That can be done at IBM, that can be done at Boeing, that can be done in Michelin, or it can be done in a startup. And it's the same tools as you very well know.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([23:24](#)):

So it's really back to this idea of acknowledging that the world is a rapidly changing place now, and it's not enough to educate our students around how do you do marketing and how do you do, uh, or how do you do accounting? Or how do you do finance? Or how do you do hr? We also have to provide them the tools that will enable, enable them to leverage that domain expertise in a very dynamic environment and leverage their innovation and, and creativity to, um, problem solve in that environment. Otherwise, quite frankly, they'll just be replaced by an algorithm or a robot. There's no need for human being in any job moving forward unless they're leveraging the inherent human traits of creativity and innovation to solve problems.



Dr. Kasie Whitener (24:07):

I like where you're going with this, because it reminds me of the chart that you showed us at the meeting on Friday in Hilton Head, which was net new job creation. And when we look at companies that are 10 years or more, 10 years older, more, they're, they're not creating net new jobs because they are going through layoffs, and then they add jobs back, and then they go through layoffs, they add jobs back. And we're seeing that in our tech companies right now. But the net new job creation comes from new businesses that are out there. And what's interesting to me about that, and why I think this connects so tightly with our Gen Z folks that are currently, you know, having come off covid and then gone to college, is that they recognize that they want to be socially relevant, meaning that they wanna make a difference in the world.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (24:50):

And I tell people all the time, if you're studying entrepreneurship at our university, it's because you believe that changing the world can happen through business. That business is a tool to be able to do that, to enact good things on the planet. And our students, I gotta tell you, so we had, um, <laugh>, we had Jason Scalzo from, um, Revyrie come and speak to my class. And Revyrie is an incubator. It's a startup, an online, um, startup mentoring kind of scenario. They're really cool. They're gonna be at the thing on Friday. They're one of our judges. And Jason was asking all my students what the projects were that they were working on this semester. And to-a-one, these projects are social impact projects. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, they wanna help little kids to gamify mental health. They wanna help college athletes to find an easier way to put their, uh, their recruiting videos out there.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (25:37):

They wanna help elderly people have a more active lifestyle in their assisted living facilities. Like these are the, the projects they're coming up with, these are the groups they're wanting to impact. It's everybody around them that they wanna make life a better, better for them, and they want to use business to do it. And that, I feel like is a cultural value that comes from McNair, comes from Faber, comes from us building out this entrepreneurial piece. I don't wanna like pat ourselves on that. I mean, this doesn't need to be a full 40 minutes of us talking about what a great job we're doing here, other than to say that I think we're not alone. When you go to a national events like you USASBE and you, uh, spend time with all these other entrepreneur professors that are teaching all over the nation, really all over the world, they have that same sense of like, things need to be fixed. And the way to fix it is to figure out how the entrepreneurs can solve the problems, right? How they can step forward and, and get engaged.

Dr. Dirk Brown (26:31):

Yeah, I totally agree with that. And that's, that's not just at the University of South Carolina. That's everywhere across the country. And in fact, it's really a global phenomenon. The other thing that's interesting is as you look at the world evolving, so now it's just thinking of the, at the global landscape. Um, you know, I sit in the international business department for a reason, and one of the, my areas of passion is global entrepreneurship. And how is it that, you know, even early stage companies sitting here in Columbia, South Carolina are, are really operating on a global landscape. If you look at their IT infrastructure, if you look at their supply chain, uh, they can very quickly go to, uh, foreign markets in most cases very quickly, uh, much more quickly than they could in the past. So, um, I think, I think if you look at what's happening in the world today, it's things are changing very fast, but also things are coming together very quickly.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([27:18](#)):

So the just, we've been trying to harmonize what's going on on, on our campus and between our campuses in South Carolina, you're seeing a lot of that sort of same trend, I think, uh, internationally and we're able to solve, we should be able to solve global problems much more quickly than we have in the past. Um, I haven't seen a whole lot of that recently, Kasie, but we're, we're, I think we're getting there. And if you look at the appetite for folks that do what we do, I think you're seeing that that appetite that you described, and, and I think, I think we have the tools now and the infrastructure to move faster in that regard.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([27:50](#)):

