

# OSU Going Overseas\_ Breyfogle ...Imore Discuss Dubai and COP 28

Fri, Feb 23, 2024 2:37PM 36:47

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

students, cop, negotiations, moment, fossil fuels, day, nick, talking, badges, climate, room, president, zone, thinking, planet, happen, blue, activists, figure, called

## SPEAKERS

Audio Recording, David Staley, Nicholas Breyfogle, Bart Elmore, Eva Dale

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- B** Bart Elmore 00:04  
What you see is that it is much bigger than one president, one politician, this was 70,000 people coming in to say how do we reimagine how we relate to one another and the planet? That's a pretty cool thing when you kind of sit in that for a moment.
- E** Eva Dale 00:17  
From the heart of the Ohio State University on the Oval, this is Voices of Excellence from the College of Arts and Sciences, with your host, David Staley. Voices focuses on the innovative work being done by faculty and staff in the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. From departments as wide ranging as art, astronomy, chemistry and biochemistry, physics, emergent materials, mathematics, and languages, among many others, the college always has something great happening. Join us to find out what's new now.
- D** David Staley 00:56  
Joining me today in the ASC Tech Studios are Bart Elmore, Professor of History, and Nick Breyfogle, Associate Professor of History at The Ohio State University, College of the Arts and Sciences. Both of my colleagues attended this year's COP 28, and we're going to spend our time today talking about COP 28. Dr. Elmore, Dr. Breyfogle, welcome to Voices.
- N** Nicholas Breyfogle 01:17  
Thanks so much for having us here. We're very excited to come talk to you today.
- B** Bart Elmore 01:21

B

Bart Elmore 01:21

A treat, thank you.

D

David Staley 01:22

Well, let's start first, tell us what COP 28 is.

B

Bart Elmore 01:26

Well, you know, I think a lot of our students might have had the same question when we started, so I think there's a lot of lack of knowledge about how this works. Basically, "COP" refers to the Conference of the Parties, and that is the Conference of the Parties to a 1992 UN climate agreement that was signed in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 1992 that began the negotiations that we think of today as the kind of climate negotiations that happen annually. And the idea is that this is a conference in which all those nations come together to try and figure out how we can make progress on this big global issue that we're all facing: climate change. So, this is the 28th COP, we've been at this for some time, and some of our students, of course, are frustrated as we are about, you know, progress in that area, but I think one of the things we found is that COP is a really big tent, there's a lot of people there. It's not just about the politicians, it's about all the other folks who show up, activists, among others. And what an amazing educational opportunity to, to think broadly about how you can insert yourself in those networks to make a difference in in this big, blue planet that we all live on.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 02:45

And with every... with every year, there are decisions that are made at these conferences that then affect the future conferences moving on, so, there were big changes with the COP Kyoto and another one in 2015, in Paris, so every one, every year is building on the next in terms of trying to to address and think through as a planet, how do we deal with climate change questions? And it's really a remarkable thing to go see a planet trying to figure out how to make decisions about one of the most existential kind of crises that we face. It's hard enough, you know, with a country or even a city or even just on your city block, figuring out how to answer some of these questions, but watching an entire, basically an entire species try to figure out answers is something quite remarkable. And, and we took... so, Bart and I went to this, and we took ten students with us, and that was a remarkable experience. I mean, going to COP was, for us, I think, I mean, some we want to do for a long time, but for these students it was, it was an incredible opportunity, and for some of them also, somebody they wanted to do for a long time. I had one student who was saying, I think basically since she was eleven or twelve, her goal in life was to get to the climate meetings, that this is what she wants to do, to be able to affect them, and from the moment that she became aware of, of the crises and the dilemmas and the changes we're seeing in our, in our planet, she wanted to be able to be there, to be part of the discussions, to be part of the protest movements that were happening there, to be part of the demonstrations, to be part of the process rather than just somebody sort of hoping that somehow it will get better. And so, it was... it was great to take these ten students, students from across the campus, from all sorts of different majors and colleges, all sorts of different interests and backgrounds. And they were a remarkable and kind of dedicated group that we took.

