**Interview with Prof. Patrice Buzzanell on International Collaboration**

Transcribed by Lin (Julie) Zhu

***Meina:*** *Hello everyone! Welcome back to the second half of the 5th WeChat Brownbag Panel Discussion on International Collaboration. I am Meina Liu from George Washington University, and I’ll be hosting this session today.*

*As we cross national boundaries when seeking international collaboration, it is helpful to get diverse perspectives from both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars experienced in international collaboration. Following the wonderful discussions joined by several Chinese scholars, we are very honored to have Professor Patrice Buzzanell with us today.*

*Patrice is not only one of the most productive/esteemed scholars in the Communication discipline (an ICA fellow and NCA distinguished scholar, with 4 edited books, over 200 articles/chapters, and 25 top paper/outstanding publication awards), an outstanding teacher and mentor (with 30 awards for teaching/mentorship, including the most prestigious ICA B. Aubrey Fisher Outstanding Mentorship Award), a dedicated leader and administrator (department chair, center director, past president of ICA, OSCLG, and Council of Communication Associations, and member on many NCA and ICA boards), but also has had extensive experience in international collaboration with universities both in China and in Europe. We are very fortunate to have Patrice as our first non-Chinese guest speaker for the WeChat panel discussion series.*

**Patrice:** Thank you so much for welcoming me. I am just truly excited about being here.

***Meina:*** *So are we, Patrice! Here is Question No. 1: Can you share some experience in forging international collaborations with counterparts in China and/or in Europe, whether at the individual level or at the organizational/institutional level?*

**Patrice:** This is really a great question. I have a number of experiences I can talk about so I’ll just break this answer up a little bit. In terms of forging relationships, just some experiences and how they took place. At least for me and perhaps for my colleagues in China and other parts the world a lot of it is about building relationships. So I’ll talk specifically about building relationships in China and then I’ll also talk about building relationships at Copenhagen business school.

So with regards to China, the relationship that I have with Shanghai Jiaotong is right now I am an endowed visiting professor with Jiaotong at the School of Media and Design. We can, because I met some people and we have great conversations and a lot of things in common. And then as I became ICA president and also was planning conferences and doing a lot of things with internationalization agenda. Then it became helpful to both parties to connect on a professional level. What I mean by that is that for me, being able to be involved in the co-sponsorship for regional conferences, pre-conferences, the most recent post conference and so on with Shanghai Jiaotong was really exciting.

The other part of it though, besides my excitement about being able to partner and being helpful to our colleagues around the world and especially in China, was I think it was also helpful to them. Because to be able to connect with this international Association certainly helps reputation, and it helps our colleagues in different parts of the world (e.g., China, United States) develop the collaborations. Without being able to make those personal connections, and build trust, and be able to work through some of the challenges and opportunities, I don’t think it would’ve been as successful. I would say that the kinds of interconnections that we’ve made, our workshops at different universities, visiting scholars from China to the United States, as well as these conferences, really worked up well.

So I’d also like to talk about Copenhagen business school. Here it was something similar to the other collaborations that I’ve started. It was a visit, it was building relationships, getting to know people, expressing interest in different aspects, lots of questions, lots of opportunities to know each other professionally as well as personally. And when I went to Copenhagen I’d asked the different administrators I’m at a particular department chair, “would you be interested in a graduate exchange, or faculty exchange” At that point in time she said no, but several months later, about six months later, it became a strategic initiative to develop international collaborations. And all of a sudden all of the groundwork that we both have been doing seemed really really important. So it’s a continuing graduate exchange program.

***Meina:*** *Here is question number two: what opportunities and challenges may exist for American scholars and/or academic departments to collaborate with Chinese counterparts? What advice would you give them for seeking such opportunities or handling these challenges?*

**Patrice:** I guess one of the things I’d like to start with is with regard to both opportunities and challenges. One of the key resources that we have are our associations and our institutions, in terms of long-term collaborations, memorandums, understanding, as well as affiliations. And being able to leverage those specific kinds of, in some cases contracts, in some cases understanding and relationships really really does help with all of these. So for example, right now there’s an initiative with ICA to be able work with people who are in different parts of Africa, with a conference coming up in Ghana right around the time of NCA in November.

