

Dennis Pitta Interview

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SPEAKERS

Interviewer: Elizabeth Epps

Interviewee: Dennis Pitta

Elizabeth Epps

Hi, this is Elizabeth Epps. It is Thursday, September 22 2022, at approximately 2:10pm in the afternoon. I'm with Professor Dennis Pitta via the online zoom platform. And we are going to begin our oral history interview for the University of Baltimore Stories Series. It's the 100th Anniversary Oral History project. And the purpose of this project is to celebrate the university's Centennial by preserving the memory of those influenced by the University of Baltimore over the years, we will be creating a digital archive and exhibit and making these recordings available online. Good afternoon, Professor Pitta.

Dennis Pitta

Good afternoon, Elizabeth Epps,

Elizabeth Epps

How are you?

Dennis Pitta

I guess you would say I'm a little veteran, which is another way for saying old.

Elizabeth Epps

I'd like to prefer the term seasoned. Because you bring a wealth of experience to the university. Being one of your formal- former students, sorry, I can also say that you've provided me with a great deal of education, hard and soft skills, of which I am very, very grateful. So, we're going to kick off today, talking about your early life, your education, your time here at UB. Specifically, if you want to go over it, we'll talk about the UB-Towson MBA transfer program that you were involved in. And then authorship. After that, and maybe some of your extracurricular hobbies that either influence or do not influence specifically what you do in the classroom, but maybe contribute to how you think about things, how you analyze things, and then why you decide to share what you share with your students and the faculty. Does that sound good?

Dennis Pitta

I can. Yeah, I can start off by telling you, my background, my early background.

Elizabeth Epps

Oh, where were you born?

Dennis Pitta

I was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay.

Dennis Pitta

And my father tells a story. We were at a parade once where a bunch of political candidates for the Senate were walking and John Fitzgerald Kennedy walked. We were on a bridge, walking under, my father said, "Go for it, John!" And he looked at him in waves. They were both Navy veterans. And I said, "Do you know him?" And he said, "No, but he's a good guy."

Elizabeth Epps

So how old were you then?

Dennis Pitta

Oh...

Elizabeth Epps

How young were you then?

Dennis Pitta

Yeah, I was like, I don't know. Maybe 10. Something like that. But, like a typical Bostonian. There used to be an expression. I'm from Boston. I love you, dear. I will go to the ends of the earth for you. As far as Worcester, you know, 30 miles away, Bostonians don't travel very much. And I didn't until I went to grad school.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay.

Dennis Pitta

I had to leave town. And suddenly, you know, Boston is a very good, nice place. I go back frequently. Lost my accent. It's funny to think how things were. I lived in New York state for my grad student grad school. I have a chemistry Bachelor's and Master's in chemistry and decided this is boring. So, I got an MBA in Buffalo. And it was pretty neat. I went to work for a pharmaceutical company. I remember shocking the President, President Schmoke by saying, "Yeah, I was a drug salesman." And I didn't say drug dealer.

Elizabeth Epps

Right. Exactly.

Dennis Pitta

His eyes went wide. I worked for Big Pharma and it is a pretty interesting thing. We called on doctors. I exclusively called on doctors and told them about new pharmaceuticals and how they worked and success and everything you see in a package insert. Indications, which means what to use it for, bad reactions and stuff like that. And I realized that doctors already knew a lot of the stuff and I was just being courteous to me. So, I said, let me do something else.

So, I applied to doctoral school, met a beautiful lady. And I was able to use my sales skills to fool her- and she married me. And then we decided, okay, we both want PhDs, where do we go? So, we applied to clusters that had programs each of us needed. and Maryland came up and I went to Maryland. Okay. And I finished and my wife started just a little later than I, she finished later, I came to UB. Not ever intending to stay, because I had a PhD. I wanted to work while she finished, and they would look elsewhere. Okay, so what was your first position here at the University of Baltimore? Well, I was hired as an assistant professor in 1979. Okay, I was hired, I believe it was '79. I was hired on a non-tenure contract. And the next year, they said, we you know, if you want to stay, we'd like you. So, they gave me a tenure track contract. So, I've been around- this is 2022.

Elizabeth Epps

Exactly. Wow. Isn't that interesting that you thought that this would just be a temporary stop, and you've built your entire career here with us? And pretty much are one of the most revered professors-

Dennis Pitta

Don't tell my wife!

Elizabeth Epps

-across the campus that I think it's incredible that I'm grateful that UB snatched you up when they had a chance within a year. They were pretty sure.