D

David Staley 04:36

I appreciate the way you frame this, that, you know, this is the species, the human species, trying to wrestle with these things. But, you'll forgive me - I had always assumed that COP was attended by, you know, politicians and envoys and NGOs and, you know, John Kerry's - no offense guys, how did two professors from the United States end up going to COP, let alone bring students? Is that... is that common?

B

Bart Elmore 05:01

We can show you the very unflattering picture we have of John Kerry, who we caught briefly and asked him, you know, how's it going, sir? And he said, we're working hard, you know. So, we had these interesting moments where we met these celebrities.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 05:15

And the poor, the poor man looked exhausted. I was not surprised to hear that he is now stepping down from this position. I mean, I think it's, it's unbelievably hard work.

D

David Staley 05:25

But is it uncommon for, I don't know, professors, or students, or... I mean, did you decide, you know, we're gonna go and you know, we'll get a plane trip and, what you buy a ticket on Ticketmaster? I mean, I've got to think it's more difficult than that.

B

Bart Elmore 05:39

It was, I mean... you know, one of the things that we had to coach this students on especially, even though - I want to say something about these ten students, I mean, I'm moved by them. I mean, I think both of us were, it was, they were truly magical folks, and I think their commitment to fighting for the causes they cared about - and they differed, by the way, they didn't all have the same mission, they had different things they cared about. But they all supported one another and really modeled for us... I mean, I remember we were walking around at one point, and we didn't know which panel to go to you, and we were, and it was a student, of course, he's like, we should be here, you know, and we all we kind of crowdsource and show up at wherever everyone was. But we we did... so I'll say that, you know, I said coached, but to be honest, we were coached a lot of the time through this. But we started by saying, look, these are government to government negotiations, as you said, right, and the delegates who show up for this are associated with these specific state entities. So, we can't necessarily, you know, just add, you know, and say this or that in certain meetings, but what we came to find is the remarkable fluidity of the space. So, there are two spaces at COP: there's a green zone, and then there's a blue zone. The blue zone is where all the stuff happens, where these things you would think would happen; where John Kerry is, you know, where the President Al Jaber that was overseeing this COP in Dubai is and organizing things. And there's also a green zone where there's kind of like an expo like feel, there's interesting

people, activists among others, business leaders, even the same people that are in the blue zone coming out to have conversations with people who do not have access to the blue zone. But what's remarkable is that we were ultimately able to get blue zone badges, and that's a really interesting story in and of itself - I'll let, maybe Nick talk a little bit about that, cause he was instrumental in that - but we, you know, we got into the blue zone. And yes, many of these negotiations are happening between state actors, but what we found is, you know, the conversation stops, the room... they say, okay, that's the end of this particular meeting, and the delegates are right there. In other words, students have access to them. Students have access to writing closing statements for research institutions or NGOs that they might be affiliated with. Those statements are then projected in the last plenary, you know, and so it turns out that they can have a huge impact, and we didn't, I think, fully realize that when we went.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 06:41

No, and it's really true, and it's also important to realize that there's a lot more going on, even within the blue zone, than simply the negotiations. I mean, those are obviously... I mean, that's why that's why everybody's there, but what has happened over the course of the multiple COPs is that what began as relatively focused negotiations have expanded outward and outward, so that, you know, there's a big university presence from universities around the world, there's a big indigenous presence, and they all have sort of pavilions. Many of the nations from around the world have their own pavilion, various kinds of NGOs and other types of organizations have pavilions. There's what they call side events, so there's lots of panels and speakers, and so opportunities to meet people, to learn, to network, to engage with all the different ways in which climate affects humanity, and the ways in which different communities within humanity are then responding to it. So, there was an unbelievable amount of opportunity to take part in, you know, to be there for the negotiations, to watch them negotiate over whether a comma should be put into place, sometimes, or whether to negotiate over whether we should actually name fossil fuels as a problem.