So keeping that in mind, some of the opportunities, I think, that the biggest opportunity is the co-learning opportunity. I mean the ability to learn somewhat the insider’s perspective on different issues, on phenomena that we are studying, perhaps jointly studying. The idea to get a glimpse into what life would be like, you know, sometimes just down the street, because you just don’t know what other people’s lives are like, or across the world from where you live. It’s just such an incredibly exciting opportunity. It amazes me that there are people who wouldn’t be interested in learning these kinds of things. And this is where I think returning back to my first question: relationships and this co-learning takes time, and then I’ll move on to other opportunities.

So another opportunity, which I don’t focus on at first but clearly is part of all of this - another opportunity has to do with different professional opportunities. And here being able to obtain grants with people in different disciplines, in different countries and so on with different interests certainly would be key in terms of an opportunity. I didn’t realize until I saw in one of our metrics here at the University South Florida that there is a huge advantage to publishing with our international colleagues, in terms of citations and interests, interests but different people have with regard to the kinds of publications that you’re doing. And that would make a lot of sense to me, so in terms of those kind of professional activities, clearly there are opportunities.

I’ll switch right now to challenges. There’re certainly other opportunities that I could bring up as well. But the first challenge is one that we all know, that’s the challenge of language, and the challenge of even though you are speaking, sometimes the same language but not necessarily understanding. I found in that working across disciplines maybe all the people involved are native English speakers, there can be incredible misunderstandings. And then when you bring in colleagues who have different first languages, but also have different disciplinary backgrounds and understandings of methods and theories, and so on, there can be enormous challenges in terms of the kind of work you’re doing. And while I say that’s a challenge it’s also one of the most exciting opportunities we also have.

I think that another challenge has to do with differences and expectations. and so I'll talk about that with regard to the next question that'll be coming up. But just trying to work through what those expectations are. and while I say that that's probably one of the most difficult aspect, I would say that's the most difficult aspect even when you have a personal long-term relationship with somebody. If you think of your personal life, your department and so on, chair to a faculty member or administration to different other administrators, setting up those kinds of expectations in a way where people can save face, understand what they need to do, and work with the ambiguities that are always part of the expectations. The ambiguity is an exciting part of these expectations.

So you asked about advice. I think I would begin with the advice in terms of thinking about how collaborations enrich your work and how they enable you to think and feel and really behave differently. I mean the behavior in an embodied sense -- when you are collaborating with different people, physically you are interacting differently. And it’s exciting because you learn things about yourself, and you learn more about how you might interact and understand communication phenomena differently. so I guess that’ll be the first thing in terms of advice is opening yourself up to these things. In many times when I traveled overseas and in different parts of United States, I’ve not known what to expect. In fact in the next segment I’ll explain one of the things.

So I ended that one a little bit abruptly but thought I’d explain some of things that I didn’t know. So I went to India and when I was in India I was going from xxx to another part of India and they said would you mind doing a 20 minute talk to just a handful of people, not a big deal and on any topic you like, but something business-oriented, because I am an organizational communication scholar as you know. So we traveled to this different university and they let me in to do this 20 minute talk with just a group of students. And it turns out that it was well over 150 people. It was being recorded. There were deans and vice presidents, and there was an opening ceremony where there were flowers. And there were also specific symbolic markings that occurred that have to do with the location.

So here I am. I had no clue, no clue what’s going to happen. so I thought I don’t want to embarrass myself or anybody else. I hope that I am doing what’s doing what is appropriate. I certainly didn’t expect it and wasn’t prepped for this kind of things. I guess I behaved appropriately because nobody said anything afterwards and things seemed to go very very smoothly. It was one of those cases where I just wasn’t sure what’s going to happen, and I think for a great deal of my international experiences, a lot of times especially the first time you really have no clue what’s going to happen. It doesn’t mean that you don’t know like somebody is going to pick you up or you don’t know exactly where you are going to find the person and those kinds of things. You just don’t know what’s going to happen.

