



***Practical Significance* | Episode 9: From Co-host to Guest – Donna Turns the Tables on Ron**

Donna: Well, hello everyone. Welcome to *Practical Significance*. We thought it would be fun for me to be able to turn the tables on Ron and ask him some questions. It gives us an opportunity to look back at JSM 2021. Talk about what keeps the executive director of the ASA up at night, and what's upcoming for the ASA community. With that intro, let me share that this really is going to be a lot of fun. Ron and I have been colleagues for more than 30 years, I might add. We met in preschool in case any of you were wondering, so it's really my pleasure to be able to talk to him in his role as executive director. So, Ron, I guess my first question for you is what are the highlights for you from JSM 2021?

Ron: Yes, Donna. I do miss those preschool days. They don't see them all that long ago now. So, JSM 2021 is just coming to an end as we're recording this podcast. And I had such a good time and it's not easy to pick a highlight, but I'll pick some. I think I'll start by saying that what I saw and what I heard was a community that's eager to gather. And so, people gathered as best we could with the online platform, but I heard so much excitement and hope about the prospect for gathering in person. I heard from a lot of people too, that even though we will be gathering again in person someday, hopefully someday soon there can remain to be some sort of hybrid option.

And maybe we'll talk about that a little bit more later, but as for other highlights, Donna, well, I always enjoy plenary sessions, but this years' were particularly outstanding. While they were all good and I enjoyed all of them, I will highlight the Vivian Mang presentation and Rob Santos' presentation because they were so personal, they really brought their full honest selves to their presentations.

And these opened up a lot of insight into how they were thinking. And just ways of thinking that others have that we don't necessarily all share, but ought to learn from. So those were great. I'm sure that you heard a lot of really interesting sessions too. So even though the tables are supposed to be turned this way, I certainly want to kick back to you. Donna, what were your JSM 2021 highlights?

Donna: Thanks. Well, first off, I had the pleasure of being a part of the first-time attendee orientation. And even though that was a big group, we didn't have time to really hear everybody's stories, but was really fun to see the enthusiasm with which these first-time attendees were approaching JSM. So that gives me a lot of hope for JSM 2022, when these are more experienced folks, and they will have made their submissions for contributed or invited sessions.

And so that was very, very cool. And then I have to say that I really enjoyed the opening mixer and Ron knows that sometimes mixers are hard for me. And so, it was really nice to be able to be in my living room actually and watch my much more talented colleagues interact. And so, a big shout out to all the folks who played the game. That was really amazing.

Ron: I want to mention too, before you go on - I want to compliment you on a great job of organizing that mixer. And I, as you know, set in on the first-timers reception mixer as well, and I heard that same

enthusiasm that you did. And I also heard just a large amount of generous spirit on the part of the experienced people that came. They were so willing to share their experiences, to offer help, and they gave great advice to the first-time folks. And I hope that people who wanted to attend that session, but couldn't, be sure to catch the recording. So yeah. What else about JSM 2021 excited you?

Donna: So, I have two more. And so, the first one is the session that you chaired on RA Fischer and Eugenics, and it was fantastic. The presentations were really interesting, the perspectives by all the different panelists were amazing. And so, I really want to encourage folks if they were not able to attend that session to go back and listen to the recording.

And, and I guess I should put in a plug for going back and listening to the recordings of the sessions you were not able to attend. That is certainly one of the benefits of the virtual conferences is we have the recordings because I know we all always faced the dilemma: "I want to go to this one and this one and this one," and we have to choose. And, I'm going to give a little bit of a behind-the-scenes view of JSM and give a "shout-out" to our colleagues in the meetings department and the folks at Pathable who supported the conference.

So, as some folks may know the very beginning of the day on Thursday, there was a bit of a challenge and many of us were not able to access the platform. And so, we had a slack channel that connected all of us who were helping behind the scenes. And I just have to say the energy that was brought at 6:30 in the morning, to solve this problem and figuring out how we were going to make the last day of the conference successful. As for the other days of the conference, it was just actually super amazing. And Ron, I know you know this, but we have great colleagues and I'm sorry that they had to deal with all that stress, but it really did make me smile at actually how everyone did it with such good humor and the problems were solved and a successful day was had by all.