B

Bart Elmore 08:26

Nick was particularly frustrated with that comma. You see, it's funny because he's sitting there and he's looking at folks - and by the way, a lot of these folks are coming at this...they're using English a lot of times, but maybe they're coming from different countries and things, and Nick as an academic is saying, it's, this is a very simple solution, that comma goes here, let's move on. But you know, we had to kind of sit back, or he did, I wasn't in that room, and just watch this kind of negotiation over the comma, where he could have easily said, comma goes here, moving on. So, I think there were moments where there might be some frustration in a sense.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 09:47

Well, you know, and that's the thing... I mean, and the comma did matter, you know, as someone who spends a lot of time thinking about grammar, it changed the meaning of the sentence, and it was clear that there was a group in the room who wanted the sentence to mean one thing and a group in the room who wanted the sentence to mean something else. And there's moments like that where you're watching the negotiations where, you know, you

take a deep sigh, and you sort of... you fear for the future of our species, that if this is how we're going to deal with climate crisis, then, alright, well, so are we actually going to get anywhere? And then in other moments, you realize, you know what, actually, we're moving really forward, and this is our process that we have for this as a species. And sometimes it's painfully slow, but it's moving forward and it's making changes. And there were things that came out of this COP that were, were tremendously important.

B

Bart Elmore 10:34

But it was, it's an emotional roller coaster, you know, I mean, you're just going back and forth, if you care about this. And the thing about for Nick and I, and you know, David, I think about this with your work, too, like - we do what we do cause we care about trying to make a better world, you know, we spend a lot of time you and I talking about this. And, you know, we were talking, joking about tenure and things earlier before we came on, and that's not what this is about. It wasn't about checking a box for us. It's about can we make a difference, and can we take ten motivated people to make a difference? So, there were days where we felt like we were having an impact. We met with the mayor of Columbus, you know, and we talked to him there and, and we felt like we were right there at the positions of actual local power to think about, can these students move the dial? And they didn't back down, you could tell the mayor knew who he was sitting around. He actually, I thought, did a great job and had a sense of, kind of reading the room and recognizing he wasn't gonna give some mayor pitch and say, you can go change the world kids, you know. Instead, he was like, okay, y'all came to play, you know, and they had. They stayed up all night, as far as we could tell, they stayed up, you know... unlike most study abroads, we're prepared to find some, you know, hungover student in the morning - just frankly, that's what happens on some of these trips - that did not happen.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 11:45

They were... they were up early, they were on the Metro at 7:30 every morning, off to the conference negotiations, they were often there way past dinner, and they were active all day, engaged, and...

D

David Staley 11:58

Doing what, what sorts of things are the students doing? Are they attending and listening, or is it more active than that? They are, I mean...

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 12:04

Much more active than that, I would say, I mean, they do all that.

B

Bart Elmore 12:07

Just to back up and be succinct - you can tell even by the way, when we're talking about this, we kind of trip over ourselves, because there's so much to try and unpack, like for us, this was a magical life-changing experience, not just for us, I think for the students, for everyone

a magical life changing experience, not just for us, I think for the students, for everyone involved. But, remember those blue zone badges, we didn't really have a lot of them. To get them, you have to have observer status, and Ohio State, for a variety of reasons, did not have observer status with the climate agreement. We have since applied and we now have, assuming everything goes well, everything goes well...

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 12:37

We gotta couple of years for that to happen, it takes a long time to get the status, but we've at least filled out the paperwork now.

B

Bart Elmore 12:42

Right, and gotten the forms you need and worked with a bunch of amazing people here at OSU and make that happen. But, we didn't have that going in, which meant we didn't have any credentials, and so we were... part of this was telling the students, we've got to figure out how to get in the room. You're not even going to be in the room if you don't start working from day one. And I think they relish that, as students who are really committed, a lot of them are just so talented and saying, okay, well, let's go get those badges. And one way to do that is to figure out are there NGOs? I mean, this is useful for anyone listening to this - are there organizations or nonprofits that you have connections to that might have status? And then, can we use our memberships or connections to be able to get a badge to be able to go into those places?