With regard to that experience in India, not only was there the opening ceremony and many many more people were very high ranking in that university, but also it wasn't 20 minutes just speaking casually and informally with a group of students. It ended up being a three-hour talk and I’m certainly able to expand on whatever it was that I was going talk about for three hours. But it was a very interesting experiences. So in terms of advice, when you enter a situation and you just have to be comfortable with the fact that there’ll the uncertainties and uncertainties on everybody’s part because especially with the first time you’re at some place or the first time some actions are going to happen. You just don’t know how people are going to

So with regard to advice, the other thing I would want to talk about is when we’ve gone to different parts of the world, and different parts of United States, different meaning, different socioeconomic status, different race and ethnicities, differences in a variety of different ways. What we ended up doing is using what we call contextualized interviewing and transcription. So we conduct our interviews roughly according to our protocols as most people who do the qualitative research would do. We check and double check and triple check all of the different ways in which we make sure that our scales and materials would be culturally appropriate and consistent with what it is we are looking to study. And most times we have collaborators who are members of the specific cultures or location where we are studying.

So what we do with the contextualized interview transcription is we literally go through our interviews and often when somebody is transcribing and work or writing notes next... It’s really transcribing and translating as in a different language but if it’s a different area of the country, we have somebody who’s sitting there and who can explain things to us. So for example, we gatherer data with children in a very low-socioeconomic-status area in the state in which we were doing our research and we also conducted research in an affluent area. There were just things we would not have known about the children and what the children were saying if we don’t have somebody with the children who understood the specific location and culture that they were in, and we were all speaking English.

Likewise, we gathered data in China and again it was with children some of them were about three or four years old and it went up to about 10 years of age, at a couple of different schools. We were really interested in wat they thought about work, about media, in terms representations of occupations, in different groups of people, about their career aspirations and so on. Every now and then they would say something or mention a word, because we were right there with the person who was translating, and working with them, and we were jotting notes aside from the transcripts, we were able to understand that…For example at one point one of the children used a word that the translator went oh that’s an odd word for this child to be using. And then she explained what the word meant and how it is usually used. We would never have gotten that information had we not been there.

So my advice with regard to the opportunities and challenges are: Stay open to all the ambiguities and the uncertainties that are going on. You always have a trusted colleague who can give you some insider information about what might happen, but nobody can predict fully what’s going to happen about different things. I recommend using contextualized interviewing translation, and transcription kind of process. Certainty look at this kind of experience as a co-learning experience that can change your life personally and professionally. You know I’m just so fortunate to have all kinds of friends and colleagues, Meina included who was the one that put together this Wechat group, you know, who have just enlarged and enriched my understanding of life.

(apologizing for possibly repeating) The opportunities and challenges I talked about with regard to enriching work, being able to think differently, professional and personal opportunities have been some of the most amazing and amazing experiences with regards to collaborations. And it has enriched my family, it has enriched my profession, my understanding of my field, my understating of communication, and my ability to question different things. I sincerely hope it’s done the same for my colleagues. It’s amazing. Absolutely amazing.

***Meina:*** *Here is question # 3: many academic departments, research centers, and schools of communication in Chinese Universities receive grants to support international collaboration activities whether at institutional all individual levels.*

1. What advice would you give them for reaching out to American/European scholars and/or academic departments?
2. What are some common challenges they may anticipate? what advice would you give them for collaborating with American scholars and/or academic departments?

