

## **Broad Matters Season 6 Episode 6 "Expanding Inclusive Leadership" with William Horton-Anderson and Scot Wright**

Ken Szymusiak:

Welcome to Broad Matters, a podcast bringing you thought leadership, innovative perspectives, and real world impact from Michigan State University's Eli Broad College of Business. I'm Ken Szymusiak, Managing Director for the Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. In the final episode of season six for Broad Matters, I'm joined by my friends William Horton-Anderson and Scot Wright. William is the Assistant Director of the college's Full-Time MBA program and its newly created STEM MBA program. Since 2018, he's been developing Broad MBAs to become diverse and inclusive business leaders.

William Horton-Anderson:

I think there are people here, and by people, students, faculty and staff, that actually want to listen and learn from each other. Broad's greatest treasure has been and will always be its people.

Ken Szymusiak:

Alongside William, we have the College's DEI Program Manager, Scot Wright. In the first year of his role, Scot has been creating programs and projects that enhance the quality of education, research, and engagement at Broad.

Scot Wright:

Broad also has the ability to, in a sense, punch beyond its weight class. It's the largest school here at MSU, so it matters in a lot of ways, in terms of its influence and reach, and I think that it's strengthening the people and the types of influence we have and reach. I think that that's why Broad matters.

Ken Szymusiak:

Today we'll be hearing how both William and Scot are helping to involve diverse perspectives, promote inclusion, and ensure quality across the College in their unique roles. Welcome to the podcast, William and Scot.

William Horton-Anderson:

Thanks so much. It's awesome to be here.

Scot Wright:

It's an absolute pleasure to be here with you.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, it's going to be fun. If each of you could give a little background on your role at the College, that'd be great. And William, we'll start with you.

William Horton-Anderson:

I like to see myself as kind of a newcomer. So I have zero connection to MSU. My business expertise handles store management. So at the age of 18, I became the youngest store manager of a multimillion dollar store, and then so much that I became an area mentor, where I had upwards of 200 to 300 employees reporting to me. Imagine people twice my age reporting to me, saying, "You should do this, you should do this, you should do this."

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Time went on. Negative situations impacted my trajectory with the senior leaders of the company. So I decided to go back and get my Bachelor's degree in psychology and then, furthermore, get my Master's in mental health counseling, where during both of those times I actually studied and focused on behavioral and cognitive interactions for both political and corporate advertisements. After that, I worked at various higher education institutions being a mental health counselor, kind of dipping my toe into academics with teaching.

And then, I was in New York at the time and I said, "I miss business." There was a part of me that always really enjoyed the business aspect of it. So I kind of sat down with my husband and we were both looking at places to go, and we saw that Michigan State had a really good opportunity for both of us. So he applied, got his job here at Michigan State, myself a year later here at the Broad College. And basically since then I've been working on developing students, helping them be the next inclusive business leaders, and moreso now with our MBA students, who are really going to be helping and developing their own teams.

Ken Szymusiak:

That's a cool journey. And it's like, "Oh, we're going to Michigan State."

William Horton-Anderson:

Yeah.

Ken Szymusiak:

I love it. Very cool. And I've known you for a while here, but I didn't know the whole background how you arrived. Scot?

Scot Wright:

So that's really interesting. I think we have some alignment in how we got here, Will. So for me, my partner is in the history department here at MSU, so she was offered a position. We came from Indiana. So my background is as a small business owner in Indiana and also as a DEI specialist at Indiana University Bloomington. Using those talents and a bit of my histories previous to that, we've lived around the country and around the world. We've lived in Berlin. Those sort of collaborations and effects in my life allowed me to use those resources to be a really strong applicant for the position that is here.

What I do here is use a lot of my skillsets that I learned with students in Bloomington as a DEI specialist. And then also in terms of my entrepreneurship, I learned so much in terms of how to relate to folks and understand markets. My undergrad was also at IU, my MBA is from IU, and those equipped me well for the position I have here.

Ken Szymusiak:

Great school. Great to have you both as part of Broad though. Pretty awesome. William, we're going to start with you. I think MBA programs, I think, writ large, have a reputation. This is where serious business folk come to get trained. But let's talk about what makes Broad unique on that front and then what you're doing to really differentiate what an MBA from Broad means and some of the work you're doing on DEI and maybe some of the other things about how to create inclusive leadership.