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 13:20

Well, can I do some shout-outs? So, I want to do shout-outs to organizations who helped us: Second Nature, the University of British Columbia in Canada, Washington University in St. Louis, the Conference of U.S. Mayors gave us badges. I'm forgetting somebody, but all of these organizations, thank you, they've made it possible for our students to better get into the blue zone, and to really, to really be able to interact every day on these kinds of things.

B

Bart Elmore 13:44

But on that ebb and flow, last thing I'll say on this is, we didn't have all that in place. We had a few badges when we arrived in Dubai, and we said, look, guys, you're going to have at least maybe two days max in the blue zone, so maximize it, and everyone was like ready to go, prepping again at night, getting on the bus early at seven. And then, after meeting with the mayor, Mayor Ginther here in Columbus, it was amazing, we just get one of these emails, and we're actually on our tour of Dubai in the morning, we're taking a break - there actually is a day of rest in the middle of this huge conference, I wish we had this at academic conferences - and we get this email, and it's from the mayor, he says, like, you know, we've got some extra badges, we'd like to get all your students in for the rest of the time they're there. And I mean, you know, that's that ebb and flow. I mean, everyone the bus is just jazzed; they're not jazzed because we're gonna get a concert to go see, I don't know somebody famous, they're like, we're gonna be able to be in that zone and do more work. And it was like, yeah, you know, and it just felt so good. So, so that's what I mean by like, ebb and flow too, not just of like, okay,

today was a good negotiation day, we heard good news, but also like, getting access and, and kind of having things happen on the fly that really lifted our spirits at times, sometimes, you know, we were also a little down like, oh, we're not gonna be able to get in, you know? A march.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 14:55

No, and that was huge. But to answer your question, so what are the students doing there all day? And, you know, we had we had some who were activists, they're activists here, they have founded their own climate organizations here, they're incredibly active in that kind of realm. And they, they connected with all sorts of international networks of climate activists. There were locations where you could put on demonstrations, where you could have your voice heard on whatever, whatever topic you were concerned about, there was a huge kind of demonstration and kind of... I mean, I'd call it a parade but that's the wrong word, right...

D

David Staley 14:59

A procession?

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 15:07

A march, thank you - there was a march through the whole area, I mean, and it's a big area, it's like the size of a big, sort of your state fair kind of grounds type of thing. And so the... and they were active in that. And so, part of what they're doing is, is networking with these international activists, figuring out ways in which they can connect, and then taking action on site. So, you know, as deliberations were happening on the last night, whether... and they were trying to decide whether to include fossil fuels as kind of the culprit and name fossil fuels as the problem and as something that needs to be phased out in one form or another, you know, our students we're out in the courtyard with activists from all over the world, making their voice heard. We have other students...so that's part of what some were up to. The students every day were going to panels, to listen to policymakers, science experts, indigenous leaders, whoever happened to be speaking. I saw an amazing panel, for example, of indigenous women from Canada talking about climate and water and what it was meaning for their communities. And so, there are all these panels that you could go to, and our students were taking full advantage of that. And they're networking and meeting people, they're meeting politicians, we met multiple different senators, we met representatives from the state department, the mayor of Columbus, we met experts in all sorts of variety of areas, we had students who were really interested in, kind of, geoengineering and, and so they were meeting with the companies or the scientists or the university officials who are dealing with that. And so, they're learning, they're making connections, they're setting up possible internships for later in the summer, they're doing all sorts of amazing things all day, and they were going the whole time. So, all of those kinds of things: learning, experiencing, contributing, having their voice heard, writing parts of it, all of that sort of amazing stuff. And you mentioned optimism, pessimism, which is, you know, it's a kind of pendulum we have when it comes to climate change. But, what's amazing about this trip is not just what they did in those ten days, but is now, I mean, they are pumped,

they're excited, they have learnt, they're energized. They have so much new kind of experience and knowledge and just excitement and energy to push forward, and so it's gonna be amazing, I think.

**D** David Staley 17:48

Well, I know you've got some recordings and things of your time there, and since we've been talking about this, maybe we could... maybe give us a flavor of your experience at COP 28.

