

Transcript of Podcast featuring Peter Bouris

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Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Hi, I'm Vish Gopalakrishnan, and this is the Manage-A-Bull Podcast where we have in-depth conversations with students, faculty, staff, and alumni to give you a comprehensive picture into the life at University at Buffalo's School of Management.

In today's episode, we speak with Peter Bouris, a student in the full-time MBA program from Buffalo, New York. In our conversation, we talk about his experience at UB and his favorite things to do about the beautiful city of Buffalo. Peter, welcome to the show.

Peter Bouris:

Hey, Vish, how you doing?

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

I'm good, I'm good. As we speak, the weather has turned on us again and we are definitely going to talk about and touch upon Buffalo weather. Because it has five different winters. That's something that we should definitely warn our listeners-

Peter Bouris:

It's about right. Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, about. Let's jump into it. Peter, before we get into the main crux of the interview, I wanted to ask you about an interesting thing we learned about you in our research for this podcast.

You did your undergraduate from Cornell University in industrial and labor relations. That's such a unique major. I don't think I've ever had a conversation with someone who has that as their undergraduate major. Tell us how you came to choose it. What attracted you to that major?

Peter Bouris:

Sure. Yeah. Well, it is a fairly unique program. I think there are maybe probably four to five programs

like it in North America between the U.S. and Canada. And what it is, the ILR School, at least the one at Cornell, was founded in 1954 and it was done right after the end of World War II. During the time in the U.S. the federal government was working to suppress prices and wages to limit inflation due to the war effort. After the war ended, people were ready for a raise and so there were strikes breaking out all over the place, some union sanctioned, others not, and the ILR School was chartered by the state government as a way of developing individuals who would understand the workplace from the perspective of workers and how to try and create more harmonious industrial relations.

And so, going into my undergrad, I was thinking probably more conventional business degree. I ended up opting... I learned about the ILR program and being in ethical New York, it's about three hours away from where I grew up. The best way to put it, it's understanding the workplace where government policy and regulation intersects with organized labor, labor in general, management, and culture and society, and how all those things affect the workplace. I found that to be very interesting and I applied.

And it is a very specific degree, but you learn a lot. The perspectives you get in a program like that are so different from anything that you hear about now, especially in the U.S. I can't speak to other nations, but in the States, what we hear about work and business is often, especially when it come... we don't talk about the union as much anymore. We don't really talk about workers from the perspective of how... We talk about how to motivate them as team members maybe.

But, at the end of the day, it gets down to they're a line on the P&L and we get there. I think it might still in vogue to say human capital, which I'm not a big fan of as a term. It's like a human, it's like a machine almost. And so that, you get the perspective of learning about business, but just from the standpoint of the workers. And like I said, just the way the culture is in the States now, it's unlikely I would've learned that on my own. So I'm very happy I did the degree that I did, so-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

No, it certainly sounds extremely interesting and I love the way that you shared the history of why it became a thing and why labor relations were important. And it is a hot button topic that gets discussed often now, but in the context of AI, with new technologies coming in, what's going to be the impact on worker rights? How are we going to make sure that people still have jobs? So it's certainly a very relevant field and thank you for telling us a little bit more about that.

Now, after finishing your degree, you worked for a little while in healthcare for a few years before working in, I think bridge rehabilitation and biodiesel industries, right?

Peter Bouris:

Yes.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Tell us a little bit more about those experiences and more particularly, how did they inform your decision to pursue a full-time MBA?

Peter Bouris:

Sure. Well, I can say that in healthcare, I was a bridge between the technical side of a EHR system and I guess the business side of it. So a translator. I was also a project manager implementing software. So I learned some project management skills. So that was the start of that. I ended up pursuing project management further in bridge rehabilitation.

I've worn a lot of hats with the people I'd worked for. I've also interacted with all different kinds of people being in bridge rehabilitation and biodiesel. I've had plenty of work with... Although my position isn't explicitly blue collar, I interact with blue collar folks all the time, developing a little bit of cred, so to speak, in that, with folks who have that method of earning a living. Was very instrumental for me.