Dennis Pitta

The other thing they did was they worked their magic on me, I realized what a unique place UB was. I came out of College Park. I had a Monday, typically a Monday, Wednesday, Friday schedule. Okay, let me give the equivalent of what we teach Marketing 301 I think that was called Marketing 300 then or 305, whatever it is 300 level marketing courses. And Monday afternoon. I was good at the class Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoon. I had one in the morning, one in the afternoon. The afternoon class on both are pretty well attended except for Friday afternoon. Right? And then what happened? Turns out I had a lot of fraternity people, fraternity boys in that class. And Friday afternoon, they had to prepare for the weekend.

Elizabeth Epps

Exactly. Exactly.

Dennis Pitta

They had a different view of education and commitment. UB was different at the time, there were a lot of returning women and we had wonderful students they stuck out because they knew how to handle a schedule. Okay, and they knew what was important. What wasn't what they could cope with. What the kids think was-

Elizabeth Epps

What was work life balance before work life balance became a commonplace term.

Dennis Pitta

They were incredibly wonderful. And I remember that I loved my son very much when he was four. We had a babysitting problem. I mean, he might have been five but he walked and talked. He was polite. And somebody created one of our neighbors who liked him and gave him a Ghostbusters uniform and the old Ghostbusters show, rather, uh movie. So here he is, in his Ghostbusters show. Confident, he walked in with his coloring book, he was going to sit in the front. And all of a sudden, the sound from the class. About 15 women said, "Oh," freaked me out! It was really just a wonderful thing. This guy is not my favorite child anymore because he moved to California.

Elizabeth Epps

Of course.

Dennis Pitta

But he is a surgeon and as a frat boy, he was a frat boy too. He takes after his mother and earns- guys, you don't need to know this, but I like to tell the story. He earned the term, the name R-2000 because he was a robot, he would always go to the library to study and leave the frat house. He also kept a fraternity on campus for three years. When he left they were tossed off campus? He was a compliance officer. Okay. He learned some skills about business and management. That he probably applies to medicine. Because of the returning women, because of the quality of students, by the way our famous former Marine alum, who owned, who now owns GoDaddy.

Elizabeth Epps

Yes. Bob Parsons.

Dennis Pitta

Bob Parsons was, I don't I don't remember having him in class. He was an accountant. But he was contemporary then. So, we had a bunch of people who had experience, who knew the value of education. I couldn't leave. So, I decided, okay, I better work and stay.

Elizabeth Epps

So, you, you were adopted very early, by your students from the perspective of them being members of your fan club. Talk to me about your approach to teaching and what you believe has made you so very effective. And also very popular, like, you know, people enjoy the marketing classes, I know that I specifically just, it was the highlight of my studies. During the semesters that I took those courses, you are very engaging, you're very dynamic, you bring in pieces of information that are not necessarily always going to be found in the textbook, because you talk about your lived experiences. So, tell me about your approach to teaching and what you found over the years your students find to be most effective. What kind of feedback are you getting from students that are in your classes currently, or that have gone on and graduated and moved on to other things?

Dennis Pitta

Thank you, Elizabeth. Thank you. I say all the time, I engage with my class because my family doesn't listen to me. There are days when my wife says "You've told that joke 15 times."

Elizabeth Epps

But it's new to your classmates- to your class, your peers.

Dennis Pitta

They've heard it only once, twice, three times maybe. It's a long story I was taught. Why did I want to be a chemist when I was an undergrad? I had two cousins who were chemists. And they're very smart guys. And I liked chemistry in high school. So, I went through, I went to Boston College, went through chemistry there and decided, okay, this is good. Chemistry teachers in general are horrible. Okay, I'll tell you, we had a professor who was actually very brilliant, wrote books. But he didn't project in class. He was- If these were microphones, you can see this. It's disappearing. Instead of going up, he goes like that. So, you couldn't hear him. Okay. He'd also- the big, uh- someone joked, yeah, as he's writing an equation on the board. There's an eraser following it.

Elizabeth Epps

Exactly. So, you either kept up with him or you did not. And you either adopted or adapted to his style, or you didn't.

Dennis Pitta

Right, exactly. And George Carlin, the famous late comedian once said, he was this class clown. I wasn't really but compared to my chemistry colleagues, I was. So, one of the things that you have as a motto, which I hope we bring back is knowledge that works.

Elizabeth Epps

Yes. It's still around, believe it or not.

