

illUminate Blog Transcript: Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips on the New Lehigh Business Innovation Building

Recorded January 30, 2023. Listen to it [here](#).

- GEORGETTE CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 00:00 I was talking with the president one morning after this 8 o'clock meeting, and he asked me how it was going. And I said, "I'm just not happy. It just isn't going the way that I wanted to go." And I was explaining to him why. And he looked across the street because we were meeting over [her?] house. He looked across the street and he said, "Well, why don't you take that parking lot?"
- ANNOUNCER: 00:23 [music] This podcast is brought to you by ilLUMinate, the Lehigh Business Blog. To learn more, please visit us at business.lehigh.edu/news.
- ROB GERTH: 00:34 Welcome, I'm Rob Gerth, director of marketing and communications for Lehigh Business. Today is January 30th, 2023. And we're talking with Georgette Chapman Phillips, the Kevin L. and Lisa A. Clayton, dean of the college of business at Lehigh. Dean Phillips' research and teaching is focused on the intersection of law, economics, and public policy. She's published in the areas of urban and regional planning, local government law, real estate, and housing. She also has a law degree from Harvard Law School. Today we're talking about all of the elements that went into the new Lehigh Business innovation building. Let's start at the beginning. When do the idea of expanding the footprint of Lehigh Business come about for you?
- PHILLIPS: 01:18 As we started growing the faculty, we were running out of faculty space. And it became increasingly evident that we had to find more space for our faculty. And as the idea started kicking around in my head, it became very clear it wasn't about the faculty. It was about the students. And if we got more students space, that we could expand the faculty within this building, within Rauch.
- GERTH: 01:55 Within this building that we're in now, the old building?
- PHILLIPS: 01:56 Yeah. Within the old building. So really grabbing the idea of an expansion of student space started to take precedence over just building more faculty offices, because at the end of the day, the student space is what's going to give us distinction and importance in the marketplace. The faculty offices, we will build them. But that's never going to push us to the top. The educational experience that we can provide to our students, that's what can do it. So I did my homework. I talked to a lot of people whose field was education, specifically higher education, and how students learn today, how students will be learning tomorrow, and then for Exec. Ed, that was another big driver. We had no space for Exec. Ed within Rauch, none at all. And so whatever we built had to also include that component. So we started doing a lot of work on, "Was the space we should have for adult learners?" as we expand our executive building. And that really drove the design of the building, all about learning.
- GERTH: 03:14 Do you think it was fate that when you said, "Hey, I think we should build a new building," that there was a parking lot across the street or catty corner to this corner?
- PHILLIPS: 03:23 I've told this story to many people. And I just cannot believe it happened. And it also shows the importance of face-to-face meetings, that I was in a Wednesday-morning meeting with then president Simon. And originally, we were actually going to expand

Rauch into the courtyard. And I just didn't like any of the designs that were coming up.

GERTH: 03:52 Into the center courtyard that I can see from where I'm sitting right now?

PHILLIPS: 03:55 Exactly.

GERTH: 03:56 So, the building faces out and there's room in the courtyard here. Gotcha.

PHILLIPS: 03:58 Right. I didn't like any of those designs. First of all, they didn't give us enough space. Second of all, they cut Zoellner off from the rest of the campus. And that's just not the way to do things. And so, I was talking with the president one morning after this 8 o'clock meeting. And he asked me how it was going. And I said, "I'm just not happy. It just isn't going the way that I wanted to go," and I was explaining to him why and Zoellner. And he looked across the street, because we were meeting over at Wilbur Power House. He looked across the street and he said, "Well, why don't you take that parking lot?" [laughter] And I said, "Really?" He said, "Sure." Now, as a real estate person, I can tell you a flat surface parking lot is probably the least productive use for any piece of land. And we just have a flat top parking, that's no. I was very happy to relieve him of the burden of that inefficiency of land use. [laughter] Okay? And just from there, it took off. From there, really, the design just came into place. We crystallized where we were going in terms of student space and what we needed, Exec. Ed. space. And the rest, as they say, is history.

GERTH: 05:19 Was it like a handshake like, "You can have the parking lot"? Was there any sellers regret on his part like, "Oh, wait, she meant it"?

