



DID YOU HEAR?

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Podcasts offer a new platform to share stories that make Quinnipiac unique

For David DesRoches, the corner office with a view of Sleeping Giant State Park isn't really an office at all. It's a freshly minted podcast studio with slick, soundproof walls and professional-grade equipment—the perfect venue for storytelling and hands-on learning.

On this early March afternoon, the hints of spring were everywhere and the coronavirus had not yet become a global pandemic. DesRoches, the director of community programming at the new Quinnipiac University Podcast Studio, was awaiting a phone call from Oscar-winning screenwriter David Rabinowitz '09, who lives in Los Angeles. Across the room, Tom Conley-Wilson '20, leaned over a digital soundboard with enough switches and buttons to launch a new era at the School of Communications.

"We didn't anticipate doing a lot of remote interviews," DesRoches explained. "Originally, we thought a lot of people would just come in here to talk. But then, I came on board and threw a wrench into everything. I'm very good at throwing wrenches into things. But I tend to grab the wrench and say, 'You know what? I'll use it to build stuff. So that's what I try to do.'"

Together with President Judy Olian and Chris Roush, dean of the School of Communications, DesRoches is building a space where students conceive and produce podcasts as part of their academic and professional development. The topics range from food insecurity, education and politics to health care and athletics.

Over the past decade, podcasting has become a global force, a powerful storytelling platform that doesn't require a broadcast signal or rigid scheduling. People can listen whenever they want, wherever they want. There are more than 900,000 podcasts around the world with more than 30 million unique episodes, according to the podcastinsights.com website.

"David is the perfect person to launch the podcast studio because of his background in public radio and journalism, and because of his expertise in telling stories and talking to people," Roush said. "We're excited to see what he does with this new initiative."

Along with students, DesRoches is working with faculty, staff and community leaders to develop a diverse lineup of podcasts.

As an award-winning journalist, DesRoches spent 15 years telling stories and reporting on breaking news in Darien, Connecticut, and on the air with Connecticut Public Broadcasting. He leverages these skills as the host of QKast, a podcast that explores the people and stories that bond Quinnipiac and its neighbors in Hamden, North Haven and the surrounding towns.

While the QKast was on hiatus this spring, DesRoches created another podcast, "Isolated Together," about life during these unprecedented times. He also launched two more podcasts, "UnCOMMON Grounds" and "The Virtual Quadcast." He produces the podcasts in his makeshift, socially isolated studio. You can learn more and download episodes at qu.edu/podcast.

Naturally, the amenities at Quinnipiac's podcast studio are much more sophisticated. Tucked inside the Center for Communications and Engineering, the podcast studio offers a generous workspace with four microphones connecting podcast hosts and their guests.

"Podcasting really is an intimate medium, and the numbers reflect that," DesRoches said. "When you hear somebody's voice on a microphone, and you hear them shake or stutter or breathe or exasperate or pause, those little details create an instant connection to you, the listener. People make a personal connection to the voices. You hear someone talking, and it's like they're telling you their story."

This is the first lesson and the end game of podcasting, DesRoches said. No matter how many downloads, the goal is to touch every listener, whether it's someone wearing headphones at the gym or someone commuting to work with the rest of humanity.

IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTENT

The inaugural QKast episode in March featured Olian, Roush, DesRoches and North Haven First Selectman Michael Freda discussing podcasts and their value as a way to bring people together.

A second QKast episode debuted a week later with Ben Bogardus, assistant professor of journalism, discussing his ongoing podcast, "Hunger in Hamden," about food insecurity. The second episode of "Hunger in Hamden" recently earned



Top: QU President Judy Olian and North Haven First Selectman Michael Freda appeared on the inaugural QKast episode.

Right: Tom Conley-Wilson '20, a media studies major with minors in marketing and journalism, shifts between a computer and a soundboard. Conley-Wilson produced the QKast podcast this spring.

Bogardus an Award of Excellence in the Broadcast Education Association's Festival of Media Arts competition in the radio documentary category.