Dennis Pitta

I'm glad because that's one of the things that's one of the gifts we've given to Baltimore and to Maryland. It was funny, as I had an undergraduate who was a junior, and he asked me for advice. And the deal was, someone wanted to sell him, get ready for this, in the age of computers, somebody wanted to sell him a type setting machine.

Elizabeth Epps

Oh, my, okay.

Dennis Pitta

And he said, "The guy told me, you know, it was \$5,000 and had it because he inherited it. And he said, "I'd like to really use them, you know, like to buy them." I said, "Well, why?" And he said, "well, the guy said, I got plenty of jobs." I asked, "Why is he selling it?" And he said, "I don't know." And I said, "Look, look, look, suppose the thing didn't work, and he wanted to sell it to you. What would he say?" It doesn't work. He'll take my you know, give me your money anyway. So, ask him some questions like, "Look, have you ever done typesetting before?" "No." "Do you have Okay, so how long will it take you to get a portfolio together so you can market it?" "I don't know." So, we talk more and what price you're going to charge as a brand-new typesetter. And he anyway, we went through this and he was a particularly naive kid. But he saw the light.

Elizabeth Epps

Hmm. Right. You're introducing him to critical analysis.

Dennis Pitta

I guess, I don't really have that, my wife makes the decisions. Confidence, that's a good way to do it. But I do have some opinions. And what's funny is that I can often see some things that are weird that nobody else kind of notices. And-

Elizabeth Epps

You capture nuance.

Dennis Pitta

Perhaps I also, for instance, we're talking as somebody in the future sees this. We're talking about Russia versus Ukraine. And I have friends on both sides, mostly the Ukrainians are vociferous and they really have a point. They have a cause. But they've noticed some things and brought it out. It's like, oh, yeah, why didn't I see that? I'd love to be able to do that to other people.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay. Okay. So, you, you, you simulate people in your classroom by exchanging a variety of ideas, especially when you do your case studies. And you ask groups to assemble, you know, everyone breaks into teams. And there's a presentation that comes through and a SWOT analysis. What got you interested in marketing specifically? And what impact do you believe UB students are making as a result of the marketing courses that they're taking?

Dennis Pitta

What got me into marketing? is a good question. I think it's probably family history. My grandparents were immigrants, and my grandmother was amazing. She was more savvy than most people I've ever met. She knew when somebody had a story to tell, and she knew when someone who was truthful, was trying to sell her a load of malarkey-

Elizabeth Epps

Good instincts.

Dennis Pitta

Very good instincts. And she realized what people wanted and what people needed. So, I kind of remember that. And when I got into business, I just tried to be a sponge. Absorbing, you know, the typical MBA, or accounting, management, finance, marketing, and marketing was kind of interesting. It was easy, because advertising was part of it. And I like to watch TV. So that was kind of that natural proclivity. So, I have too many ads still stuck in my head that I call out in a moment's notice. But that got me into marketing. And in terms of- you asked a specific question about doing case analysis and unraveling, I'm not a big puzzle guy. But early on, people asked me for help. I had some friends in college who said, "Look, I have this printing business, and we're having issues trying to sell our printing." So, I kind of went to a city and we talked about it for a while. And I made some suggestions. And interestingly enough, we actually developed a couple of products he could make he could sell and he did pretty well. So, it's like, "Oh, that's cool."

Elizabeth Epps

Product Development seems to be a natural calling for you.

Dennis Pitta

You know, me too well. I think it's because, you know, there were a lot of academic groups and one, the global brand interest group. It's out of England, but lots of international people go there. Their conferences are amazing. So, I've always liked going so I have to write a paper because of that. And we have to write journal articles. And since I've written the paper for the conference, it's, you know, I'm in the same rut. Yeah, the product is really interesting. And some of the younger people have come up with nuances of products that I didn't really consider like products that have personalities, like Under Armor. You know, anyway. That's one reason for the product. Product Development is another area that is kind of interesting, but mostly branding. But they're all related.

Elizabeth Epps

So, talk to me about the UB-Towson MBA program. How did you get involved with that?

Dennis Pitta

Um, ready for this? Yes, I love my colleagues at Towson. They were just very, very good. We get shanghaied. Nobody asked me. It's like, "Oh, hey, I just got an induction notice they're going into the service." The Presidents involved at the time decided it would be a good idea. And on the surface, there were lots of things that were a natural fit. They had a larger undergraduate population and business people. Okay. We had a pathway from undergraduate to graduate where people would save some MBA courses, graduate courses would satisfy the requirement.