But overall, what I've learned is that you're going to... at the end of the day, first of all, as a manager, as a leader, you got to have enough tactical skills, know what everyone else is doing, first of all, and more importantly, you have to be able to understand what makes people tick. Because I've had cases where I take maybe not even a half hour for lunch, but I'm working with somebody who has three children at home and so she uses her hour lunch. This is going back many years. She uses her hour lunch to take care of some personal stuff on the computer. I didn't realize that was the reason she was taking the lunch. I thought she just wanted to take the lunch. I would say, "Hey, come on, let's keep going." But I didn't even think of that perspective.

And so, the biggest thing is, yeah, so basically it's understanding people and then being able to understand people and respond accordingly and having the technical skills to at least know what folks are doing, if not even be able to do it yourself sometimes.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right.

Peter Bouris:

So those are the main two reasons why when I did make the decision to go for the MBA program is, one, learning to manage people better and to improve my technical skills. Honestly, it was a little bit longer.

It took me longer to get there than I thought. I was planning on getting my MBA earlier in life. But few left-hand turns and things, but anyway, it's-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. No, I think you mentioned, if I could summarize real quickly, there's the technical reasons for why you would want to get an MBA, which is learning about different subjects, understanding how a marketing person will look at a problem and a finance person and an accountant. But the most rewarding aspect of a full-time MBA, especially if it's in person, is that you learn from your peers and you learn those soft skills of having empathy, of understanding where other people are coming from and then becoming a overall better manager and therefore a better leader in the future.

You did mention that you waited a little longer than most people in order to pursue an MBA. But when you did make that decision, right, for an experienced professional like you with a couple of years of work experience under their belt, what made the UB full-time MBA program a good fit?

Peter Bouris:

Sure. Well, the fact that it was full-time was from my perspective the best case scenario I wanted. The goal was to honestly finish the program within the shortest amount of time possible. And then more specifically, the emphasis on teamwork in UB's program is very high and it's been a trend for a long time now, the move toward teamwork, but it's really accelerated. And being able to just be comfortable with that was a big factor for me. I knew that I had doing that for a couple of years. And the MBA program I would feel much more ready to handle it in the workplace after I finished.

The other thing also, I mentioned technical skills. UB is very good. UB's business program has outstanding faculty in general and also when it comes to any sort of a technical matter in business, the faculty has more than the chops that you would need as a student to prep you for what you had to do and when you get done with the program.

So, all in all, that was pretty much the main reason why I chose UB. There was a factor of locality for me as I've moved back to Buffalo, but I was willing to leave for a two-year program and UB made the most sense for me regardless of that.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. You bring up a great point about teamwork and that fits really well with one of the main reasons why you wanted to come and get an MBA, which was developing those soft skills.

And yes, UB's MBA program is extremely team focused. I don't think there's a single course in the

program where you don't have a team that you're working with on a group project, which can be a blessing and sometimes a curse, depending on the mix of individuals that you are able to work with. But the caliber of students in the program, we've been quite lucky to have some high performing individuals come in. So generally speaking, it's a very rewarding experience for a lot of students.

So, you came to UB, you've started your MBA, you are very close to finishing your first year in the program, just a few more weeks left. How has the experience been so far?

Peter Bouris:

It's been what I had hoped it would be. I've definitely gotten my goals coming in, as I mentioned already. I've improved on both of those in the teamwork areas, developing my people skills a little bit further and also learning some hard skills. Because I've been extremely impressed of faculty. They all have some very serious and impressive background in the business world and that's been an added benefit of course.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. I think the thing about the faculty is that because we are a research focused university, you do tend to get subject matter experts, people who have spent 20 years, 30 years in a field. They also have great industry connections, but definitely very research oriented professors. So they go deep and their knowledge of their field is vast. And sometimes that can be a challenge because, how do you take all of that vastness of knowledge and synthesize it into a seven-week course, right, or a 14-week course? But I do agree that our professors definitely work hard to make the learning experience compatible with the various learning requirements of different students and learning styles of different students. Especially now with a lot of the delivery being done online, a lot of the coursework and materials being available online.