Well, so there's the phrase, right? Legacy is planting seeds in a garden you'll never get to see. And I think of that right now, I think of these students in their twenties getting this experience, getting this access to working with small businesses, seeing the impact they have on their local economy, and then thinking about how they can solve these really big problems using this entrepreneurial skillset, using businesses itself, right? And then I go, okay, this might not be the thing that I'm doing. I'm not going to necessarily solve these problems, but I might be planting the seeds in these students who 10 years, 15 years into their career, they're gonna be taking on these really big problems. So I'm not, I don't feel a sense of urgency necessarily. Not, certainly not the urgency that my students feel. And maybe Covid accelerated that too. Like there's, they have a real sense of urgency. They wanna start earning, they wanna start contributing, they wanna start having an impact immediately. And some of that maybe is, um, amplified by social media and what they can see of people that are just five or six years ahead of them that are having these really incredible impacts. Right. Um, but some of it too is I think just this generation wanting things as fast as they can possibly get them.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([28:56](#)):

Oh, I totally agree. And, and also back to this idea of, you know, how does entrepreneurship contribute to the educational experience of our students, and therefore to their jobs and their careers? I, I think it provides them, uh, some confidence and therefore some courage to really push the limits of their field at an earlier stage than they would've been able to historically. 'cause what we're teaching them is how to think outta the box and try and look at how to solve, not do things the same way they've been done forever, because frankly, just get a robot or an algorithm if you wanna do that, but look at things as they are and how they might be changed to accommodate this drastically changing world that we're seeing. So, um, I do think that the role that entrepreneurship plays in education, the, the way you and I have defined it today is huge.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([29:42](#)):

Yeah. Never has that been more clear to me than we had our business expo. And I went around asking all the different recruiters that were there, and the business expo is a hiring event that happens twice a year at the Moore School. And so I went asking the recruiters, would you hire a student that had entrepreneurship as their minor or as their concentration in the management department? And, and there was a variety of responses, but one of them really stuck out to me as a very old, very big firm operating in, uh, an industry that is just not all that dynamic. And she said, no, we would not hire somebody with entrepreneurship. And she said, because they tend to be frustrated by the bureaucratic nature of our organization. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, they tend to feel like they can't enact change fast enough that they can't be innovative in our space.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (30:28):

She said, and that's just the nature of our company, is that we are a large, old bureaucratic organization with lots of rules and we're not the right place for an entrepreneur. And I thought, isn't that interesting? Like, number one, kudos to you for being like super aware that that's the culture in your company. But then the other part of it being like, okay, great. So could we figure out early on which of these students is gonna thrive in a bureaucratic, you know, very, uh, structured environment and, and do very well in that environment? And then who really wants someplace that's gonna be fluid and dynamic and is gonna give them an opportunity to, to like, as you said, push these limits, push these expectations and say, I know it's always been done that way, but what if we tried it this way instead, or we're being enabled in this way or that way instead. Um, it's, I think on Friday we're gonna see an opportunity with our international business 50 year celebration, all these different changes through the years as international business has changed. And our, our role in that space has changed. But then two, add the entrepreneurial component for the second half of the day with these Groving ground students getting up there and pitching their ideas and say, okay, well what's, what does the future really look like for the Moore School?

Dr. Dirk Brown (31:38):

Yeah. It's interesting. I I, I'll, let me react to that comment you just made because, um, you know, one, one piece of data I recommend everyone go look at is the turnover of Fortune 500 companies over the last few decades. It's accelerating. And about half of the Fortune 500 companies, you know, are no longer that were there a decade ago, are no longer on that list. They've either been acquired or ceased to exist, and they're being replaced by these fast-growing younger companies. And the ones that are still there and have thrived, uh, companies like IBM is a good example. Uh, they've embraced this idea that a large company does need systems and processes. Uh, the University of South Carolina is another great place. You can't just, we, we would just destroy, destroy ourselves if we decided we could go off and create, you know, um, curricula and, and, and, and, and any professor that wanted to teach any course could just go teach it, right? I mean,

Dr. Kasie Whitener (32:28):

The rules are there for a reason.

Dr. Dirk Brown (32:29):

The rules are there for a reason, for sure. Uh, but the, the, the larger organizations that thrive are ones that recognize that also the world is changing dramatically. And we need to understand how we are going to, um, adapt and evolve. And, uh, IBM's a great example. They were a, when you and I were growing up, they were a big iron. They were sort of the big server company. Now they're essentially a, a consulting firm. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, uh, but they did that in a very mindful and strategic way that accommodated the, the scale of a hundred billion dollar company, right? So I think, I think that, um, you can have both. I don't think entrepreneurship is limited to small, uh, fast growing companies. I think it's, I think it's a necessary component of any company today, I would argue.