PHILLIPS: 05:29 I said, "I'm going to take you at your word." He said, "Take me at my word." I said, "Fine. Good." And he didn't take it back. So, the proof is in the pudding.

GERTH: 05:39 Now, the parking lot, while convenient and across the street from us, only allowed you to build a 74,000 ft² building. The Rauch business center a 115,000 ft². First of all, did you wish you had a bigger building across the street? And then second of all, what kind of problems did you run into building on such a small lot? I think you're on every setback that there is.

PHILLIPS: 06:04 Oh, oh, yeah. I mean, there's not an inch to spare over there. The fact of the matter is, we're under height restrictions from the city. So, there's one subterranean level and three above ground. And that's basically our limit before we start getting into a lot of variances. So, do you want a big, or do you want it fast? Sounds ironic at this point. But we chose fast, because, well, talk about the pandemic. But from a real estate perspective - going back to the thing that I know and love best, which is real estate - the more you get as a right with the city, the better off you are. And you don't want to keep asking for variances. You want to say, No, this fits. You don't have to do anything special for me. This fits. Because you always have to have permitting. You can't just build it. But it's a much easier conversation if you're not asking them to give you something in addition. So, I didn't want to go up any higher, because it would have taken time with the city to exceed the height limitation. As far as the building envelope, oh man, it was tight. Oh, it was so very, very tight, because once we started thinking about what we wanted, of course, the building got bigger and bigger and bigger. And pretty soon, we were taking up every square inch. And building a edifice of that size in that constrained space is extremely difficult. We had to use that back alley much to the consternation of the people that lived on that alley. We tried to be

very good neighbors. We paid for their parking because they had a hard time getting in and out of their houses and the parking spaces. So we gave them free parking. They're students; it's student housing. We gave them free parking. We bought a lot of pizza for them. [laughter] Okay. We listened to them. We tried very, very hard to be good neighbors.

GERTH: 08:06 And I know you had to store a lot of materials, like the stone in such offsite and shuttle it in day by day.

PHILLIPS: 08:14 Interesting that you mentioned that. The roof was delivered to us, but they required that we take delivery on site. There is no place on site. Then we said, "We'll store it up a Goodman." They're like, "Nope." Because that's where we store most things. Lehigh has a lot of space on mountaintop and up on the Goodman campus. They're like, "Nope. You have to store it on site." I think they were trying to prevent hoarding. Well, luckily, just luckily, there is this little triangle of space down the street from the police station, which was close enough for them, that they deliver. I mean, literally, we put up fencing around that little triangle, and we stored our roof there.

GERTH: 09:00 We talked about some of the difficulties in the construction. But I guess the biggest one that we haven't mentioned yet and probably should is the worldwide pandemic that happened [laughter] in the middle of your construction.

PHILLIPS: 09:11 So yeah, this project was greenlighted by the board of trustees in February 2020. It was a glorious day. I was so, so happy that day. We had met our fundraising requirements, and it was rainbows and unicorns, so very happy. How quickly it turned dark! [laughter] Okay?

GERTH: 09:35 Like a month later.

PHILLIPS: 09:36 Oh, not even a month later. The governor of the Commonwealth shut down all construction everywhere. Now, of course, if you remember, Lehigh's had several construction projects actually in the ground at that point. Three new dorms were in the ground. And so, they had to be stopped. And I was just beside myself, because our project wasn't in the ground. We had done all of this fundraising, millions and millions and millions of dollars in fundraising, and we weren't in the ground yet because we were supposed to start digging the hole in June of '20. And so there was a really dark time there when we didn't know what the pandemic was going to do. I mean, I don't think that it stretches the imagination that we were wondering, "Were we going to exist as a people?" I mean, [laughter] this could have been some black plague type event that happened across the country, across the world. Nobody knew in March of '20 what was going to happen. So, there's no way that I could say, "Well, I think that we should start building." First of all, like I said, the governor said, "You're not building anything." And second of all, we were just trying to swim fast to stay even as a university. And we weren't going to divert our attention to starting a new building project. Then things started to get better. We started seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. The governor lifted the moratorium on building so that we got the three dorms done. So, at the end of 2020, the board of trustees reaffirmed the green light. And that was again a happy day.

GERTH: 11:23 Because it could have changed their mind, because we don't have as much money as we used to have now, and even the backers that were backing you could have backed out.