DesRoches also helped with the rebrand of the Quinnipiac Athletics Podcast hosted and produced by journalism majors Dan Bahl '20, and co-host Matt McAuliffe '20. The reimagined podcast, now named "The Roar," celebrated its 50th episode in March, although it's on hiatus like the QKast.

But the podcast studio's outreach and storytelling doesn't end there.

The work of the Quinnipiac University Poll will be featured in a podcast called, "Pols and Polling," hosted by poll director and associate vice president Doug Schwartz. Additionally, the Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine is developing a podcast hosted by Lisa Coplit, associate dean for faculty and associate professor, called, "TOLD"—To Learn and Develop.

Journalism major Kevin Meiselman '20 worked with DesRoches to help improve his mental health podcast, "Behind the Mind." Meiselman hosted and produced 12 episodes over the past

year with guests including former NFL lineman Joe Barksdale.

"It's easy to do a podcast if you have an iPhone or a smartphone. You just record your podcast and put it online, right? But what's the quality level?" DesRoches said. "That's why Quinnipiac wanted to develop a systematic consistency of quality. My real vision is to have our students run the show—every single thing—from the hosting to the producing. I want them taking ownership of the show. I want them coming up with the ideas."

Roush sees the podcast studio as a storytelling laboratory for students, a place where their ideas can be downloaded and shared across Apple Podcasts, Google, Spotify and more. "Many of our top students are coming to us with podcasting experience already. We need to be able to refine those skills in what has become a popular field," Roush said.

'THE CORE FOUR'

DesRoches served as mentor and muse to four students in particular this spring—"The Core Four" as he calls them. They all helped with the preparation, production and promotion of the QKast. Conley-Wilson was joined by Nia Braccidiferro '22, a graphic and interactive design major who ran the podcast's social media accounts; Benjamin Labadia '22, a psychology and film, television and media arts double major; and Elise "Evie" Velez '22, a political science major and the podcast's audio engineer.

DesRoches hired 15 student workers to help with the other podcasts, which are expected to launch later this year. A complete launch schedule remains unclear because of the medical and social implications of the pandemic. "We also recruited volunteer students who just want to learn about what it's like to podcast," DesRoches said. "The interest is clearly there. It's just a matter of figuring out where to put the talent."

Conley-Wilson, a communications/media studies major with minors in marketing and journalism, produced the QKast. An experienced podcaster, Conley-Wilson led the group's weekly meetings before the podcast center closed with the rest of the university. He also wrote the rundown—a document listing an episode's timeline and script—for the Rabinowitz interview.

"For me, this whole experience has been so rewarding," said Conley-Wilson, a former radio personality and music manager



The DesRoches File

David DesRoches is the director of community programming for the Quinnipiac University Podcast Studio. A veteran of print, broadcast and digital journalism, he has won more than two dozen awards for his work over the past 15 years.

Before coming to Quinnipiac, he taught a podcasting workshop at Central Connecticut State University. He also taught journalism to college and high school students and co-founded and operated a nonprofit media organization in Ethiopia for three years. He earned a bachelor's degree in communications and media studies from the College of Charleston in South Carolina.

DesRoches worked as an alternate host of WNPR's flagship morning and afternoon talk shows, "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered." He also guest-hosted WNPR's award-winning live talk shows, "Where We Live" and "The Colin McEnroe Show."

When the studio closed this spring, DesRoches focused most of his attention on the podcast, "Isolated Together," about the struggles and triumphs of people during the COVID-19 pandemic. The episodes feature stories about coping with social distancing, navigating the never-ending news cycle and taking a deep breath every now and then. Work also continues on his three-part documentary series, "Behind Rage," which provides a detailed look at a Quinnipiac theater production that is the subject of a story on page 36 of this issue.

"I hope to not only create excellent podcasts, but also build a world-class program, one that reflects the common values of the university and the local community," DesRoches said. "It will be a place for creativity and innovative storytelling where diverse voices are encouraged, nurtured and given space to grow."



Scan the code to listen to a variety of QU-produced podcasts.

at student-run WQAQ. “I’m proud to be a part of something that’s directly helping the Hamden community and giving us the opportunity to tell really cool stories like what we did with David Rabinowitz. These kinds of experiences are impactful for students.”