Dr. Kasie Whitener (33:14):

I think I like that approach. I'm not as convinced that that's, uh, that that's the mentality inside those companies. Um, and as I've mentioned, the recruiter having that, you know, perspective of her particular company, and I'm wondering what the leadership will look like. I mean, is it that we send students in there to become managers and, uh, or supervisors and managers and eventually executives,

and you see those companies change over time? Or is it that, you know, some new CEO comes in and just says, we're changing everything <laugh>, we're, we're, we're flipping the ship.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([33:45](#)):

So I, most of my career was in Silicon Valley, as you know. And so I lived that, that whole, uh, I lived through two bubbles in Silicon Valley, but great times. Uh, but one of, one of the techniques I saw large, well-established, you know, company like semiconductor companies or software companies utilize, is they would take those mavericks, those entrepreneurial folks that they knew they needed, and they would just leverage them in a way that made sense. So they wouldn't put them in positions of, you know, running the factory, for example, and having them change the settings of every piece of equipment every day, right. Just to sort of play what's, what's going on. So there are personality types that are more, well, better suited towards sustaining very rigorous processes and systems that you just don't wanna be messing around with. But the, the successful companies have found ways to drive in these agents of change, these teams. And sometimes actually Kasie, I've seen them isolate them in whole different buildings, like, do not, do not contaminate our factory. Right? Go, go over there. Um, and, and in many ways we've done that, done a good job of that. I think at the university, I think we've done a good job of sort of embedding innovation and, um, and understanding how to make our student experience more rich, more compelling, while also maintaining the necessary rigor of an accredited institution.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([35:00](#)):

I was about to ask you. So, okay, so now take that Silicon Valley, the, this kind of company metaphor that we're talking about here and apply it to what we've got at the university, specifically in the business school. So we do have our traditional disciplines, we have accounting, we have some of these classes that are fundamental business education stuff. You've got to know this. If you're going to come out with a business degree, we expect that you have knowledge in these particular areas. And then there's places where things get exciting and dynamic in things like sustainability and, uh, and entrepreneurship and marketing. Like these kinds of, I hate to call them buzzwords, but like, what's the trend that's out there right now? What's the thing that companies are paying attention to that they want our students to be aware of when they come out of the door, you know, and they're ready to be hired. Okay, well, what do you know about these things that maybe the people who've been working for all these years don't necessarily know about this or that? And so I think, um, AI is probably the, the best example of that. How do we bring those kinds of things into the classroom to enhance their experience, but also give them the knowledge that the potential companies that might hire them are looking for as well?

Dr. Dirk Brown ([36:04](#)):

Yeah. Um, well first of all, I think Dean Verma has great vision in this. And I think the whole leadership, uh, of the Moore School has great leader, great, great sort of vision here and a deep understanding of how it works. I mean, if you look at the institutions that our leadership have come from and, and the successes that they've had, there have been, it's been really, um, impressive. And so, uh, I'm quite confident that, um, the Moore School, but I think the entire University of South Carolina as well, uh, is managing this very well in a very dynamic environment. I mean, just think about now versus 10 years ago, it's completely different. Um, I would say that one thing I've seen work very well is these Centers. So the Faber is sort of, it's, again, you sort of keep the centers as that place where you can be innovative and do stuff that's cutting edge without, and isolate that a little bit from the more fundamental curriculum development and the, and the committee type of work that, right, that faculty and staff need to do to make sure we have rigor in our programming.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([37:00](#)):

And so I think the Centers is a great place to do it. I think, um, a tighter connectivity with other organizations I've seen evolve. So you mentioned earlier GrowCo, you've got SoCo, you've got SCRA, we've got Department of Commerce, I'm sure now, now I've started listing them. I've forgotten somebody on the list. SBDC is another one. Um, and we also have, by the way, the other institutions around the state and the other organizations, um, you know, up in, up in the, um, upstate and down in low country and on the coast. So I think the Moore School, this is, this podcast is a good, great example of the Moore School tightening up connectivity with the state ecosystem is another way to kind of drive that, um, fresh energy that the, the, the necessary changes, um, into the, into the university without sort of breaking the core of the system, which really needs to maintain its rigor.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([37:54](#)):

Yeah, I think you're exactly right on that. Um, and then now we're at that part of the podcast where we just keep agreeing with each other and like patting each other on the back for what a great job we're doing at the university. Um, but it's meant to be less about that and more to be about we're we're moving in the right direction. We've got, I think, the right people at the helm. I think we've got the right people rowing, and I think we're, people are starting to see the vision for how the university can position itself to be relevant, to stay relevant, and then also to help our students have, uh, an experience that really is the very best experience they can get through our state university, through the flagship here at Columbia, but also through our affiliates across the state. So back to our inner Campus Alliance conversation. Yeah. Because we did spend some time with USC Bufort down at the Hilton Head campus. We're looking to, in the fall, go spend some time with USC Aiken. I just did an entrepreneurial event with USC Aiken back in the spring. We are already starting to create some of those connections between the faculty. What is your vision for how those connections get created for the students and how the students might be able to benefit?