- PHILLIPS: 11:31 It was, "Who knows?" I mean, we are not engaging hyperbole. We could be dead. I mean, not the university. We, as human beings, could be dead. There were people dying left and right. It was such an incredibly scary time. So we got through that. The end of 2020, they reaffirmed their commitment to the building, because we are-- we raised a lot of money, but we do have a university contribution. We raised the bulk of the money. But the university was quite supportive of what we're doing. When they did that, I was like, "Oh my gosh." And then we finally broke ground in May of '21. So yeah, we lost over a year.
- GERTH: 12:19 And was that your-- I guess this is a dumb question. But was that your biggest obstacle, or you had other obstacles that are caused but that are left over, I guess, from the pandemic? And I'm talking about supply chain.
- PHILLIPS: 12:31 Yeah. Supply chain issues continue to. But the irony of the situation is the big supply chain issues, we did avoid, because when we got the green light in February, we ordered big building material, I mean like steel, concrete, just the really big ticket items. And we locked in those prices. The roof before the pandemic hit, we locked it all in because we were-- and that was seriously good luck, because remember I was talking about the roof. They told us in fall of '21-- after we broke ground in May of '21, they told us in fall of '21, "We have your roof. We can deliver it to you now. Or we can deliver it to you next June, maybe." How are we going to build a building if we were going to wait seven months, for eight months for a roof? I mean, you can't do that. And so the only thing that we had to do is show them we were going to store it on site. And we did. So that was lucky. We dodged that bullet big time.
- GERTH: 13:46 And then we talked a little bit about funding a project like this. What goes into that? It's probably an immense task. How do you go about even starting to fund something like this?
- PHILLIPS: 13:57 It all starts with the idea. I cannot say a big enough thank you to our initial donors. I say thank you to all of our donors, of course. I mean, the generosity has been astounding. Our Lehigh alums have just been amazingly generous. But I have to give a special nod to the people that signed the commitment while it was still very much in the design and in the thought process. You always have to have those people that believe in the idea. And then you have people coming along as the idea becomes reality. But our early adopters, I just say thank you, because without them, without their faith that we would get this done, we wouldn't be sitting here.
- GERTH: 14:46 When you're planning a building like this, how do you decide what's what like, "Oh, we need a place for this. We need a place for that. And I want to have these kinds of screens. And I want to have this-- I want to have a lobby"? How do you even start that?
- PHILLIPS: 15:02 Well, first you get good architects, because the imagination drives the reality. And our architects, VMA, out of Philadelphia, an amazing group of talented group of people. The first thing that they did was, we had big meetings, students, staff, faculty, because everything was on the table. I mean, what you're seeing now wasn't-- it didn't come out as a whole project. Everything, everything possible was on the table, "We can do this. We can do that." For example, you notice there's no food over there. That was a decision that we had to make. Do we want a cafeteria? Well, no, we decided other things were more important. And the way that we went about it is that we had big focus group meetings. And people said, "No, this is important to me. This

is important to me. This is what I want this." And we took all of those ideas and prioritized them, thought about how they are going to help us achieve greatness, not keep us where we are. Yeah. I don't want to duplicate what we're doing here. I mean, what we have here is fine. I want to take that next step. And so you have to think about not just what people wish they had here, but kind of anticipating what they're going to need in the future. So, a lot of the classrooms. It's funny now that we're talking about it. But this was an absolute priority as we're thinking about the classrooms, is that we wanted them all to be modality neutral, that we could have people on site. We could have people remote. We could have people at the same time. Remember, when we're talking--

GERTH: 16:47

That was pre- everybody knew what Zoom was.

PHILLIPS: 16:49

Oh, this was this was in 2019-- actually 2018, 2019 when we were doing all of this design. There's no way that people were thinking about, "Oh, this is how I'm going to be teaching every day of my--" And yet, here we are. Yet here we are. It's really funny that we had a faculty meeting, a Lehigh business faculty meeting in February of '20. And a big discussion point was hybrid learning, remote learning. And people were adamant, "We will never teach in a remote environment. We're just never going to do that. This is Lehigh." And then a month later, "Hello, Zoom," okay? [laughter] But we had anticipated that. And then the flip side happened, that I had people say, "Well, why are you building all of these classrooms? Nobody's going to be in the class in the height of the pandemic. Nobody's ever going to be in a classroom. Everything's going to be hybrid." And I said, "You know what? We're Lehigh. We will be back. But we've learned now that we have to offer several modalities of instruction."