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William Horton-Anderson:

MBA's, we're very good at training teams, here specifically at Broad. We're very known for training team interactions, team cooperation. Then also, furthermore, another thing that we're really good at is training managers. Managerial consultants, we're very good at that. But I think another part that's really important that a lot of people don't focus on is the interactions of teams, what people say are those soft skills. And that you can't really learn in a classroom setting.

That's more so the interactions between individuals that happens either on group work, outside of the classroom work, extracurricular work, all of that stuff. So specifically for the MBA side of things, what I am overseeing is how people talk with each other. I think this all started a few years ago when I actually got that position. It's people actually taking the time to sit down and wanting to have that initial conversation. That said student may have come from a background of five years in business, but that's all they've ever done, whereas we have another person who might have come from a low-income city where they had to literally work full time since they graduated high school and since then they've wanted to work their way up in the company, but they consistently kept receiving pushback because of how they identify and the experiences that they're bringing in.

And now they're coming here for an MBA to give them the quote unquote "business chops" that they can back it all up with everything that they have experienced in their life. So in the MBA program, that's the core of what we've been working on for the past couple of years is the individual story and the individual experience that every single person brings in that makes them a better person, but also it makes the MBA program a lot stronger.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, absolutely. What are you doing to break down some of these barriers and help students own that experience? Because, really, it's a total experience. I think, oftentimes, we focus on the credits, what you learn in the classroom, but I think this is the change to what makes a really, really good Master's program, in my opinion, is one which is inclusive of the entire experience.

William Horton-Anderson:

Absolutely. And I think the thing that makes it strongest is that it's student-led and student-driven. I had students come specifically to me saying that we should probably focus a little bit more on this rather than this or even at an even standpoint. So the students are the ones that are really driving everything. I'm taking all the feedback, and I'm using all of what they want and bringing it up to the administrative level. How will this work in this setting? How will this work in this setting? How can I pull in various people from the College or even the University to make what they want a little bit stronger?

I think the starting point was, this year, we really started focusing on monthly identity articles, the monthly heritage articles. So it all started in September, and then we're finishing up the one for Arab American History Month right now. Where every single month, we had students that have that identity or share that identity and just talk about just general experiences. What they've gone through, what it means for them, how they plan to use this in the future, what is an important thing in the business community that they can learn about themselves, and not just here at Broad, but also throughout business in general. Because I know we have tons of alumni that love listening and talking with our students, so how can they learn from said identity? So that's where it all really started was there, and from there, it's just really starting to blossom.

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Ken Szymusiak:

That's awesome. And Scot, I know you do a lot of interaction with the MBA students as well. Can you tell me about your experience and what you've been doing programming-wise with the MBAs?

Scot Wright:

So the MBAs that I've encountered that Will's introduced me to and then also just your interactions through different affinity groups, they're brilliant, they're thoughtful. They've shown me so many aspects of the Lansing community, interesting things about themselves. So with respect to the Black MBA Association, more recently there was local businesses with respect to African American-owned businesses in town.

So we had an opportunity to go visit the businesses, talk with these entrepreneurs and learn their stories and their backgrounds. And so with respect to those folks in the affinity groups and the folks that Will is supporting, it's been a nice collaboration. So the collaboration's been really strong.

Ken Szymusiak:

Now, before we move on, I do want to ask you about the new MBA STEM program.

William Horton-Anderson:

Yeah, absolutely.

Ken Szymusiak:

Let's talk about this and how this came to be as a specialization that Broad's going to focus on.

William Horton-Anderson:

Yeah, totally. So this has been, I would say, for three years we have been working on this degree, making sure everything was met appropriately. So first, just really quickly, the difference between STEM and full-time. So STEM was really designed and designated for our international students because when they graduate, they only get 12 months of post-graduation work. And in that 12 months, they have to hit the lottery and cross their fingers for the H-1B Visa, whereas a STEM designation degree, which is a federal approval, they can extend that 12 months an additional 24 months, making it a full three years, which greatly increases their H-1B visa selection process.

That was a real driving force is how can we best support our international students that are really leaving their lives in a completely different country and wanting to come here and study with us? How can we best support them and strengthen them and push them off to a better future?