**B** Bart Elmore 17:57

Yes, we have two clips that I think would be worth playing. This was kind of, like, taking you in with us, because we're wandering around... first of all, you don't really know exactly what you're doing when you're first there. Nick had gotten in the first day because of the limited number of badges we had, and we joked when he came out, he said, oh, the coffee tastes much better in the blue zone. And you know, there was kind of this status thing that we joked about a lot, yeah. And so, anyway, but he was giving us some guidance, we're still like, okay, can't quite figure it out. So, my first day in, I'm stumbling around trying to figure out where anything is, and I just wander upon this massive plenary where every country is there, the Executive Secretary of the UN is just talking. There's headphones on the ground, this was in English but, you know, the other people were speaking in different languages, you can put on headphones, and it was like, we are here, we are at the UN. And the thing I want to emphasize here is I'm in the room, I'm within, you know, really hugging distance of most of the delegates, and that was the thing that we kind of realized is that if you're thinking, oh COP, you know, it's a government to government negotiation. The reality is, you're in the room in a very serious way, and when these conversations end, you can go up and talk to these folks. So, this is the Executive Secretary and the big plenary, this is the middle of the conference. There's a lot of heated discussions about how much progress has been made, and there's a statement here that he's going to make to the entire group of people that have come to divide and the blue zone to talk about this.

**A** Audio Recording 18:08

"To lose all tropical coral reef systems, which provide the sustenance and livelihoods to hundreds of millions of people. Past 1.5, models predict that in less than 50 years, two billion people will live in areas so hot, they are beyond the human limit."

**B** Bart Elmore 19:47

And I think that really summarizes what was at stake. This 1.5 degrees centigrade, which is the real target that was set ultimately, it had been negotiated for many years coming out of Kyoto and then Copenhagen, but really had been settled upon at the Paris Accord in 2015, as the target that's going to prevent, you know, really catastrophic changes to our planet. If we can keep things below 1.5...



**D** David Staley 20:13  
And that's 1.5 degrees over...?

**B** Bart Elmore 20:14  
Pre-industrial levels. We're at... it, you know, depending on who you talk to, 1.1 to 1.2 degrees centigrade or so.

**N** Nicholas Breyfogle 20:22  
Well, it's worth noting that last year, on specific days, we went above the 1.5. And so, you know, it was about 1.2. last year, is that right?

**B** Bart Elmore 20:30  
I think somewhere around there.

**N** Nicholas Breyfogle 20:32  
But it was, I mean, last year was the hottest... 2023 was the hottest year on record on average across the planet, and we're really close to that 1.5 mark. And it's not to say - I mean, below 1.5, we're gonna see changes, significant changes, but above 1.5, then we start to see profound disruption.

**B** Bart Elmore 20:50  
Right and, and so, you know, you see this and that what I loved was, you'd hear... you kind of think, well, this must be some dry stuff, you know, but turns out at a lot of moments, i was about as direct as it gets, very forceful, very passionate statements. And, you know, you could see people saying, we need to, we have to move now. This idea of waiting another five years or whatever and then coming back together, which was kind of the old model - if you go back to Rio, it was kind of, okay, we're gonna meet in Kyoto in 1997 and we're gonna figure out how this is gonna work - we need to move now. And you can feel that forcefulness in the room at every turn, and I think that's a good segue to the other clip that we had. So, you know, we're in an interesting situation, we're in Dubai, which is a place that has been really built on oil, if you think about it, the United Arab Emirates is host. And so, there was a lot of discussion about, you know, should should you go to a COP that is not only so heavily tied to oil in that way, but also, the President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber was an oil exec.