**Patrice:** In terms of grants to support activities, first don’t assume that people will not say yes. That’s a double negative, I realize that. I think entering into this assuming that there are lots of scholars who would be very excited about entering into these kinds of opportunities. I am always amazed at our colleagues who you would assume to be incredibly busy, yet when there was an opportunity to connect with different colleagues, or to give back, because they’ve been mentored in a variety of different ways, the extent they would go was … [sound cut off]

What I mean by the extent to which they will go to do things is, let me talk about the ICA initiative in Africa right now. With that initiative, there were a group of people who went for a mentoring session last fall. We were all told when we said that “yeah, we are interested in doing this kind of things” we were told that “you are going to have to pay for your airline ticket, you are going to pay for a variety of things as well as your room, we will host you in terms of meals”. And I think that everyone who was there was willing to give up their time and pay their own expenses to be able to participate in the opportunities to work our colleagues in Africa on developing their research programs, on learning how to write for international offices/outlets.

And so don’t assume that people aren’t willing to do that. There will certainly be researchers or scholars who would say that my university won’t support this, or I don’t have the money or so on. But there are others of us who would say “you know what, this is an opportunity I couldn’t pass up” or this is a career developmental experience, or this is a chance to connect with some folks who wouldn’t might have had the chance to connect with. So don’t assume people at particular levels or from certain universities wouldn’t be interested in working on grants or other kinds of collaborative projects.

So in talking about grants in the U.S. in engineering, I built a relationship with people who have asked me to patriciate in a number of different grants. We ended up doing a variety of different projects on which several of us are PIs and co-PIs on them that have to do with communication and engineering education, designing processes, cultural design issues. I mean issues in terms of opportunities as well as challenges. The most recent NSF grant that, we are finishing one that has to do with the everyday design and communication processes, but the other one has to do with professional formation of engineers, and since I specialized in careers, I’m really interested in this. Most of these grants have to do with ethics, so we put together scales for engineering ethics, we did the development, the construct validation, and so on for these different scales and then moved into some other areas using a variety of other methodologies. so I am talking about grants to support activities, this came about because we knew and trusted each other. We knew what each could bring to the table, and this is long-term development that I still have in Purdue because that’s where my grants are. I’m still working with an internal grant that have to do with diversity and inclusion across. I got this grant right as I was leaving Purdue. I just facilitated the most recent retreat that we had.

So the point is, ask around see who might be interested. Start with the big names if you wanted the big names. And also just gauge the level of interest and the level of commitment. The other thing that I would advise has to do with something that I said earlier, and that is spell out expectations. For example, when I was asked to do Shanghai Jiaotong endowed visiting chair, I got a translation of what my contract might be. The contract, I’m laughing about it now, but it actually is, pretty fun.

So the contract ended up spelling out a number of different things that I didn't really know what was in it because I don't read Chinese and because the translation was only a partial translation of some of the contract. Nobody I knew was going to translate the whole thing. So the partial translation that I got from somebody was that I had to be in Shanghai two months every year. I was going to be given $5 million USD per week I think to work in China. I remember just looking at this translation and laughing out loud. So I knew the translation wasn’t accurate but I also knew that it wasn’t a contract that I have to fulfill every single detail to the letter.

So for instance, the ability to spend two full months in China every year since I began this professorship has never been able to happen. Part of it was because I was moving into an administrative role where I really couldn’t take the two months. And I’m hoping sometime in the future I’ll actually be able to do that so. I understood because of my relationships that there was a wiggle room or leeway with regard to contractual obligations in terms of this. And so that’s something other people might not necessarily understand. So I do fulfil my obligations in terms of helping the school build reputation, going to conferences. I’ve been on the advisory board for the school of Media and Design, making all kinds of connections and so on.

And in following up on that last answer that has to do with the leeway in terms of contractual obligations and my administrative work and so on, I think again helping people understand what their expectations are, different parties’ expectations are, and working through that does a lot in terms of adding some clarity to the situation. For me I am pretty comfortable with the ambiguities that occur whenever I’m involved in a different kind of relationship and the tensions and I mean tensions in a positive sense. But I have also noticed that some of my colleagues, my western colleagues aren’t necessarily as comfortable with those kinds of uncertainties.