Scot Wright:

And I think that, really, that energy that the University's kind of come up with in order to see the problems students would face based upon that one year and that timeline, we can actually broaden that to folks who are here, even in terms of domestic diversity with respect to a two-year MBA. Is the opportunity cost of that are fairly significant if you don't have the resources to come in.

And so when you think about where we're seeing the necessity in terms of support, how do we think about those students who might not just, one, have the resources, but if we're thinking about them two to three years down the line, it's difficult to step out of a well-paying job to think about, "Yeah, I will have additional resources at the end of this MBA and responsibilities and I'll grow my networks and all

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that stuff." But if you're making ends meet for the first time in your life and you support families and all that, taking two years is a real commitment.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah. It can be a big step back financially for folks. That's a lot to wrap your brain around in terms of making the commitment. I applaud the efforts. I think it's a really, really progressive way of thinking about how we actually move forward on this. Now within the MBA program, we also have a number of DEI-focused student orgs. Do you want to touch on those briefly and what they do in terms of lending support to the student community?

William Horton-Anderson:

Yeah, absolutely. So, first, we don't refer to them as student organizations. What we really want to try and do is almost mirror and mimic what the "real world" quote unquote is like. You have ERGs, you have employee resource groups. But here in the MBA program, we have student resource groups. That's why we call them SRGs because when they go back into the quote unquote "real world", they're going to want to connect with those employee resource groups to help better connect to the community that that business is offering, but then also make mutual connections. So that's really what we're doing.

So the SRGs, what they do is they first want to welcome any members in that have said identity and saying, "You have us. You have a family within a family. This is what we're here for. We're here to lift you up, support you in any way that we can."

Then another thing that they do is they want to educate their peers. And the best part about all of it is really being student-driven. I myself, quote unquote "oversee" all the DEI groups, but really they're the ones that choose what they want to do every single year. They're the ones that decide how they want to do it, in what way, so they want to engage and how they want to maybe change what was done last year or, "This is what I did in my experience, this is what I want to do" and I just say, "Go for it. Run with it. You are in charge of this. This is all student driven." So I think that's a big differentiation in comparison to other groups. These students want this done. They want to push the culture. They want to change the culture.

Ken Szymusiak:

There's a lot of ownership there.

William Horton-Anderson:

Yeah.

Ken Szymusiak:

Scot, relatively new position here. DEI, hot space, there's a lot of talk about it. In terms of its relevance and that it's kind of bubbled to the top of discussions, which is shining a light on these types of activities. And there's pockets of this activity happening in lots of different places. How are you inventorying what's happening and then where have been the things that have been examples of really good impact that you've seen so far, and what's your approach so far in terms of how you wrap your brain around what Broad's up to in this space?

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Scot Wright:

I kind of think of myself as a serial collaborator. I love to use resources that are already out there. A lot of the folks we have here want to do amazing things, and so if we're siloed in certain ways, getting out of those silos, having meaningful conversations, that's the important piece. There's a freedom in what I'm doing, in terms of asking questions in a way that each of the individual bases can kind of relate and sort of delve into what they're thinking, their objectives, and then to make some collaborative efforts.

For example, within MBP, which is Multicultural Business Programs, which is undergraduate space, which supports affinity groups, Black and Broad is one of their newest affinity groups. And so I helped a little bit earlier in the year with Black and Broad to get involved with the Burgess Institute to make sure that they had meetings over there.

Also, Black and Broad partnered with the Black MBA Association in Will's space. The efforts to make collaborative spaces where students can see where they're going, that's important to me. Because those students in the Master's programs, they've been out in the workforce, they've got experiences. They're the ones who can give the amazing advice to the undergraduate students who don't have those experiences.

So on the student level, there's that, connecting undergrads to graduates. But then also with respect to Broad in general, we also have staff. So I'm a part of the Staff Leadership Committee, so that brings all sorts of groups and information to staff needs. For me, it's all-inclusive, I'd say. I'm continuing to learn. It's been about six months, but it's been a nice journey.

Ken Szymusiak:

I'm going to give you some kudos here because this is a tough role. It's a topic that everyone appreciates, but a lot of people have a hard time asking questions about. Are we doing the right things? Are these measurable? Are we making an impact, or are we just doing things because we should be doing them?