GERTH: 18:03

Well, let's talk about some of the features in the new building, features that are there for faculty, for students, for staff. Give me the highlights.

PHILLIPS: 18:13

I just got back from a walk through. And so, it's fresh in my mind. And the first thing that you think about is openness. It is so open. It's big. It's bright. It's beautiful. You don't feel claustrophobic. And your geography really does dictate your interaction with each other. So, if you're feeling very constrained, very closed, you're probably going to remain that way. If we give you big open spaces to think, hopefully, you will do that. So, the classrooms are designed so that the students have the ability and the faculty have the ability to interact with each other while in the classroom. There is one, what we would call, traditional horseshoe classroom simply because we got to teach ECO 1, right? [laughter] That's just the fact of the matter. We do have to have some big classes. But the vast majority of the classrooms are built so that there is no one way that students are learning in the classroom. There're two things that we wanted, that were always front of mind in our design process: flexibility and adaptability. Flexibility, meaning that when the faculty and the students are in the classroom, they can do things; they can move the tables; they can have everything. Adaptability acknowledges that the way that we're teaching today probably is not going to be the way that we're teaching in 25 years. We want the building to age gracefully. We want the building to adapt to modalities of teaching that we don't even think about now.

GERTH: 19:56

During the course of the construction, during course of the whole process, even when you first thought about it, are there any special moments that were positive like,

"That was really a special moment that I had with somebody," or just as you were walking through the building one day or anything like that?

PHILLIPS: 20:15

I still marvel when I walk into the building and I see that big, beautiful lobby. It's just spectacular, just spectacular with the open staircase. And when I go into the classrooms, especially the classroom in the round, it just being in that room, in the round classroom makes me want to teach in a different way. And that's the goal here, that we allow the faculty, the license to do things differently. We don't constrain them by how things are set up. We say to them, "How would you like to teach? Here's basically a blank canvas for you to use." So, the classroom in the round really does excite me. The view from executive education is amazing. The idea that we didn't have Exec. Ed, and now not only do we have Exec. Ed, we have such a marvelous space to welcome members of the business community into Lehigh. I don't think we do enough of that. We're very good with our undergraduate students, with our graduate students. We don't do enough of bringing the business community into Lehigh. And that's what this space does.

GERTH: 21:42

And I have to say that the views from the first and second floor classrooms are spectacular, too.

PHILLIPS: 21:46

Yeah. I mean, it's a gorgeous building. [laughter]

GERTH: 21:53

So now you have two buildings. Lehigh Business has two buildings now. Some people are like, "What are you going to do with the old building?"

PHILLIPS: 22:00

Yeah. I mean, first of all, germ of the idea was, we have to build more space for the faculty. There's not one faculty office over there. [laughter] So how are we getting more faculties because we definitely need to faculty space here in Rauch. So, we are moving the graduate programs office over there. And that opens up a lot of space. And we're giving more space to the undergraduate programs office by moving the Rauch Center for Business Communications over to the new building. We're moving out the financial services lab. And because we don't have a faculty lounge. We don't have space for the fact. So, we're changing that to be the faculty lounge. So we can reuse the Rauch space for a less intensive use, not teaching-oriented use, and solve the faculty problems. So yeah, we still need every square inch of the building that we're in right now.

GERTH: 23:03

So, what does this new building do for the future of Lehigh Business as far as the college's mission and goals?

PHILLIPS: 23:11

I mean, the most obvious thing it does is that it provides a space for executive. I mean, that was another major driver of the building, that we had no Exec. Ed space, and now we have gorgeous Exec. Ed space. So that really plants our flag very prominently. And I have to give a nod to the folks in the Vistex Institute For Executive Education, that the pandemic was rough for every Exec. Ed. program across the nation. There are several business schools that I know of that closed down their Exec. Ed. business because those were dark days. And we managed to keep our business open to the point that now we're back to thriving. We were doing extraordinary business beforehand. We kept the fires burning during the pandemic. I say we. It was really the folks up in Vistex Institute that did such a great job. But now we're back rolling, and it's going to be even better when we start to have our own space. So that's one of the first things that it does. It really plants a flag in the ground that we are a full-scale business school. We are undergrads, we are master's students, we're a

PhD, and we are Exec. Ed. So that's the number one thing that it does. Secondly, it allows our business students to learn in a business simulated model, that so much of the things that they do will be presentations, group work, all of the things that businesspeople do that we have to give them real life experience. We are giving them great space for interviews. A lot of times, especially since the pandemic, students have to do remote interviews. And it's asynchronous. It would scare me the death if I were a student. But you get the questions. You have to upload a video of yourself answering the questions.