Dr. Dirk Brown ([38:55](#)):

Yeah, there's two ways. So the, at the highest level, uh, the way we thinking about, the way we're thinking about it is strengthening communication. So that means making the, if the students want access or want to communicate with anybody in the state, whatever your journey is, we, we, we are here to help you communicate and then strengthen alignment between the various, um, campuses, the various schools and colleges. And what I mean by that is just don't step on each other's toes. Like, um, you know, one of the things I've seen that's been great, uh, is just folks who want to do the same type of work. Historically, they would sort of go off and do the same type of work independently, and just, there'd be a lot of overlap without a lot of synergy. And so I guess the word alignment, I could replace with the word synergy, just sort of make sure that, um, that if you're doing something and I wanna do the same thing, maybe I should just help you do your thing, or maybe I can do something a little bit different.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([39:49](#)):

And then the, the third part of it is this collaboration between, so at our level, at the faculty and staff level and the administrative level, but then also driving that down to the student experience. And so the students get a firsthand view of, um, getting, getting, uh, communication, communicating with entrepreneurs with potential investors, both in the state, but even outside the state. And in the IB department. We're connecting students with folks in Brazil and China and, and Africa, right? Um, and

then getting those students, uh, a real world experiential collaboration of some kind with those stakeholders across the state, and frankly, across the country and around the world.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([40:31](#)):

We open our campus up, we bring additional people in, uh, we share our students and share our resources. And I think that's going to create a much stronger experience for the students that come through. It also creates a stronger experience for the faculty that come through. And ultimately, all of that has impact on the state. So it's just a really great opportunity, McNair Institute for Free Enterprise and entrepreneurship leading this kind of inner campus alliance model in specifically the discipline of entrepreneurship. But it's not to be the only way we connect all these campuses, it's sort of to be like the first way and then show other disciplines and other, uh, organizations, Hey, this is how we were able to do it, and oh, by the way, we would be glad to support you as you guys start connecting across other disciplines as well.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([41:16](#)):

Yeah, that's a really important point. So, um, I, uh, I think the only way this scales is a decentralized model. So I, I think that, you know, one point of contact is efficient, but um, it needs to be multiple nodes contacting multiple nodes, and we just, and so the way we've been thinking about this, Kasie, is an infrastructure to enable that. And we think about that in both, uh, virtual terms, so online infrastructure as well as, um, in person. And so one of the things that we've done recently, as you know, is we've started this idea of going to the various campuses and having the various campuses visit one another. Uh, and that's been great because it's really hard to replace seeing in person the entrepreneurs at work, seeing the, the, um, uh, the NGOs at work in the, in the place that you're at, the, uh, but then the, the way it really scales, I think, is you take that human interaction and you supplement it with an online systems and processes that allow us to scale this.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([42:14](#)):

And, and we've been working on that as you know, um, for a while now. And it, and it's starting to get some real traction. So startup wind is one tool we use to help companies, real companies grow, uh, in collaboration with a lot of other folks in the state that are doing the same type of works without sort of replicating what they're already doing, but just providing a, a tighter connection and, and collaboration with them. And then, um, you know, some more centralized communication efforts around what's going on so that we're not, you know, the simplest example is you and I have done been in here multiple times where you're hosting an event and I'm hosting an event on the same night, exact same day. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, and, and I would say you and I are probably more coordinated than almost anybody else in the state. We're

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([42:54](#)):

Gonna fix it though. We're gonna get a universal calendar at some point.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([42:56](#)):

We we're on that. We're on that. Yeah. And, and, and there's been some great examples of that working and some unfortunate examples of that not working. And I think we, it works is when the community owns it and can sustain it together, where, where, where it tends to fall short is when you have bottlenecks to that. So we're, we, we can talk more about that. That's probably a whole nother discussion as well.

Dr. Kasie Whitener ([43:14](#)):

Well, I think we just have an entire episode on decentralization and the value thereof. So thank you so much, Dr. Dirk Brown from the McNair Institute of Free Enterprise and entrepreneurship at the University of South Carolina for being part of the Moore School podcast. I'm Kasie Whitener. I've been your host for this episode. If you learn more then you know more, and if you know more then you do more, thanks for listening.

Dr. Dirk Brown ([43:34](#)):

Great. Thank.