I've enjoyed talking with you about this, and if we're going to do it, we're going to do it the right way. So it's nice to have you and William and others. Obviously, you've named a lot of great folks here in the business school who are working on these things, but I think we can be a leader if we do it right.

Scot Wright:

That's important. I think that leadership matters. We highlight when we lead in particular departments, whether it's supply chain or accounting. We highlight that. How can we highlight our diversity, equity, inclusion, leadership? There was an interesting article, sort of an interfolio recently, which talked about promotion, retention, and tenure.

This is another aspect of what we do. Those examples of diverse folks in the academic spaces, we have opportunities there, but that lends itself to creating a business school, which is inclusive for everyone, where Master's students can say, "Oh, my gosh, Professor, you have an amazing job where you're influencing these folks. You're influencing people like me." That's where Broad is going to hopefully become that particular leader, I'd say.

Ken Szymusiak:

How do we create inclusive communities without being exclusive?

William Horton-Anderson:

That's a really deep question.

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Ken Szymusiak:

We might not solve it here. I just want your thoughts on this because this is something that routinely comes up in these types of conversations.

Scot Wright:

Well, I'd say, for me, it really is listening. If you're not talking, if you're not speaking, then you're listening. You're actually absorbing what's going on. But with respect to making sure that I'm hearing people and understanding, I don't believe that everyone has ill intentions. Right?

Ken Szymusiak:

Right.

Scot Wright:

And so if I approach a person on a human level, we can actually relate to certain things and hear each other out. One of the things we created as a part of the Culture and Climate Committee was a “Food for Thought” engagement series where people could come in and just, without any sort of barriers, have a meal and have a conversation over a particular topic. It was very small spaces so people could listen and hear each other and find out about different opinions on different topics. No one has all the answers, and I think that if you're just listening, opening up, allowing others to share their experiences, it allows for them to hear your experiences, I'd say.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, I think that's a really good answer.

William Horton-Anderson:

Also, going off of that, listening is fantastic. It's great, it's powerful. But also at the same exact time, you have to have someone who is in charge that is willing to do the hard work and to set the pace. For me, it's got to be more than, "We're going to do this to do this and check a box and give ourselves a pat on the back."

It's, "Do we really want to change the culture? Do we really want to be inclusive?" That's what you have to internally ask yourself in the position that you are in. And if you can answer yes to all of that, then listening, in my opinion's, going to be a lot easier. It's this combination of, yes, listen to people and listen to those experiences, but you've got to have clear, defined leadership from the top that is literally saying, "Yes, this is important to the College. This is important to the business that I am running. This is important X, Y, and Z." It's got to be both sides. It can't just be people at the bottom-

Scot Wright:

Yeah, I love that.

William Horton-Anderson:

...lifting it up.

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Scot Wright:

That's so important. I appreciate that because that accountability aspect. If what you say falls on deaf ears or you're expected to fall on deaf ears, which is a lot of what happens in DEI space, that's such an important point. I think we have leaders here who are listening, but it's also, that's the impact. You have to constantly champion it, and then the accountability part, where that apprehensiveness that we might feel as being diverse in spaces that don't celebrate us, that apprehensiveness that we feel, it can be met with a sense of, "Okay, all right, I'm going to be allowed to breathe a little bit now." And then more and then more.

Ken Szymusiak:

I think it's almost like integrating listening as the learning process or something. This sounds kind of strange to say because it's what we do, but how are you an engaged learner about what makes a good inclusive space? And this is a challenge I've put to myself to some extent even this year is how do I become a better listener so I'm understanding why certain people have different opinions on these types of topics? Because it can be hot button topics. It can put you in a vicious cycle. And, how do we break it? We might not have the answer, like I said, but I'm interested in your thoughts on it.

William Horton-Anderson:

That's kind of what I've been doing a lot lately with the presentations that I've been doing, not only around the College, but also in other various spaces. I do this really fun activity. I hand out sheets of paper, ask people to write down important things that are in their lives, whether it's things, people, titles, you name it, whatever. Have them crumple it all up, put it in a giant pile in front of them, and then I just give them scenarios.

"If you're born in this month, take this color paper, set it off to the side. If you have children, take this paper, set it off to the side." It's this idea of putting themselves in an identity and an experience that they were not privy to in very simple and easy terms. So then at the very end, they realize, "Oh, my God. All I have left is my car and I'm a director and I like to walk my dog at the end of the day. That's all that I have with my identity."