And so we've had conversations among the western colleagues about what does this contract actually mean, and what do I do with regard to this facet of this contract and so on. So it's not something necessarily you ask a direct question about and get the direct answer about, but a negotiation process. And depending on who they are and what part of the world or culture they are from or how they worked with different contracts before, this might be a little bit problematic. So spelling out the expectations as much as possible, indicating there might be some leeway with regard to how one fulfills the obligations. And it’s more of how one fulfil them and the responsibilities than it is the exact to the letter part, although that might differ.

So I think maybe on this one with regards to grants to support activities, the last advice is to work with people who have been involved in some capacity with grants, or to work with them in a way in which they can start to understand what would be involved in that particular grant. So if one has not been involved in a grant before it may be difficult to understand the time frames in which things operate, the expectations with regard to when you write up different kinds of reports, and what formats with regard to bios and so on. They certainly differ in whatever context that you're in, so being able to walk people through and have the relationship where you can do that kind of walking through easily really helps.

(Commenting on Meina’s summary: start with big names, stating the level of interest and commitment, spell out expectations, add clarity to this situation). Let me just say start with your aspirational names, but also there maybe somebody who is an emerging scholar or expert in a particular area, and that person may actually the time and the ability to really fully collaborate. Sometimes when you start with people who are at the top of their game, they don’t necessarily have the time to put in the full commitment. Part of what I’ve learned too is I may not be able to fully commit to something, and I’m thinking more about the experiences that I’ve had here in United States with regard to different publishing opportunities and different grant work. But I bring in my colleagues and I bring my students and being able to do that really has enabled all of us to benefit from it very very greatly, so thanks for clarifying it with the summary.

***Meina:*** *Question #4: Can international collaboration happen at the student level? How?*

**Patrice:** Meina, let me begin by saying that these are amazing questions and I really really appreciate this. So as far as the student level goes some of the things we’ve talked about would apply. In working with my engineering design team at Purdue, we were the first EPACS, EPACS is Engineering Project and Community Service, the first engineering design team to go overseas and collaborate. We don’t impose our technology or processes on those we sought as collaborators. It began the same way these other collaborations begin: by making a trip to Ghana, by meeting a variety of different people in different institutions, and then connecting with NSBE, the National Society for Black Engineers. And there was a particular group who was interested in collaborating with us.

So what we did was we ended up working with the Provost of KNUST (XX University for science and technology) and with their particular NSBE group so that we could actually co-design for two rural villages in Ghana that were completely off the grid and had very very little in terms of resources, but have a lot of interesting opportunities for us to work with both KNUST and with the villagers in the two places. So we never did have the opportunity to bring all of our teams completely together in a co-located setting but we were able, through all kinds of different technologies, to be able to develop the relationships that enabled our team to do the kind of work our team members wanted to do and the Ghana team wanted to do.

***Meina:*** *Knowing your amazing abilities to improvise, I’ll throw in a follow-up question right on the spot. You know I’m a negotiation person. Do you recall having to “negotiate” about anything in the process of international collaboration? Any specific story or experience you’ll like to share?*

**Patrice:** What a good question, Meina! In terms of negotiating things on the spot, I think some examples I spoke about earlier about negotiating what I would do, like at the time I was in India, also that happened when I was in Beijing in terms of specific meetings I was involved in, with regard to different kinds of talks, traveling in different places. Just understanding, trying to understand what both parties want from that negotiation and why they may want certain things. I also needed to negotiate access, the project I was referring to for children. We gathered data from 800 children from four countries, and so that required letters of invitation and approval from a variety of different administrators in China.

I’d like to add one more thing to the negotiation. In Ghana we did negotiate a variety of different things and one was we wanted to ensure that whatever we did, honored the institutions and the people we were working with. And so that meant our negotiations we’re not, we’re not solely about what we wanted to do, but really what was it that we could do to benefit them. I think that’s also been in negotiations with regard to ICA and my colleagues as well as, what can we do that will help bring the scholarship of our Chinese colleagues to the forefront and really enrich our theories and our practices.