Ron: That's exactly right. And I'm glad you pointed out our great colleagues on the meetings staff and elsewhere in the ASA office. I know that we were really sweating it on Thursday morning, but they came through. And, as you said, Donna, even though we just had a few minutes here to single out a few things, there were hundreds of great sessions at JSM 2021, and it's terrific that those sessions will be available for people to go and browse. And as always, all the plenary sessions will be publicly available on the general JSM website where you go back and not only see this year's plenaries, but plenaries from years past as well. And that's a public resource. It doesn't have to require attendance at JSM 2021.

Donna: I know that we need to move on, but I guess I just can't resist saying one more. I did have the opportunity to listen to the panel that my colleagues who had to teach through the pandemic presented. And that was really fantastic to hear all the things that they did to make the experience for their students positive. And I guess I was especially interested that they all were willing to look back and say lessons learned and to say how even hopefully post-COVID 19, the things that they actually learned that will change their teaching practice.

And we have such amazing colleagues in the education sphere that they're always thinking about how to improve. Okay. So, Ron, I don't want to add to your stress, but I know that there are some things that ***you think about that keep you up at night***. I've actually been the recipient of a few late-night texts or late-night emails from you. And so, I know that your mind is spinning. What's on your mind, what's keeping you up at night? And of course, if you want to talk about how the community can engage in and help relieve your stress, that's fine too.

Ron: So, Donna, if by a few texts and late-night emails, you received hundreds, then yes, we have had plenty of those conversations. Well, there are a lot of things to think about. I will mention two, but I will preface by saying that I'm super excited about the American Statistical Association. And I love my job. I can't imagine a better job for me. So, the two things that I will highlight, first of all, is **membership**. And in particular, what I'm thinking about is how can we continue to understand what our members want and provide that to them? How can we figure out what people who aren't yet members of the ASA, or who perhaps were members of the ASA, or have given up on ASA membership, what it is that they need to want to continue to be a part of this community?

And of course, we're constantly thinking about what groups of people do we need to be reaching and how to do that. So, measurement – the problem of figuring out what it is that people want and need – getting them to tell you, it's a difficult problem. And one that we're working on. It's always a challenge to find the right sampling frame, I guess I'll say to really gauge that sort of opinion. So, what can people do in that regard? Well, they can write us either you or me, Donna, for me, it's ron@amstat.org, and for Donna donna@amstat.org – tell us what they're thinking about.

And especially if they have some insights from colleagues that are not perhaps what those people are telling them, that that's the reason why they don't join or what it would take for them to be involved. So, I am thinking all the time about our membership, both our current membership and people that I hope will become members of the ASA.

And the second thing I'll choose is thinking about the **future of our meetings**. Everyone that I talk to says that they're eager for in-person meetings, but I also hear from a lot of people who say that it might be a long while before they are able to attend an in-person meeting - before they are financially able to, before their workplaces will free them to be able to do that before they will feel safe to attend an in-person meeting. And so, they don't want to lose the benefits of the virtual aspect of the meetings that we have had to have in this past 18 months or so there's also a recognition that there will be many people for whom it is very unlikely that they will be able to travel to a meeting – to a JSM, for all kinds of reasons.

Again, it could be financial reasons. It could be work-related reasons. It could simply be distance – that it's just not practical to do. And so, I hear from a lot of people who say we need to have a hybrid element of the meeting, and I think everybody involved in ASA leadership agrees with that. The tricky part, Donna is what that hybrid meeting will look like. And now I am speaking just for myself and not for the ASA leadership, the rest of the ASA leadership. And that is that I don't think an effective hybrid meeting is one where you have people in-person and you have people online, and they're all trying to share the same experience. So, you have people in a room who are leading a session and people in the room who are attending the session, and then you have those people who are remote. And they're trying to participate in that same session, sort of along the lines of the people who are there.