And they actually advertised to be hardly ever advertised. So, for me at the beginning, it sounded like winter. We had some teething troubles with the level of approach for courses because some of our colleagues at Towson were- took over some of the courses that we taught. And their approach was a little lower level or a different level. I shouldn't say lower, lower than we did that we overcame that pretty easily. It was always great to get together with them because we had two different perspectives. You guys have football? Wow. We've made some friendships. And so long ago that a lot of our friends retired. But it was a very good kind of, by the way, the dean of the Towson Business School was one of my one of my former victims. So-

Elizabeth Epps

Isn't that exciting?

Dennis Pitta

Yes. And she, I didn't quite remember her because at the time, I taught sections of like, 90? And she was a good student, but she was one of the 90. She introduced herself and I said, "Oh, yes!" We had a good time. She was very kind to me, which was nice. That's amazing. I am sorry, you know, it's unfortunate. Maryland is one thing I do remember about Maryland- Massachusetts is a state where politics are very funny. But Maryland has an interesting political climate. And I know the political reasons for Towson, and UB joining forces. As a matter of fact, I was involved in the ill-fated DBA program from the business school. It was supposed to be for not a Ph. D. program. It was a DBA program and like a strategic management exam for CEOs around the area.

It was a well thought out program. And we put it forward to INAC and it was shut down and we were actually sued by another university. So, we had to stop it. The other university, by the way, did not have a DBA program, and they only had one Ph. D. program in a different area. So okay, that's fair. So, we did all these things. And one thing I should have mentioned is one of my administrative appointments was director of special continuing education, not continuing education, but special education for business people. I learned that the state of Maryland had a grant focused on China. And if we applied for the grant, we would get some money to put on programs. I learned after we applied that all the money went to college park, so I was like okay, what are we doing now.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay. So, it benefited the University System of Maryland entirely more so than UB specifically, but at least it made some partnerships, or at least it created some pathways. And there's always been a fit that way. What other roles have you played within the Merrick School of Business administratively?

Dennis Pitta

I was the director of the Chinese Executive MBA program. Which, which actually was a big deal at the time one of our finance professors, a good colleague named Hung-Gay Fung heard about this. I said, "Hung-Gay, supposed we do an MBA program? Can we market it in China?" As it turns out, a lot of stuff came together and one was the Maryland Department of Economic Development had had an office in Shanghai. And it was run by a Chinese citizen with a green card who lived- had Maryland connections. And we contacted him and said, Look, we'd like to do an MBA program. How do we do marketing in China?

And he did it as part of the department, we used the Maryland resource. And what he did was, he gave us introductions, he set up some fairs we could go to. So, the first year Hung-Gay and I actually went to Shanghai in Beijing, and introduced interviewed a bunch of people who had applied and we were, I was worried about English. Because I would say colloquial stuff in my accent. And a lot of people knew what I was saying. And other people just kind of had pretty good English skills and good scores. But, you know, if they listen to me and understand me then they're in, you know, with their grades. That went well, for like four years. Hung-Gay left us the next year to take an endowed chair, big one, in another university. So, I kind of ran it, we had somebody helping me. And then I think I ran it for like four years.

And then with Hung-Gay for one, and then four years, the incredible with the all paid out of state tuition. Okay, that's a big help. Yeah, university needed money. So, we didn't know about a few million bucks. Then some, they gave it to somebody who could speak Chinese and basically say, I can handle it, and some of the Dean signed off on it. And he went to China with another faculty member and came back with nobody. Even without contact. So, the next year, next semester, I contacted my contact and went back by myself, he came back with a class, but that's only because we'd originally set up the relationship and this new guy thought he knew better. And at that point, you know, it was something that was kind of nice.

The president at the time got a little flak for that because oh, you have to go to China because you don't attract Americans. And he decided to kill the program. So, we don't do it anymore. At the same, we use the same model we use for something called the advantage MBA. Saturday MBAs are different. Saturday MBA was like four Saturdays on- 10 Saturdays on four Saturdays off, we have four by 10. So, you could take four terms in a year, and get out quickly. And we had an amazing group of people. Now some of you asked me, what is the most memorable thing? There are lots but here's one first Saturday MBA class graduated. And they decided to throw a

party at the Lyric. Okay, I know I'm sorry. The Yeah, the Lyric. And the President was there. And we were all asked to do a speech. And I basically said to them, "Look, with great affection, your class has been wonderful. But the faculty call you the walking wounded. And someone said, "Why?" I said "We have seen you Saturday in, Saturday out with crutches, slings, braces, artificial soft shoes, all the things that people who are injured need but you show up anyway."