And it's just basically connecting that experience. This is what happens, and it can be across any identity you think of, but I just use it as a coming out experience. So, for example, me just coming out to everyone in this room and everyone listening to this podcast. I give you all the power to say, "Yes, we're going to accept Will for the way that they are" or "Nope, absolutely not. Move on. Next." It's just kind of laying it down in a fun, easy, simpler term where people can start having those conversations and be challenged with each other. That's a nice, fun way that I've been using and people seem to enjoy it.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, it helps disarm the noise in the head to some extent, and I think that's half the battle with some of this stuff. And to your point earlier, Scot, I think most people, probably 99.99% of people, they're not approaching this topic as a villain, per se. They just haven't had experiences, or they haven't had the chance to learn. And when you meet people on their terms and you have conversations, it changes everything.

Scot Wright:

I hope it changes things. That's the objective. The weight is heavy. And so with respect to allowing people to share their voices and that, it's a disarming sort of technique, I'd say.



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Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah. Out of all the things we're doing here at Broad, what is exciting to you both right now?

William Horton-Anderson:

I think the most exciting thing is this DEI index that we've been working on. Something brand new that we started last year. It was driven by myself and my graduate assistant at the time. We like to think of it as a year in review. How is the MBA program doing in terms of DEI? And we use our student resource groups to talk about what they've done, and we use admissions data and metrics.

We do informal interviews for student leaders, for program leadership, College leadership, and how it all relates to the MBA program. We like to think of it every year as a keep ourselves in check on how well we're doing and what, more importantly, we need to work on. But then also my own hidden agenda to it is also challenging the College to look at too. So it could be either a guiding light or, "Wow, we didn't think of it that way. Let's try something like that maybe in the future."

Ken Szymusiak:

It's a really great internal scorecard. Are we doing the things we said we were set out to do?

William Horton-Anderson:

Exactly.

Ken Szymusiak:

Very cool. Scot, what has you excited right now?

Scot Wright:

So I think, in some sense, excited about the culture and climate data that's going to be coming out real soon, and I think we'll have some data to work with, how we're doing, how people feel in the College, some relevant terms, I think.

Ken Szymusiak:

Is this just faculty staff, or is it students as well?

Scot Wright:

It's students. It's across the entire college.

Ken Szymusiak:

Oh, okay. It's across the entire College. Okay.

Scot Wright:

Listening to diverse voices, hopefully hearing people in an anonymous way so that we can get better in terms of the things that we're doing moving forward. What we expect is that we'll learn from this certain things. Hopefully a lot of honest assessments of what we're doing well and what we're not doing well, and then sort of getting feedback from that, which is open to all stakeholders, and then coming back at it annually.

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I'm really excited about the collaborations. Within Broad this past semester, we've had a collaboration with APIDA Heritage Month folks, so Asian Pacific Islanders, Desi-Americans, just in terms of programming, in terms of support. I've joined a APIDA Heritage Month committee. Making sure that diverse voices that are just being heard in and around campus. Broad, in a lot of ways, we're insular. We're very proud of what we can accomplish, but really making those collaborations with folks who are diverse around campus, who are doing the work, that's what I'm excited about.

Ken Szymusiak:

Very cool. Great way to close out season six of Broad Matters. So how do we keep in touch with what you guys are both working on?

William Horton-Anderson:

Well, for the MBA program, what you can do is just go to the Broad MBA website and then specifically look at DEI. We have a page right there. And then, more importantly too actually, students, we're able to sit down and actually contact a student. They actually want to share their real life journey and experience from where they're at to where they are now and fill in the gaps. For me, myself, personally, LinkedIn's always the easiest way. So again, it's just William Horton-Anderson.

Scot Wright:

For me, I'm Scot Wright with one T. You can find me on LinkedIn. You'll see my face. It'll be celebrating DEI here at MSU, but that's where you can find me.

Ken Szymusiak:

Thanks for being in the closing show. Really appreciate it.

William Horton-Anderson:

Absolutely. Thanks, Ken.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah.

Scot Wright:

Thank you so much, Ken.

Ken Szymusiak:

Join us next fall to hear from even more Broad College faculty and staff as they weigh in on relevant issues and discuss how their work makes an impact, illuminating how and why Broad matters.