

illUminate Blog Transcript: Georgette Chapman Phillips on Interdependency Between Government and Business (Year of Learning)

Recorded July 19, 2023. Listen to it [here](#).

- GEORGETTE CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 00:00 One of the great things about being in a university is that we should be teaching our students critical thinking skills. And this is a perfect opportunity to say, "I might disagree with you, and I'm going to back it up with some facts."
- ANNOUNCER: 00:18 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: 00:30 Welcome. I'm Rob Gerth, director of marketing and communications for Lehigh University College of Business. Today is July 19th, 2023, and we're talking with Georgette Chapman Phillips, the Kevin L. and Lisa A. Clayton dean of the College of Business. Welcome, Georgette.
- CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 00:46 Hi, Rob. Thanks for having me.
- GERTH: 00:48 Now, the College of Business is on its third year of learning. The first year's theme was the corporation society. Last year's was limitations of technology. And this year's theme is interdependency between government and business. Now, before we dig into that, just a quick explanation of what the year of learning is, please.
- CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 01:07 Every year at the College of Business, we take one theme and we weave it throughout the entire curriculum, through undergraduate, graduate classes. The idea is that in each class, the students will be exposed to this theme embedded in the discipline of that class. And so if they're in accounting class, they will talk about the theme from an accounting perspective. If they are in a marketing class, through marketing, and so on and so forth. And it's even possible that if a student has two classes in the same discipline, they'll be hearing about this theme from two different professors. The idea is to give the students the agency for their learning, that through hearing about the same topic through several different lenses, they will be able, using their critical thinking skills, to discern the differences, the similarities, and ask themselves, what is the connection throughout the curriculum. So that's the goal.
- GERTH: 02:19 So now as far as this year's theme goes, interdependency between government and business, that seems like a big topic.
- CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 02:27 Yes. Yes, it is. I mean, one of the challenges of choosing a theme for the year of learning is that, like I said, it has to go throughout every single class that we teach, everything from statistics to human resources. And so you have to have it broad enough that everybody can get a piece of it, but narrow enough that it really does have impact. It really does mean something. And so the faculty suggest topics for each year, and then in faculty meetings, we discuss them, and we vote. And one thing that we found with this year's theme, it started out with simply regulation of business by government. And quite correctly, some faculty members brought up, "Well, wait a minute. There is a lot more going on between government and business than regulation." And so why don't we just expand it to talk about how we have government and we have business, and the two really do depend on one another.

That's the interdependency. And I thought that was a marvelous idea because it just doesn't talk about how we regulate business, but it also talks about how the government and the business world depend on one another.

GERTH: 03:57

Do you have any specific examples?

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
03:59

I can think of-- we live in eastern Pennsylvania here, and top of mind was the collapse of I95 in northeast Philadelphia. And so it's a public road, obviously, but it was a public-private partnership in getting that road up in record time. And so we have these private firms that have proprietary solutions to the problem. The government brings them in. The government is able to expedite it because it is the government. And I believe it's within three weeks several lanes of I95, the major artery in the United States, the northeast of the United States, was back open again. The government could not have done this alone. Private industry could not have done this alone. They had to work together.

GERTH: 04:59

So how do you keep students and professors from this becoming a very partisan discussion? Because I'm sure you don't want it to be a partisan discussion.

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
05:09

Absolutely. Absolutely. Nobody wants to turn this into any kind of partisan or political discussion. And one of the great things about being in a university is that we should be teaching our students critical thinking skills. And this is a perfect opportunity to say, "I might disagree with you, and I'm going to back it up with some facts." I'm going to give it a big we'll see. But we can't shy away from our responsibility as a university being the marketplace of ideas, the exchange of ideas, and having a platform where different sides of the same discussion can be presented in a neutral manner.

GERTH: 05:57

Ultimately, what kind of discussions are you trying to get the faculty and the students to have?

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
06:02

Ultimately, to have people recognize that business cannot exist without government, and some government intervention on business is not a bad thing. I mean, going back to regulation, I don't think anybody would say that seat belts are bad. Okay? That's regulation that you have to wear a seat belt. Another example is occupational safety. We have regulations that dictate that a workplace has to be safe: fire regulations, air regulations. These have been monumental changes that happen long ago that we don't really question them anymore.

GERTH: 06:52

So, part of the program is faculty and students discussing this in their class, no matter what kind of class it is, finding a way to apply that. Another part of the program is in the spring, you bring in a speaker that gives a talk that is related to the topic of year of learning.

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
07:12

Right. Right. We try to look out into industry and see who is a leading thinker on these topics. In the past, we've brought in authors. We've brought in people from think tanks. This year, we are anticipating having somebody from the federal government come in. And that person spends an entire day on campus meeting with students, going to classes; meeting with students, having lunch with students, giving a lecture at the end of the day, and then meeting with faculty after that lecture to discuss more about the topic. So it really is a holistic endeavor.

GERTH: 07:59

And with two full years behind you now, how do you think it's going? How do you think that-- what do you think the student and faculty are getting out of this so far?

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
08:08

Well, I do read the student reviews every semester. And I know it's working because some students are saying, "Why in a world are we doing this?" For example, when we were talking about the corporation in society, one question is, what is the proper role for the corporation in society? Should it contribute to the public good? And some students wrote on their evaluations, the role of a corporation is maximizing shareholder value, and anything other than that is not the role of the corporation. And I said, bingo, that's exactly what I want to our students to start thinking about, because that showed me somebody introduced their idea into his head or her head. Now, it might be that the student ended up in the same place that they thought they were before, but at least they were exposed to another idea. Of course, you get students that say, "This was great. It went across two or three of my classes. I really enjoyed hearing about it from several different perspectives." Yes, these are all great answers. But I knew that we were on the right track when we had at least one student say, "Oh, I disagree." That means that he or she was thinking about it. And that's the goal.

GERTH: 09:36

Thanks for joining us today, Georgette.

CHAPMAN PHILLIPS:
09:38

You're very welcome, Rob. Looking forward to launching our third year of year of learning.

GERTH: 09:45

I've been talking with Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips. She is a professor in both the Perella Department of Finance in 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. I'm Rob Gerth. Thanks for listening.