And similarly, not sure how really practical it is to have two of the speakers in the room. And one of the speakers remote, you can certainly do all those things. It's not that you can't do them. My concern is, is that what is the experience for everybody involved? How good of an experience will it be or put another way? How can we maximize the quality of the experience for the people who are attending in-person and for the people who are attending remotely? So, my current thinking subject to change, and I will address specifically half that change that happened is that perhaps we need to design a hybrid meeting so that it is to a large degree, an in-person meeting somewhere and a hybrid meeting online. And

they're not trying to be the same thing. Each meeting tries to bring out the best aspects of that particular meeting format.

And so rather than finding the lowest common denominator, you find some way to make both meetings. Do I have that figured out? I sure don't, so I welcome people who are listening to this podcast and others to talk to us about what a good hybrid meeting would look like for them. And just even how important having hybrid meetings in the future are. I'll just finish by saying that we're also thinking that maybe some meetings not necessarily JSM, but maybe some meetings are better off being virtual meetings and maybe that's the format that we should continue. So, lots of things to think about and membership and meetings are certainly those that keep me awake at night dreaming and wondering about.

Donna: Yeah, Ron, those are obviously things that we've talked a lot about and that the board has talked a lot about. And so, I guess I just wanted to reiterate that we would really like to hear from folks and that if they want to invite you and me, whatever, to a virtual coffee or tea or beverage of your choice, we're happy to set up a zoom meeting. We're happy to think about engaging in whatever way makes the most sense. And I guess I just also want to say that I think both you and I really are approaching these issues with a very open mind. So, folks don't have to feel like there's something we want to hear. We just really want to hear what they think. So, I hope that in the next couple of months, there's lots of conversations.

Ron: I agree with that. So, I'm eager to hear other perspectives, as well.

Donna: Yeah, absolutely. Just prior to JSM, we had the ASA board meeting and of course it was virtual. It was three days of really amazing conversation. And I'm just grateful to be a part of the professional staff and to be able to work with such amazing folks who are on the board of directors and several things emerged from the meeting.

But I wanted to focus on one. And that is we spent a fair amount of time for one day talking about the need to bring more diversity to ASA publications. And thinking about that really broadly to who's publishing who the reviewers are, who the editors are, who the associate editors are. So, it was an important conversation with many facets. And I think we agreed during that meeting to form a task force to continue that conversation. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how you see this unfolding.

Ron: Sure. Thanks. That was a great discussion at the board meeting. We had several different perspectives, not just from the board, but a great panel of people that we brought in to discuss the issue. And it's not an ASA-only issue. It's certainly across STEM fields, gender, and other diversity in publications from soup to nuts is a serious issue. And so, we're going to see what we can do to take that on. And we know that there aren't easy fixes. There's something where we just grab off a bunch of low hanging fruit or do something that makes the numbers look better. We want to seriously think about what the root causes of the lack of diversity are and address those root causes. We'll pull together a task force just as you mentioned on a short timeline – that is a few months – to report back to the board near the end of the year.

And it'll be a group of people with diverse expertise and perspectives.

The big idea is to think about the whole process from authorship to review, to editor decisions, and ultimately to publication and what it is that we need to do to diversify our authorship, to diversify people on editorial boards. How can we better prepare a diverse group of people to serve as editors? So, this task force has a charge and they're up to it. And so, we're really looking forward to meeting with this group as it gets pulled together.

I'm sure they will be asking for feedback from members. And ultimately the goal is to have some very specific actions that we can take to change the diversity in our publications. We all agree that it's a problem that we're losing out because we're not as inclusive as we need to be. We're missing important voices in the research community because of inherent problems with the structure that many times we're not even aware of, maybe most of the time, we're not aware of, but that we can fix. And so, looking forward to that process unfolding soon,

Donna: Ron, that actually made me think about another JSM highlight because it was also a presentation to the board. And that was the presentation by David Marker and Adrian Cole on the preliminary findings of the task force. And I know David and Adrian also chaired an open session but in the spirit of encouraging people to reach out that's another topic area that's really important to us. And I know that the [Anti-Racism Task Force has a community site](#).

So, I'm going to shift gears just a little bit. Now, I'd like to know a little bit about what are you listening to? What are you reading? What are you spending time when you're not being executive director of the ASA?

