



November 1, 2022

A CONVERSATION WITH THE ASU PRESIDENT MICHAEL CROW



In a discussion led by Dean Batts, President Crow engaged us in a conversation about ASU, the role of Cronkite and the Howard Center at ASU, and what lies ahead. During the conversation, he thoughtfully fielded our questions and thoughts. We have placed a summary of our discussion below.

**The Role of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism
at Arizona State University**

President Crow explained that ASU intends to invest more in Cronkite because it is “central to where we are going.” Although the school is “clustered in downtown Phoenix,” there are “substantial facilities in multiple locations,” all making “technology investments in learning new ways of storytelling and visual expression.” For example, “the new Hicks Center in downtown Mesa has the most advanced digital media technology that exists in any university in the country, and it is also available for use by the [Cronkite] school.”

New Ways to Teach and Adaptive Technology

President Crow was asked how research is informing decisions and ideas at ASU and what has ASU found are the best ways to learn and best ways to teach?

“Going back to egalitarian access, we just built an engineering school with 30,000 engineering majors, up from 6,000.” President Crow explained that he has expanded ASU’s reach in engineering by “figure[ing] out how to teach in new ways. He believes that ASU “can take every journalism major and make them science literate with no problem.” Further, he states that research provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers, supports that “VR learners are four times faster to train than traditional classroom learning.” Per the research, ASU has created a “3,500 student introduction to a biology lab off earth.” The virtual reality immersive biology curriculum, called Dreamscape Learn, allows students to “beam up to an alien zoo, which is 20 kilometers across to 4 kilometers deep.” According to President Crow, students become, “living interacting scientists as an avatar with other students.” The innovative technology has resulted in “a 30% improvement in learning outcomes.”

President Crow added that ASU has “new ways to teach 30 adaptive universal learning courses, using adaptive learning technologies, so anyone can understand the math that is necessary to understand finance.” “We have taught 100,000 students across a broad group of disciplines, but we have not done this in journalism.” However, he firmly stated, “if up to me, we would.”

Creating a “Truly American University” from Scratch

President Crow explained the “model of an inward-looking college is not the right model for ASU.” Instead, he outlined what is called “the New American University.” Below is a summary of what he believes is incorporated in a “truly American university.”

- Egalitarian and Diverse
- Highly Entrepreneurial
- No Focus on Class Structure
- Committed to the Community
- Journalism – When discussed, President Crow clarified that “the Fourth Estate would be central to the institution.”
- Open to Intellectual Diversity
- Hands-On and Everything Must be Functional
- Problem-Based Learning

- Scalable – “A new American university has to figure out how to scale so everyone is invested.”
- Elements of Free Press – “Always driving to investigate what is happening around us.”

Professional Certification and Journalistic Integrity

We shared with President Crow our thoughts on who we believe to be the greatest purveyors of mis/disinformation and asked his thoughts on the efficacy of professional certification for journalists to uphold truth and be accountable in disseminating of the news. President Crow stated, “we should have some method of finding, granting and maintaining certification.” According to his theory, “there should be four classifications, like - journalist certified, citizen, columnist/populist and comedian.” With comedians being allowed to “say anything under the notion of entertaining and making jokes.” He added that “somewhere in the continuum, there needs to be a flag planted saying this is what a journalist is, this is what a certified journalist does and doesn’t do, and they should be held accountable” to those standards. Admitting the process of coming up with standards across the industry would not be an easy task, President Crow offered, “it should be what we are undertaking as a project and then the journalism school can take on a broader role, which is trying to figure out how to certify journalists the same way other professions require it.”

Bringing International Journalism to ASU

President Crow was asked for his thoughts on whether he believed ASU is appropriately situated to interact with or house an international journalism program.

President Crow believes that ASU is uniquely positioned to partner with an international journalism program and/or house one at ASU. He explained that ASU has “students attending from 158 countries,” has “digital learners from 180 countries,” and collaborates with “15 international university partners.” Coupled with ASU’s “ability to teach anything on any learning platform, on any scale, in any culture, and in any location,” it couldn’t be better suited for the task.

President Crow provided an example of ASU’s ongoing initiatives for global education. He explained, since 2012, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, ASU has been providing high-quality education to economically disadvantaged, high-achieving African students. After a successful Phase I, which supported 120 students, the program is now in Phase II, focusing on institutional linkages, which currently supports a 3+1+1 program in partnership with two African universities, offering an accelerated Masters degree at ASU in engineering or business. The program is currently supporting its eighth cohort, comprising fifty-nine students from seven African countries.

(Dean Batts mentioned that Cronkite intends to send a proposal to the Scripps Howard Foundation regarding the topic of international journalism education, but he didn’t elaborate on any of the proposal’s details.)

Mis/disinformation and What ASU Can Do to Help Stem the Tide

President Crow discussed with us an incident on campus between two white students and three students of color arguing about the intended purpose of a newly created multicultural space on campus. The argument was videotaped, posted on social media, and went viral, pushing ASU into an unwanted and uncontrollable national media spotlight that President Crow believes was fueled by mis and disinformation about what had actually occurred and how many students were initially involved. The incident garnered millions of views on social media, sparked unrest, and drew the attention of national news agencies, such as The New York Times.

President Crow explained that he believes mis and disinformation is a “serious problem” and that ASU needs to “figure out what it can do to help stem the tide from here.” Although he was “not sure [ASU] has the answer,” he believes the solution will come from “figure[ing] out a way to do it ourselves.”