So speaking of coursework, classes are an important component. It's one of the main ways by which the university delivers knowledge to students. What have been some of your favorite classes during your time here so far?

Peter Bouris:

I'd say I really enjoyed the core finance class. Part of that was because of the material and also I got to know a little bit... Veljko Fotak was the instructor and he does a lot of research himself. Having a class with him is very enjoyable, I'll just put it [inaudible 00:13:26]. And he's a gentleman that grew up in Italy and for the sake of those who don't know, he grew up in Italy and he's got a bit of an accent going and

he still has some Italian mannerisms and it's pretty funny. I mean, as someone who's my ancestry is Greek, and so I met a guy who spoke my language a little bit from Southern Europe. But yeah, I would say definitely, that would be my top course probably just like I said, because of the instructor and also because the subject matter was directly with what I'm hoping to get out of the program, so...

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah. We did touch upon this question earlier, but what are some of the ways in which you feel you have grown over the past eight to nine months? And do you feel that you have achieved everything that you wanted this program to do for you?

Peter Bouris:

Well, no, I haven't achieved them yet. I do think that I'm well on my way to. And my biggest struggle but yet also my biggest area of improvement has just been learning to be very alert to the sensibilities of people who are maybe younger than me or, I would say that's probably been the biggest thing.

But certainly it's a very diverse program also culturally, ethnically, and otherwise. So being conscious of that too. Yeah, I came from for several years working in an industry that is, everyone's an American, and if they were not then they're probably either from... I mean, well, I guess people from Puerto Rico are American too. But also, folks I've worked with who are from Mexico and outside of that, it's Black and white Americans and that's it. And it's mostly men as well.

And so I went from a pretty narrow group of folks who I worked with on a regular basis to being surrounded by a very different variety and being able to manage that and still have good relationships has been, I'd say the biggest change for me.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. It definitely enhances the in-class learning experience when you have someone who's Russian or someone from Ukraine who can add interesting perspective on leadership and different leadership styles in different cultures, someone from China or India, it definitely enhances the overall learning experience. There are challenges that come with cultural differences, but I think working through them is part and parcel of the overall growth journey that an MBA program like the UB MBA program offers.

Now this next question is usually a little tough for some of our guests to answer, but I'm still going to push you and ask you, but if there was one thing you would have liked to change about your experience in UB so far, what would that be?

Peter Bouris:

I mean, as far as the School of Management building, having another avenue by which one can attain coffee than the one Tim Horton's that where the line is constantly backed up to the other side of the building-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. That's such a good part-

Peter Bouris:

That would be a welcome change. On a more, I guess, serious front I would say, I don't know what the answer is with these seven-week courses, but I feel they should maybe just pick one direction or another and go with it, either everything's seven weeks or nothing's seven weeks.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, I completely understand. The seven-week courses can be extremely difficult, especially when you have the switchover and you're having finals five weeks into the program, right, you're already having exams? So that can be quite intense for a lot of people. And it is a slightly unique set up. There are other programs that follow a similar format, also many others in the rest of New York. But yeah, that can be a challenge.

And I completely agree about the Tim Horton's thing. The thing that really bothers me the most is that they actually have two counters, but one of them is always off. So the line could be halved, but it's just the way it works I guess-

Peter Bouris:

That's a small kitchen for a Tim Horton's and so they don't have enough capacity to churn out the egg sandwiches or the avocado toast. Even if they did have the two counters, they'd be bumping into each other. That's been my working theory on it anyway.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. Yes, space is definitely a premium. And yeah, if we could just have maybe even vending machines, just coffee vending machines [inaudible 00:18:08]-

Peter Bouris:

Yeah, those old school ones. Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, maybe those will help. But yeah, I completely agree with your assertion and those are great points that you made about things to improve in the experience of students in the program.