**D** David Staley 21:53  
The President of COP?

**B****Bart Elmore 21:54**

The President of the COP. So, you have the Executive Director of the UN, he's gonna control this, and you have the President's usually a local representative, who's overseeing how things are gonna go in the space. And, you know, there were these... I remember we had this moment when we were there, and a friend of ours, Sammy, had attended this meeting, where it was leaked that the President had said, you know, there's no scientific evidence that phasing out fossil fuels is really the solution to this problem. And I mean, literally, being in these rooms, you could feel the like, that ebb and flow, it was just like, middle of our trip, just the bottom had dropped out of our hearts. You know, I was like, whoa, we thought we had a chance here, what's going on? But here's a moment that was interesting. This is... this was called the majilis, and at previous COPs, including Paris, that had been similar moments, where things have gotten kind of out of hand, and the President says, let's get serious. Let's, it's like, meeting, everyone in the same room, let's go, you know. And this isn't... the meeting we just listened to, I kind of made it sound like everyone's in the room, the truth is, those are, you know, these aren't the John Kerry's, these are probably like the folks that are doing the real grunt work of like trying to get it passed. Well, John Kerry is going to be in this room. Everybody is in this room that is the highest official because this is the President saying we're not making enough progress and we got to do something on this. And so it was called the majilis, which I think is a reference to a tradition of coming around in a circle and speaking to one another, and I'll just say one thing about this, and then we'll have another comment. But like, where you are Dave, it was interesting, because some of these folks were reading off their script, and he would stop them. Well, essentially, he would actually be kind of polite, let them finish, then he'd say, listen, I don't want the rest of you doing this. I know you're trained on reading off your notes, but let's talk, like it's time to get serious. And so...

**N****Nicholas Breyfogle 23:49**

Person to person, from the heart.

**B****Bart Elmore 23:50**

From the heart, yeah. Which is interesting. And again, I'm not trying to say the President did all the things right; I still think there's a lot of criticism that's rightfully leveled at the kind of lukewarm agreement that came out of this, and I have my own personal opinions on that. But, I think this is an interesting moment. So, again, apologies for the audio. In fact, right after this, I was trying to get... catch audio because a representative from China had just gotten up to speak, and there were a bunch of people who, you know, needed the translation, and so, I don't know if you'll hear this in the audio, but they're rushing back to go get their headphones so they can hear the translations. But here is President of COP, Al Jeber, who is, is kind of having this moment in the middle of COP. And we were all with the students kind of in there on our... on the edge of our seats wondering what he was gonna say.

**A****Audio Recording 24:38**

"... that's conducive enough as what we see in this room. For everyone to have the opportunity and to have the facilitation and to be able to speak to each other in a way that is, of course,

respectful, open, and at the same time ensuring the overall engagement of everyone. So, I want to say, thank you very much for, first, accepting..."

B

Bart Elmore 25:12

And it cut out there, part because of the recording. But, you can see again, here, there's the President in the middle of this circle, and around him are all these different high, high level officials from all around the world, and he's saying, look, no notes, let's get serious. Let's have these candid conversations.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 25:28

And there were some amazing speeches, there where people really... I mean, they put their heart on the table in terms of what we need to do. And I mean, they don't... this is not where they're negotiating the commas, they're not negotiating the policy here, but they're negotiating the vision, and the ideas of how fast we need to move, how serious is this, how are we going to get about this? And, you know, and to hear, you know, a country like Colombia, who came out and said, look, we have an economy that is based upon oil and natural gas, you know, on fossil fuels, but we know it's time to stop - we can't do it ourselves. We cannot reconstruct our economy without help and without kind of international support, but we know what needs to happen, and let's make it happen. We have other people like the representative from Ireland, who was just passionate about the need to make these changes now and to call out these kinds of problems. I mean, incredibly eloquent, I thought. And so yeah, you want to jump in?

B

Bart Elmore 26:26

Well that moment, I remember, it's so funny, because Nick is right here, just as he is here, and you know, being with a close friend and colleague in these moments was really powerful. And I remember thinking to myself, when the representative from Colombia was making the case that this isn't just about climate, this is about everything.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 26:41

It's about all of us.