Elizabeth Epps

Right, highly committed.

Dennis Pitta

It was such a compliment to the faculty for one thing. One guy said, "Yeah, we learned how to manage our schedules, so we could get married and go on a honeymoon without missing classes.

Elizabeth Epps

That's incredibly important. Again, work life balance happens here at UB.

Dennis Pitta

Follow that up. Unfortunately, the four by ten system had dates that were not-

Elizabeth Epps

Didn't jive with financial aid.

Dennis Pitta

Financial aid. So that's kind of an issue. We're thinking about doing it again, but having it comply. But, you know, we'll see what happens. But that was the thing that got me was that they had a friend. The class had their friends there. One guy had his church choir come and sing for us. And it was just remarkable.

Elizabeth Epps

It's amazing.

Dennis Pitta

By the way, in terms of commitment. Thursday before we started the first Saturday, somebody came to my office and said by the way, you have two husband-wife teams in your class. I said oh cool. And they said, one won't really be there. And it's what people travel, you know, business people travel, I understand. I say, okay, I didn't even ask why. And then I was told, husband and wife took a last-minute vacation before they started the program. They were in a near fatal accident in Virginia Beach. And she said, the wife has been released from intensive care. She'll be in your class on Saturday. He said the husband will join you later. And he did.

Elizabeth Epps

That's incredible.

Dennis Pitta

I'm almost tearing up. They made class after class after class, but they missed this graduation thing, because something more important happened. Isn't that amazing? The most important thing was that their daughter, Mary was born.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay. Oh, beautiful.

Dennis Pitta

I have never been in a situation, except some military situations we've seen where people are so dedicated, that they don't allow a near fatal car accident to hit you- stop you.

Elizabeth Epps

Exactly. Education is a priority for many. But I believe like you do that here at UB, education- education is stepped up to another level. You know, we had a new marketing campaign a couple of years ago, and the words tenacious, grit and so on came out of that. And I think it's something that the students, faculty, and staff all model, we're, we're all in this pot together, and we're willing to help each other succeed. And, you know, the sense from a former student's perspective, is that our professors show up more than 110% for us each and every day. So yes, we're going to climb mountains to get to those classes.

And we'll eat Cheerios, if we have to, you know, practically starve because we'd rather complete our assignments than eat. So, I mean, you know, it does not surprise me that individuals have had some pretty life altering, or what would be normally life altering experiences than any other setting. But here, it serves to strengthen us rather than diminish our perspective and our focus. And some of the stories that you have shared are definitely representative of that.

Dennis Pitta

Well, you know, this is funny. COVID has changed everything. Yes. We talked before about the global study course in Thailand. I was ready to go. As a matter of fact, one of my colleagues said, Look, I have to go to Africa- Africa. I'd rather go in January when it's cooler. Do you mind switching your January course to spring break? I said no problem. Turns out a week before spring break. COVID was just enough, enough of a concern that we canceled that course and avoided you know, exposure. There's no vaccine, you know. Somebody- in the past, what I used to do is add friends around the world. And some of them wanted to come to see Baltimore. So, I'd arranged some kind of academic program where we got some of our business people, some of our alums to come and do some cases with them. We take them around to the city.

By the way, for those of us in Baltimore, the famous Horse You Came in on saloon was one of their favorites. Interesting because one of our MBAs was the marketing director of the horse. Okay, and told us about they had something I don't know he's since left but I don't know. They kept this for a while at the Jack Daniels Club, where you could buy a bottle of Jack Daniels whiskey for like 75 bucks. They would keep the bottle for you. Your name was on it. Yep, name, password, etc. And actually, was a number of the bottle and a password. So, you know, people seeing it, kids saying "Hey, Pitta's got one!" So, there was a little bit of security there. And you could go in and just get your bottle, they would pour it for you. It's against the law in Baltimore to pour your own liquor in a bar. Bartender would do it. And you don't have to pay for the booze because you already own it. Got it. This guy

came up with a way for people to save probably hundreds of bucks. All you do is tip the server as you would anyway.

Well, he told the story about why he came up with it. Competition in Fells Point area. How many different places there were you had to differentiate the bar. They do say it's the longest continuously operating Saloon in the United States. Okay, that's cool. Snopes would probably say yes. But this is a way to say, Come with me. I'm special, bartender, number 28-4or 28-A that bottle number. And a person would ask, what's the password you drive down, and then you drink for free. It's like, Oh, if you wanted to impress a client, some clients would be impressed. The first time he did that we had a group from Switzerland. Then he did the presentation and said, By the way, tomorrow night, please join me at The Horse for some light refreshments. And, you know, beer, wine, whatever. That evening two Swiss groups.