Now, let's move on away from academics and focus a little bit more about the main crux of our conversation here today, which is the City of Buffalo and everything that is wonderful and great about the city. So as a Buffalo native who has lived away from the city for his undergrad and for other experiences work, what were a few things, let's say two or three things that you missed the most about the city when you were away?

Peter Bouris:

This is an often repeated answer, but it's true in my experience. People here are different than in other places. It's called the city of good neighbors for a reason. It's one of the city's several nicknames. And it happens to be very true. People are friendly. They will, if they can help you, even if they don't owe you that well, a lot of people are willing to step up to do that. There's a certain pleasantness that goes with it.

And it is not just a big city versus medium-sized city thing or a small town thing, because I've been to those kinds of places too and there's nothing wrong with them, but, it's not quite the same. It's just not the same of being in a place where you'd think you're in the Northeast, you would figure people aren't going to hold the door for you that long or at all. Really good. Well, they do. Or, so you walk down the street, total stranger, you just say hello to each other. So that's a huge element of it.

I mean, one factor probably goes without saying based on the context here is, majority of my family is here, but there's that. But yeah, I would say the people and then also the food here is good. And it's not just the junk food either. The pizza's good, the chicken wings are good, the beef on weck is good, the pierogies are good, the hotdogs are better than anywhere you've ever had if you get seance. So that's all the junk food. But then you have whatever, Italian, Greek restaurants all over the place. Even a little bit thinner maybe with subcontinental Asia or East Asian food, but you still have good options.

I don't know what it is, Buffalo has, I believe, more restaurants per capita than New York does, which can... So there's a lot of restaurants here, a lot of them are really good and you can't beat the food, man-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Can't beat the food-

Peter Bouris:

And it's also rank highly in magazines as well for this purpose in the national publications in the U.S. So-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. And being almost a border town, the Canadian border is only about 20 minutes away from the university's North Campus, it does add a little bit of international flare to things. People come here for, you mentioned wings and other food items. So commerce helps. And it does have a huge immigrant population also, there's-

Peter Bouris:

That's right-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

[inaudible 00:21:35] Greeks, Italians. There's been a huge influx of people from South Asia, especially Bangladesh. And with that comes the cuisine, with that comes to food. So there's definitely a lot going on in the culinary scene of Buffalo. Interestingly, before I moved here, I was one of the people who didn't know that Buffalo sauce is actually named after the city.

Peter Bouris:

Yes-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

I thought it was named after the animal for some reason, but I didn't know that Buffalo sauce is actually from here. It originated here and it is a matter of great pride for people of Buffalo and a subject of heated debates also.

So let's get a little controversial, right? What are your top three Buffalo wings spots, right? And they're just called chicken wings here. That was the other thing that I realized. So, what are your favorite chicken wing spots? And if I had to ask you to pick one that is your top absolute favorite, which one would that be?

Peter Bouris:

Well, I'm always partial to independent pizzerias here. So many of them are famous in the area that are pizza and wing joints, not just wings.

Buffalo, you talked about the wings, a quick aside note about Buffalo pizza, for anyone who might be interested. Buffalo has its own spin on pizza. It's a bit of a hybrid, say, between maybe Detroit-style and New York. So Detroit-style is a very high crust, whereas New York is very thin, so Buffalo's in between there. And then, typically it will have a lot more mozzarella on it with sweetened sauce. So the sauce is... it's pizza sauce, but it's a little sweeter than what you might be used to from if you get something from Dominoes or Papa John's. And then usually, well, it's common to sprinkle very small amount of oregano on the cheese as well. So that's the standard Buffalo pizza. So I'm a big fan of that as well. My go-to places, they sell those products and wings.