B

Bart Elmore 26:42

And I thought, that is what this is, you know, there is a famous book that's out, you know, that "This Changes Everything", by Naomi Klein. And I think, in that moment, I did think of that line, because I thought, what these folks are talking about is the history of colonization, the history of economic inequality, gender inequality. This is not about climate, as per se, as much as that is just about humanity and about how we're going to potentially navigate our relationships to one another moving forward. And I just remember thinking, in that, just having that kind of, whoa, you know, moment in that space. So, I received an email after all this where somebody said to me, in an email, and I'll paraphrase kindly, like, why did you do this? Why did you take

students there, I mean, there was an oil exec running this? I think it was something like it was disingenuous, and it was just kind of a weird email to get. And I thought, I get where this person is coming from, right? From the outside perspective, those things frustrate me just as much as anybody else. I don't... I write about greenwashing. That's my job, that's what I spend all my time thinking about, is how people are not telling the truth and be more forceful. But what you see is that is much bigger than one president, one politician. This was 70,000 people coming in to say, how do we reimagine how we relate to one another in the planet? That's a pretty cool thing, when you kind of sit on that for a moment.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 28:04

And that is, I mean, I was gonna say two things building on that. The first is, is that this is... it's not just, I mean, when we think about climate change, we're thinking about, okay, well, yes, so alternative fuels or geoengineering, or I need to recycle more whatever. But, the conversations are about so much bigger aspects of what it means to be human on this planet. And as you say, about reconstructing how we think we should be; not just as a single country or as a single people, but as a larger species, as a larger humanity, and thinking about, I mean, Bart mentioned, yeah, I mean, just the sort of questions of global south versus global north, you know, colonial legacies, the ways in which there are certain countries that have really benefited from these sorts of, you know, from the kinds of industrial and energy policies that that have caused all these problems, and others who are really suffering and how can we... how can we be fair and have there be greater justice in all of this? And justice in every sort of way that one could imagine. And so, to hear people talk about that, and to be pushing day in and day out, you know, one step at a time to make that happen, is pretty extraordinary. I did just want to sort of say on the whole oil exec thing, and I think that that was something that was really, I think, for hard for many of us, we debated it a lot in the class. You know, the good outcome of that, in some respects is, or at least the the way in which this seemed to work out is that, you know, at the very end of the day, they did include for the first time - and this was COP 28 - but for the first time in these negotiation documents, fossil fuels are called out as a problem that need to be dealt with. And that wasn't clear even up to the last moment, I mean, it was... it was an all night session that went over time to make that sort of decision. And I think for many people, the argument is, is that actually having an oil executive from an oil country in the room at that time kind of leading the negotiations helps, right? I mean, he's, he's someone who can say, listen, we have to make this choice, you know, for us, for our economies, for everybody. And he can speak the language of all the oil companies, he... he's got a credibility that, you know, a climate activist doesn't have in that same room, and so that there are those would argue that actually having him there was essential to get to that next stage where actually, so, now from every point forward, fossil fuels is called out as a problem that needs to be dealt with, you know, with fossil fuel use, emissions need to be abated. And, and so, you know, it's, it's nowhere near enough, but it's not nothing.

D

David Staley 30:32

So you've been...

B

Bart Elmore 30:33

An optimist.

D

David Staley 30:34

Well, so this is the question I want to ask. So now you're back, you've left COP - are you overall optimistic or pessimistic having gone through this experience?

B

Bart Elmore 30:44

As Nick was talking, it was like I was going through that roller coaster, because Nick and I share that. I mean, I think one of the things that makes us friends is we really like... we are ultimately optimists, and, and so as I'm hearing Nick give this really wonderful summary of it, that frankly, we didn't quite have the day we were leaving, you know, because we didn't even see that news yet. It wasn't finally done.

D

David Staley 31:07

About the fossil fuels?

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 31:09

It's deeply personal that way.