Braccidiferno, who promoted the QKast on Twitter and Instagram this spring, agreed. She took the candid podcast studio photos that were shared with her posts. Listeners can follow Quinnipiac’s podcasts on social media at @qupodcasts.

Braccidiferno said she appreciated the opportunity to apply what she learned in her graphic design classes: “Working here has really helped me put my skills to good use outside of class. I’ve been able to contribute to something that I can put on my resume and be proud of when I talk to people about it.”

While Labadia comes from a visual background, he points to opportunities, not limitations with podcasting. As someone who has worked as a part-time camera operator for ESPN filming QU basketball and hockey games, Labadia understands that storytelling works best with angles and ideas.

“Obviously, a podcast is sound, so you don’t really think that there’s a video side to it,” he said. “But that’s something that a lot of podcasters are starting to do now—the visual side. I feel like there’s a better connection to the audience when you can see what people are saying and what their reactions are to what other people are saying.”



As a first-year student in the accelerated dual-degree program in the School of Communications, Labadia said he appreciated the opportunity to work with older students as a peer this spring.

“I love the fact that we come in here for our weekly meetings, and we discuss all the ideas we have for the future—different fun episodes and different serious episodes,” Labadia said in March. “Each of us gets to come in and say, ‘Hey, I have this idea for an episode.’ To have that idea accepted and then to plan it, that’s really cool. We work together and collaborate. It’s a great environment to learn and be creative and have fun.”

DesRoches, as a podcaster and former journalist, sees a promising future for “The Core Four”—students who were thoughtful, curious and passionate this spring. They represent the kind of students whose energy will continue to fuel evocative storytelling at the podcast center (qu.edu/podcast).

“Curiosity and passion are two critical elements you need to bring into any field where you’re providing information. Journalism doesn’t necessarily allow you to express some of the passions that podcasting allows you to do,” DesRoches said.

“You can still search for information and truth, but you can have a bit more fun doing it. For me, that’s what makes podcasting enjoyable. These guys also have that sensibility. They share that deep desire to tell important and impactful stories—and have fun doing it.”



Good Podcasts Contain the 3 C’s

The podcasts with the most downloads and engaged listeners follow the three C’s—content, creativity and chemistry. These podcasts also are based on a single theme. It might be crime, comedy, politics, money, sports or anything else, just as long as the experience is deliberately targeted and consistently good.

“If you’re not passionate about it—if you don’t really want to do it—people can tell,” said Nia Braccidiferno ’22, a graphic and interactive design major who ran the social media accounts for the QKast this spring. “You don’t get the same vibe. Everyone here is passionate about the topics we’re talking about and the community aspect.”

Tom Conley-Wilson ’20, a communications/media studies major with minors in marketing and journalism, likes to listen to podcasts about basketball and music. He said the best podcasts are the ones that leverage chemistry between hosts and guests.

Maybe they share a hilarious story. Or maybe they turn reflective at a time of loss. Either way, listeners connect with these moments of spontaneous humanity.

“A good podcast always starts with chemistry. I think that’s the No. 1 thing,” Conley-Wilson said. “Making it an intimate thing is something else that’s important to me. Making sure you make that connection with your listener and have fun with it.”

Here are some of the most downloaded podcasts on Apple Music, Google and Spotify:

“THE DAILY” A 20-minute podcast about news, politics and current events hosted by North Haven native Michael Barbaro of The New York Times.

“THE BILL SIMMONS PODCAST” A podcast about sports as entertainment and society’s connective tissue hosted by journalist and entrepreneur Bill Simmons.

“THIS AMERICAN LIFE” A podcast about the people, places and shared journeys of a national narrative hosted by journalist and radio personality Ira Glass.

“MY FAVORITE MURDER” A true crime podcast hosted by Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark that has been described as shocking, irreverent and hilarious.

“THE ADAM CAROLLA SHOW” A comedy podcast hosted by television personality Adam Carolla, who riffs on everything from specialty pizzas to mean grandmas.