GERTH: 25:19

Oh, with no questioner. It's just you and you.

PHILLIPS: 25:23

You and you. And that's kind of tough to do in your dorm room. Okay? [laughter] And we're giving them great space dedicated for that purpose. With the one touch studio, they go in, they record, they upload, they leave, and they send it in and hopefully get great jobs. So, it's those kinds of things that I'm most looking forward to.

GERTH: 25:48

One of the great spaces in that building is for Lehigh Ventures Lab. Tell us a little bit about that.

PHILLIPS: 25:54

Yeah. Absolutely. This is so incredibly exciting. This is the university's first space to actually launch businesses. Lehigh Ventures Lab is a collaboration between the Baker Institute and Lehigh Business. Our goal is to highlight ventures that have commercial viability and incubate them to the point that they're ready to fly out pre-age, early-stage businesses, so graduates, faculty, whoever it may be spending time within the lab with the support of Lehigh Business. So we, on the Lehigh Business side, provide the, let's call it, educational backbone, finance classes if they need them. Business plan help. Our SBDC is an integral part of this because the folks from SBDC will run classes for the folks that are resonant in the Ventures Lab and getting them their exit strategy to launch. We've done a really good job at the university of instilling in many of our students that entrepreneurial mindset. All the wonderful things that Baker does, just getting students to think, "What does it take to be an entrepreneur?" We're going to take those who want to dedicate their profession to this and give them the space to grow.

GERTH: 27:36

You talked about a little bit because you were just over in the new building. But right now, as we record this, we're about five weeks away. What are your thoughts right now? What are you thinking?

PHILLIPS: 27:47

I joke about this. But I cannot think of an analogy that suits me better, that I have been pregnant now for 24 months, and I want to give birth. [laughter] And I remember when I was getting ready to give birth, it was an anxious time because you've been waiting for so long. Everybody tells you, "It's going to be fine. It's going to be fine." But until you see that baby and you count the fingers and the toes and you hear the [whale?], you're like, "Well, will it really be fine?" [laughter] So I can't wait on March the 3rd, when we have our big opening celebration to count the fingers and count the toes and hear the squeal of delight of my baby. [laughter] So yeah, it's five weeks away. There's just a myriad details, myriad details that you just have to slog through and pray that everything keeps falling in the way. For example, all of the furniture in the classroom in the round was delivered damaged. We did not anticipate damaged furniture. Well, it should be in about 10 days. But still, that's the kind of anxiety that, fingers and toes, fingers and toes. I have to go back to what I said when I started this job in July of 2014. One of my most pressing goals was to take, at that

point the Lehigh College of Business and Economics and transform it into a world class business school, undergraduate, master's, executive education, that we are known for being a business school. And the building goes a long way to that, that it shows that we do pay attention to executive education, that we do have master's students throughout the building and our flagship MBA program, which is still-- it's an incredible program, but it is part-time in the evening. And so you don't see a lot of these students many times. So, there's no visibility. Well, now we have a daytime MBA program. Now we have other daytime master's programs. So we're seeing those students in the building. We're seeing executive education in the building and of course our wonderful undergraduates. I mean, they are just spectacular. And we're continuing to see them. So, it's not to diminish the undergraduate side. It's to bring up everything to that level. And the building really does help us do that.

GERTH: 31:06

I've been talking with Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips. She's a professor in both the Perella Department of Finance and the College of Business and in the Africana Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences here at Lehigh. This podcast is brought to you by iLLUminate, the Lehigh Business Blog. To hear more podcasts featuring Lehigh Business thought leaders, please visit us at business.lehigh.edu/news and follow us on Twitter @LehighBusiness. [music] I'm Rob Gerth. Thanks for listening.