B

Bart Elmore 31:09

Transitioning away from fossil fuels. And what was so jarring was kind of getting back on a plane for twenty plus hours, by the way, and then reading these headlines that did pitch it is such an optimistic end, when we had just gone through this kind of roller coaster of having a lot of things that we were frustrated about, because the flip side to Nick's optimism in that statement is, there weren't really clear mechanisms for how we're going to do this. There weren't stiff rules and strictures on, on forcing businesses to do this. Maybe the old companies get off way too easily in this. You know, I think there is a... there's a side of me that says, does this make us feel good, or next year when we're in Azerbaijan, which is where we'll be headed, are we going to see the same kind of slow pace of change? We're at 1.2, 1.5, right? That's, that's where I sit and think about this. And I think when I returned home and see my two boys, River and Blue, you know, I know we're all parents in the room. That's... it's not a game for me. You know, I know it's not a game for any of us. It's deeply personal, and when you see a two, in my case, a three and a five and a six year old - I'm already realizing they're getting older as I speak - a three and a six year old, you know, like, there's a side of me that says, this isn't enough, you know. We need to go back to Baku, which is where we'll be next year with a new group of ten students, to fight harder. So, I think that's where I'm at. I think what it did do, and I will totally agree with Nick here is, I'm pumped. In fact, I like called Nick the other day, I was just talking with him for like, an hour, where I was just like, kind of just like... let's go - which became our catchphrase, by the way, while we're there, "Let's gooo!!!", with multiple o's and lots of exclamation points, because that's how we felt. So, there's an empowerment, I guess, and I'm, if I'm not totally optimistic that we're going to solve it in the next couple of years, I'm

at least pumped to be a part of continuing to fight. And I think there was a moment before we left, where, you know, maybe I was losing a little bit of that edge to fight. I certainly have it back, which is good.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 33:15

Well, that's all we can do is struggle, right? And, you know, I, I come back with, in some ways, greater optimism. I mean, ultimately, it's all going to depend on what happens now. I mean, these conferences are not where the change actually happens, the change happens afterwards, right? So these conferences, you know, the COP conferences set a kind of, it's like a vision statement, right? Well, so how are we going to apply the vision statement now, right, how is every country as they go back to their, to their respective countries and their respective peoples - how are they going to apply the new ideas that are coming out of it, right? So now...

B

Bart Elmore 33:50

Wonky term here - "nationally determined contributions", that's what they're called, NDCs. That's what each nation is commitment to the climate thing is.

N

Nicholas Breyfogle 34:00

Exactly. What are your emissions going to look like? Are you actually going to live up to the promises that you've made? Are you actually going to give money to the loss and damage fund? Are you, you know, are you this, are you that, are you going to develop new types of energy, you know - what are the things that are going to happen now? And I think this is what we have to, to really pay attention to over the course of this year. There was a great piece in The Economist recently about how, like, the majority of the world in 2024 will go to the polls in one form or another, and climate change will be on the ballot in every one of those different elections, right? So, that 2024 is going to be huge, and not because of COPs and stuff, but because of people making decisions about what kind of government they want and the kinds of changes they're willing and not willing to make. And so, what we have to do to maintain that kind of optimism is to... is to make sure that we're, we're out there for those elections. And it's across the, across the globe, everywhere you look, there's going to be these kinds of events. And freer... some more free and less free, but I also say I'm gonna come back optimistic just having gone with our students, because, I mean, they're there to work, right? And they are the people who, I mean, we may not solve it, but they're going to, and I mean, I'm so confident in their ability and their commitment and their knowledge. I mean, the commitment to this process, that something's going to happen from it. Now, you know, we're already seeing significant and, not quite catastrophic, but profound changes to our planet, right? So, we're living through the perils of climate change as we speak. So, you know, it's not so much how are we going to stop it, it's to what degree are we going to go, to what degree are we gonna be able to maintain anything remotely resembling the kind of societies that we have right now, particularly for our children. But yeah, it's, the more people get out there, trained, impassioned, excited, and willing to work day in and day out - that's, that's what's gonna make this kind of change. And these ten, if they're any example of the people around the planet, you know, okay, it's gonna be alright.

**D** David Staley 36:04  
Nick Breyfogle, Bart Elmore. Thank you both.

**B** Bart Elmore 36:07  
Thank you so much.

**N** Nicholas Breyfogle 36:08  
Thank you.

**E** Eva Dale 36:10  
Voices of Excellence was produced and recorded at The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences Technology Services Studio. More information about guests on Voices of Excellence can be found at [go.osu.edu/voices](http://go.osu.edu/voices). Produced by Doug Dangler. I'm Eva Dale.