You know, like five people, six people went to the horse and bought their own bottles. And somehow, the next evening, we went and they said, By the way, and they had an empty bottle of Jack Daniels, they showed us this is our it was a big hit. And they keep coming back. And then my friend who was in this thing, finally said, you know, people who watched The Wire, were a little concerned. So, we're going to Thailand now and he introduced me to some people in Bangkok. We ran a really excellent program, instead of me doing it by myself that a whole staff did it. It's just a different experience than Europe, because it's not.

Thais are very friendly. Their customs are very different, we do a lot of custom covering customs, what to do, what not to do. And it's pretty interesting. The program is world class. So, people who have had this experience, who eventually get into doing business in Thailand, know the ropes to begin with and know what not to say and what not to do. I know business people shake hands here, typical Thais, do a 'sawadee', if you know how to do that, first, you won't insult anybody. So, it's a good entry into doing business in other countries. So, it all started with The Horse You Came in On.

Elizabeth Epps

Isn't that amazing? And this is one of your signature tours every year. So, it's interesting to know the history behind how it started and it's still going strong today.

Dennis Pitta

It is. The interesting thing about UB students is now they say UB is a special place. Our students are special people. Our Thai partner is Mahidol University International College. Their language of instruction is English. So, all their students from Thailand mostly speak English pretty well. They're like speaking English with us. By sheer luck, I didn't mention I grew up in Boston. And I lived two miles from where the King of Thailand was born. Okay, how did that happen?

Elizabeth Epps

I was going to ask you, that's incredible.

Dennis Pitta

His father went to Harvard for a public health degree. And His Majesty, Bhumibol was born in a hospital about two miles from me. So, I happened to mention that in class we Bostonians have a reverence for the Thai family because we know the family.

Elizabeth Epps

Small world.

Dennis Pitta

I get treated very well.

Elizabeth Epps

Small world, beautiful how that fabric was woven through your entire life and flourished in a way that, you know, many people would never have anticipated. Something beautiful is a beautiful working relationship and partnership?

Dennis Pitta

So, our friends of Mahidol that love UB students, as a matter of fact every once in a while, there's a romance, but I won't go into that.

Elizabeth Epps

Okay. So, here's a question for you. You've seen a great deal of change while here. How have you been able to navigate some of the changes whether it's been curriculum or the year of students that we're bringing into the university, whether we're bringing first year students and our higher-level students in? How have you managed your expectations and maybe adjusted your course material with regard to that? And how do you see things heading in the future? There are lots of hurdles right now in higher education, is it or is it not relevant is of contemporary argument. Most of us that are here at the institution, obviously believe in the benefit of higher education and continuing education. But what trends are you seeing or hearing? And what's the chatter? I guess that's on your side? From a professor's perspective? What concerns do you have about what you're seeing and hearing?

Dennis Pitta

Before we address the future, in the present, let me go back to the past. The only thing one of the major things I saw at UB was a willingness to be flexible. Okay, faculty, the administration and so forth. Some of our faculty members were wedded to the academic system they grew up in. I will mention, I won't mention the subject area, but I will- Statistics. We had a professor who could not make changes we wanted to do- I mentioned the advantage MBA, which was a full time MBA, and we said, Okay, what we'd like to do is use a case in each the same case in each of the five first courses.

So, this is a continuation. So, we looked at statistics, management, marketing, finance, accounting, in the same company, and he said, "I can't do that." Immediately. And that was a problem, but everybody else did. So, our students got out with not just okay, this is a marketing case, this is the management case. Oh, finance, it was that same company. So, what they got was a perspective of, if you're in a company, and you want it to succeed, what do you have to do in each of these areas? Brilliant! At least I liked it. The other pieces are an original online MBA program called a web MBA. We got a few people- I was really bored at the time, okay. And I use the computer a lot. So, we got a few people who said, Yeah, let's do this. So, I taught one of the first courses offered, okay, and some of my colleagues and I developed marketing 640 I think it was at the time. And he taught it first and I taught it and then I kept teaching it. And it was funny to see one guy from Hong Kong in the course. One guy from

Moscow, in the course, a bunch of Americans, including guys from the south from Florida in the course. And after it was over, except for the guy from Ankara and Moscow, most of the people showed up for the graduation party. Wonderful.