Ron: It's been quite a summer, Donna, as we speak and recording this podcast, I'm in the car rolling towards Kansas where my youngest daughter is getting married. I'm thankful for my son who is driving us. So, I'm free to talk on this podcast. And we had another child getting married earlier this summer. So, it's been busy, but there's still time for things that are fun to do that. My wife and I enjoy doing together as you know, Donna, I love audio books. So, I've listened to a bunch of audiobooks, and I get so many great recommendations from members that I can hardly keep up with them. So, I'll just mention two at the moment. So, I've just started listening to a very interesting book called *Robert E. Lee and Me*, and I recommend it highly. I heard about it from a couple of places and from a review in the *New York Times*, but also on the Jonathan Capehart's [podcast](#).

And I'm just part way through, but it's really an interesting and important historical perspective. And I love fiction and I have a huge soft spot for Fredrik Backman books. So, I just read both books in his *Bear Town* series this summer, I should say, listened to those books. And he really has a way to sneak up on you and write a sentence that just comes out of the blue and strikes you right in the heart in just such a delightful way. Sherry and I also enjoy musical theater. We're not able to exactly attend the theater. So, we've been watching a lot of musical movies spanning, all the way from *In the Heights*, very currently to going clear back to *Singing in the Rain*. So, it's been fun to browse those sorts of things too. So, Donna, I'll throw out one more. If people haven't discovered the British comedy series *Taskmaster*, it's available free on YouTube, and oh my goodness, It's hysterical.

Donna: That's great. And of course, Ron, I have to say that I know that both you and I spent a fair amount of time listening to podcasts, as well. Obviously, we had the *Practical Significance* episode where we were joined by our colleagues who are part of ASA-sponsored podcasts. And those are always high on my list, but I have to say that I am also enjoying the *Cultural Gap Fest* from *Slate*. It has really

become a regular in my playlist. So new episodes are released on Wednesday, and I basically listen every Wednesday, and I haven't missed many, if any. So, I would toss that out as something that you might want to add to your listening rotation.

And then I have to say at JSM, we hosted the PStat/GStat accreditation reception. We tried something different, and we try to have a spatial chat world. And it was a lot of fun. With help from Anna Nevius, who is my partner in crime on many initiatives - a big thank you to Anna for actually helping me a lot with the first-timers reception. But she shared a book that her book club read – *The Secrets Between Us*, and I just got it. It looks incredibly interesting. So, if you're looking for another read *The Secrets Between Us* comes highly recommended from Anna. So, we know that's a recommendation we can trust.

Ron: Yes, it is outstanding. And thanks for the podcast recommendation. I have a whole podcast library that I would say two-thirds of it comes from recommendations I've gotten from you. So, thanks again.

Donna: Yeah. It's a lot of fun to add podcasts. And I think what I really like about the podcast is that they're in all different genres and they're all different lengths, right? So, depending on my mood and the time that I think I can spend, I can find just the perfect podcast, both in terms of content and length. So that's a lot of fun. Well, as listeners of *Practical Significance*, know, we have come to that time of the podcast when we have Ron's "Top 10." So, Ron, over to you.

Ron: Well, thanks, Donna. And I have really enjoyed the conversation today. Yes, it is time for the Top 10 list, and we have something a little different. This is the "Top 10 List of Things That There Probably Aren't at Least 10 Of."

#10: Moments when you thought, wow, I need to gain some weight.

#9: Fun reasons to go to the dentist.

#8: Instances when you agreed with the referees who rejected a paper of yours.

#7: On the top 10 list of things, there probably aren't at least 10 of Olympic water polo players you can name.

#6: Pleasant, things about traffic,

#5: Favorite life moments that involved a Zoom meeting. Donna, I'm guessing you don't have any of those on your list.

#4: Pictures of yourself that you really like.

#3: People who sincerely apologize for horrible things they have tweeted.

#2: When you did anything, your teenagers actually thought was cool.

And the #1 thing there probably aren't at least 10 of? Times you closed Facebook after just one cute pet video.

So, Donna, that's the Top 10 list for this week. Thanks again for a lovely conversation. And we thank you *Practical Significance* podcast listeners for joining us again this month. And we will see you in October.

Donna: Thanks so much, Ron. And thanks to everyone as always. We are delighted to have your suggestions. So stay in touch. And as Ron said, we'll see you in October.