***Meina:*** *Thanks Patrice! That’s such an important tip, and it so well defines you and what you’ve always taught us! - Perspective taking - not just to focus on how much we can get, but also what we can do for the other party, to make it a win win situation. We naturally gain more trust and nurture good relationships when we practice it. I can’t stress enough how I myself also have benefited from this.*

**Q&A session:**

*Question 1 [Julie Zhu]: Compared with established scholars, what are some specific opportunities and challenges for junior faculty in terms of international collaboration?*

**Patrice:** That’s really an important question. As an established scholar or someone who has already been promoted and tenured, the expectation is that you will go ahead and broaden your research focus, get involved in more innovative projects and engaged scholarship and so on, develop different projects. As a junior scholar, I think that the biggest thing to keep in mind is that you want to make sure that your records are fairly consistent. So starting to build these relationships doesn't take a lot of time but you might not actually act on collaboration until later because they are time consuming.

*Question 2 [Chiaoning Su]: Could you recommend some good platforms to find international collaboration opportunities?*

**Patrice:** What a good question about platforms for international collaboration opportunities! One of them would be the different conferences. So I’ll just take ICA international communication association as an example, pre-conferences, post conferences, different kinds of sessions. So for example there are sessions where you can get feedback on your research projects, and really the expectation is that these are not done projects, but the first drafts of that, so it doesn’t need to be perfect. Making the first connection with people. Going to scholar to scholar, office hours at conferences where you can sit down with anybody who happens to be there at that conference. Also most of our colleagues are very willing to meet with you at conferences. The issues for them might be that their conference schedule is pretty full. So please don't take that as a rejection of you or rejection of the interests that you have, but simply that if there is they are very much involved in their associations, they’re slate in terms of their conference schedule, maybe full before they even get there. So they may not be able to meet with you. So doing those kinds of things are really important. To go back to the earlier question about junior colleagues and collaborations, I think probably the easiest way to do things as a junior colleague is to know what the initiatives are at your university, and particularly in your college and in your department. And if you can align your collaborations with those initiatives, strategic initiatives and give yourself time to build those, that will work well for you.

*Question 3 [Ping Yang]: So what are some challenges for international collaborations in teaching?*

**Patrice:** Some of the challenges with regard to international collaborations in teaching would have to do with the fact that you may, and I know I’ve done this during this WeChat, is you may use examples that your audience doesn’t necessarily understand very well. So having someone who is translating for you, who can go “wait a second, I need to do some more explanation, I need to provide some background” maybe there’s a give-and-take in terms of the interview in the middle of a lesson, that would add clarity to what you’re actually trying to talk about, is really helpful. I know that I’ve done lecture sometimes where I have a friend in the audience in China, and the friend that has come up afterwards and said that they’re not really translating what you mean by certain things on. This person has been an expert and that has been really helpful.

I'll add another thing with regard to the teaching and then I will wait for the next question if there is another one. Even though you think you know what's going to be happening, in terms of the amount of time, the amount of sessions, there's a language difference in terms of what course, class, sessions, and level in terms of what you’re going to be teaching, and where you are going to be teaching where that changes. So what I usually figure is whenever I go in and expecting to do might need to be modified. Whenever I planned to do (so as you noticed that I do speak quickly, and thank you Meina for pointing that out) that I need to slow down, and I need to provide some time for processing, and that I have to build into the lesson. So often I might not get everything done that I want to get done. But hopefully I will get done what I need to get done. So I’m constantly adjusting and I think that's important to keep in mind with regard to teaching. Sometimes I’ll start teaching in an area and found out that I need to provide some examples, and to work through what some of the understandings are. And it’s a great learning experience for everybody to find out about those examples. A case in point and I won’t belabor this one: I was talking about my family and my audience of Chinese undergraduates found out I have six children. I was talking about the dialectics in family negotiations, with children who were getting older. This whole thing was obviously quite different for my Chinese audience, so we went back and forth talking about that.