So, then we, you know, after that course, we ordered- we, as faculty, got together to figure out how to teach it. New people who are developing new sections, we, you know, we all shared information, and it was pretty much like, you know, Wednesday afternoon tea club, it was great cooperation, great insight. I got to be a better teacher as a result of that. Sadly, I'm on my seventh platform. So, there's a lot of learning and relearning and unlearning, constantly, we're going to another one. But stuff like that is wonderful. Nowadays, when the pandemic hit in 2020, I had a course that was face to face. We pivoted to zoom. And that worked really well. And by the way, that year, Zoom went from nothing to one of the top 100 brands in terms of value. So, it wasn't Coca Cola, or McDonald's, but it was-

Elizabeth Epps

Technology became the way that we could live our lives.

Dennis Pitta

Yes. Nowadays, given the choice between Sakai, our asynchronous platform and zoom? Now we see a change, people say eh, zooms, okay. I'd rather do it online. So, they don't have to be at a specific place at a specific time. So, one of the things I'm actually writing about is what happens to branding as we go forward. You know, a lot of things about branding include just experience, you have to know about a brand before you can even form an opinion about it.

You have to know what a brand does. And that's usually using it once, using it twice, buying and having a problem not having a problem. And for services. It's kind of interesting, how do you know how good a doctor is? What kind of bedside manner does the person have? And usually that's experience. But if someone's doing telemedicine, how do you get that information? Well, social media, perhaps, maybe other ways, but the challenge is, it has to be interesting. And at this point, I have no clue about where we will eventually go. Just hopefully we get back in the classrooms so I can tell a few jokes and hear the reaction.

Elizabeth Epps

Do you believe that professors and students want to assemble in the classrooms? As they did previously? Moreso? Where do you think the percentage is spread?

Dennis Pitta

It's not the way it was before it's lower, wanting to be together.

Elizabeth Epps

What kind of impact does that have? For those that? Don't want that face to face experience? Do you see that there are any gaps? And how are those gaps being covered? Or do you think that for individual learners, everyone's different? And perhaps, if they're going to select an option that fits them best? Does it really equate to being the best in the end? Once they've completed their degree requirements? Are they as strong as

Dennis Pitta

You know, Elizabeth? It's a thoughtful, insightful question. My only reaction is to say, the only thing I've done is basically made a few comments to shape the knowledge they've gotten from the book. And sometimes we use video, sometimes I use cases, sometimes I use anecdotes. But the people who've done the work, have the basic knowledge, you remember that old thing about, you learn only in connection with what you already learned.

And if you know a lot of stuff from the book with a lot of material, and I can clarify something, or turn the meaning of something in a different direction, then that's my job. It is not to read the book to you. And I think what's going to happen is, a lot of people will be the motivated students who will do all the work. It matters less to them in their learning whether it's going to be face to face, synchronous, or asynchronous.

When we first started the web MBA, somebody said, this is a correspondence course. And we had to say no, no, this interaction, there are assignments, assignments, get graded, people get feedback, it's not a correspondence course. The only thing different is we won't see each other because at the time, it was just on, you know, a learning platform rather than zoom.

So, I think what's going to happen is that really good students will do the work and learn from whatever, you know, extra stuff professors can give them. Different things not covered by printed material. Already I am seeing, for instance, just getting the book. I realized not everybody has money to pay for books and have to wait for money to come in. And that's caused some problems with people falling behind and assignment reading assignments.

Because you know, the grant hasn't come in, they don't have money for the book, they're going to start late. Well, there are a few ways around that. And for years, people call me Professor Putin, because I was a crud, and now I have to be a softy because, okay, okay, let's, let's extend the deadline for the first few and catch up and monitor that. But it's just one of those realities we've got to deal with. As long as we have people who want to succeed, who want the tools we can give them to succeed, then we have a, we have a hope.

One of the things I worry about, well, I don't worry about it. We have this great thing, in this rating. University of Baltimore has one of the highest upward mobility ratings of any university in the country, social mobility. So, if you come from a poor family, you come to UB, you get a degree, you get a job, and all of a sudden, you're more successful, your family's more successful. And that's one look, I'm an Italian that comes from a mafia background. So, we're not killing people to get money, training them how to do their own.

Elizabeth Epps

I love you, I love your jokes. Um, but that was loaded with fact and in all seriousness as well. Now, we're getting close to the end of our time. But before I let you go, is there anything that we haven't covered in today's interview that you think someone is looking at or listening to this or reading the transcript, however, they come across our conversation? Is there anything else that's essentially Pitta, or essentially UB that you would like to share that we didn't think to ask you, or that didn't come out in conversation?

Dennis Pitta

Well, this is the old drug dealer- drug salesman. Detail! Detail men or women to get the details of drugs for physicians. One of the things we learned was you've got to get the message out. And there is one thing I am sad

about the semester we did the Chinese MBA program. Okay, four by 10 system, all Chinese in a cohort, and the Saturday MBA program, four by 10.

Everybody on Saturday, we did another one called the advantage MBA program. The Baltimore Sun had an educational supplement. We were in for the Chinese MBA program. And I think the Advantage MBA program, we had, you know, three pages, pictures of each of the classes, descriptions, dadadada. When I look at the advertising section, I know it costs money. Every school in Maryland had an ad. Loyola, College Park, The Laurel Barber College had an ad. UB didn't! Now, I know we're an educational unit, University and an educational institution but I wish somehow, we get money that's to spend wisely on promotion

Elizabeth Epps

To position ourselves more visibly.

Dennis Pitta

Yeah, I will say something. Do you remember Artscape? Yes, regrettably, I haven't been to Artscape for a while. But I have about 50 T-shirts still left from when we did a research project at Artscape. We asked for and got the UB tent. And we put a bunch of computer laptops out there with surveys. Since you've finished the survey, you got a T shirt was white t shirt with the in purple, the skyline of Baltimore, Charm City in white and a raven with the top of one of the buildings. Okay. We had people wearing those things coming back the next day to take a survey, so that was popular. But the thing that was really popular was we were right in front of the academic center. And someone said, Oh, UB huh? Yeah. Where is that?

Elizabeth Epps

Oh, my. Yes.

Dennis Pitta

Unfortunately, the guys who this is with a different president, the guys who ran admissions and so forth, we're told no, no, don't waste your Sunday. Don't waste your weekend. Well, I for your viewers, I will not use the words I should use. I complained vociferously. Yes. You said there's got to be a way for us to

Elizabeth Epps

Place ourselves on a bigger map.

Dennis Pitta

Right. And not just handout recruiting things. Actually, I got a bunch of recruiting stuff, just in case anybody asked. I handed out very little. But what got me was there after we talked about love gaming, can you guys do something? Well, the next big one went back in the Meb Turner, whatever the building is called the education bill Hill College of Liberal Arts Building. They had a game competition. And they had all these people come in. Now, what we were doing was not selling ourselves. We're not marketing. We're not saying hey, come here, which is giving everybody exposure to what the university does. I'd love to be able to see us do that on a bigger scale

Elizabeth Epps

On a larger scale.

Dennis Pitta

We're a great place.

Elizabeth Epps

We are. We're still a hidden gem for some.

Dennis Pitta

Well, I'm glad I complained vociferously.

Elizabeth Epps

Yes.

Dennis Pitta

Because somebody, somebody listened. And it was nice to see. Now I haven't been to Artscape for a while. I'm still using the data for research, which is interesting, different sections of it. But for me, it was a big plus. And I'm still wearing the shirts, the extra shirts,

Elizabeth Epps

It is coming back. Just for those who are listening to this interview Artscape will return to Baltimore, probably in a much different form, and will not only be centered in our current community of Mount Vernon, Bolton Hill, the Charles Street Mount Royal area, but they are looking at strategies for including other neighborhoods, adding additional venues so that more of the charm of Charm City is showcased along with the art that's happening amongst the neighborhoods, and the fabric of those neighborhoods are the people. So, it's interesting. It'll be interesting when it comes back in another year.

Dennis Pitta

Thank you for the information, this has been delightful.

Elizabeth Epps

Yes, it has. We have enjoyed our time with you. I enjoyed our conversation. I am hoping that your interview shapes and changes some minds and maybe adds to some knowledge that folks will be looking for in the future. But more importantly, I hope that it makes the case for the quality level of education that we offer here. And that comes from quality professors who really care like you.

Dennis Pitta

And this is embarrassing, but nice. I've been stuck inside basically, for a couple of years here doing you know, and again, my family doesn't laugh at my jokes. Softthis is neat.

Elizabeth Epps

Well, we are fond of you and I have to say thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you again for joining us today.

Dennis Pitta

This has been my pleasure and for the UB audience: If you see this, you guys are lucky you're here.

Elizabeth Epps

Thank you, Dr. Pitta.

Dennis Pitta

Thank you.

Elizabeth Epps

Have a great day.

Dennis Pitta

Have a good day.

Elizabeth Epps

Bye.