So with that going around, well, I'll say, I put Duff's in my top three. They actually don't sell pizza, but Duff's is two locations in Buffalo Metro. You can't really go wrong with it, what you're getting when you go there. And after them, I would say La Nova Pizzeria is very good. They do a good job. If you ask them to cook your wings well done they'll do it and you really crunch into them.

And then my top place, and I'm biased because it's partially owned by a relative of mine, I don't know if it's appropriate to reveal the name of the place. You know what I mean?

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah.

Peter Bouris:

Or I'm fine revealing it. I don't know if it's appropriate for-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Oh, please go ahead-

Peter Bouris:

The instructions we have here.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Oh, no, no, no, please go ahead.

Peter Bouris:

Oh, okay. So yeah, my uncle and his business partner own Imperial Pizza in South Buffalo.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Oh, okay-

Peter Bouris:

Pretty far away from North Campus. Actually, it's a 40-minute ride, but it's on Abbott Road and they've won the Buffalo Chicken Wing Festival many, many times, in particular with the barbecue wings. And obviously I have the family bias going, but in my opinion, if I'm taking someone who's never had Buffalo Wings ever, I'm taking them there-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

That's the spot.

Peter Bouris:

Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

But you're setting the bar high. Once you have those, and I have, I've been one of the lucky few, that I think one of my other Native Buffalo friends recommended it and we got it for a Bill's football game or something like that. And it was definitely delicious and crunchy. And you're setting the bar high. If that's where you start as someone who's never tasted wings before, you're going to be constantly disappointed-

Peter Bouris:

Maybe disappointed afterward. Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Afterwards just constantly disappointed with everything you try.

So, the other controversial question that goes with the wings question is, ranch or blue cheese or something else-

Peter Bouris:

I don't know any self-respecting Buffalo and who actually eats their wings with ranch. If you know of some, I need names. Because they need to do like in Catholicism it's like, okay, Father, forgive me, I've sinned, I confess to this sin, and I'll do 20 Hail Mary's-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Got it-

Peter Bouris:

If you having your wings with ranch, you need to do 500 Josh Allen's, the quarterback of the Buffalo Bills. And so, I don't know, that's my opinion. Despite, even in an immigrant family who luckily my parents were young enough where they were able to assimilate a little bit to American culture and that's the thing, ranch is for vegetables or salads or whatever-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Salads, yeah-

Peter Bouris:

Chicken wings, blue cheese right there next to it. Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

I think that is the litmus test for differentiating a true Buffalonian from someone who's just pretend Buffalonian. Because so many people who are strong Buffalo have said that it has to be blue cheese or nothing. If you do ranch, you're not from here.

You mentioned Josh Allen, right? The other thing, other than wings, that Buffalonians are extremely proud of is sports, sports in general. And I'm sure you have heard the phrase that Buffalo is a beer town with a sports problem or a football problem.

Peter

Bouris:

Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Whether it is ice hockey or the Buffalo Bills or Josh Allen, people here take their team very seriously. Well, whatever their team is, right? And it's not a stretch to say that it's almost like a religion sometimes. Like Bills Mafia, you meet somebody who's a Bill's Mafia, they live and breed everything that that team does. They have very strong opinions about players and rosters and deals, who's going to win, who's not? Or they have strong opinions about a game and a call that a referee had five years ago in some game.

So tell us a bit about your favorite team and their history with the city.

Peter Bouris:

Yeah. And, well, I would argue Buffalo has a bit of a drinking problem too, if I'm being honest. But, that's my opinion.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

That was going to be my next question. Because there's so many beer breweries here. So we'll touch on it next.

Peter Bouris:

Yeah, well, if you've ever gone to a Buffalo Bills game... I don't know, have you?

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Not yet. No, I haven't been lucky enough [inaudible 00:28:34]-

Peter Bouris:

Yeah. Well, you may want to think about it, you'll experience what I just said. Anyway. No, look, Buffalo is a blue collar town. It's a medium-sized, Rust Belt towns, when they all started losing a lot of manufacturing jobs around the same time in the 1970s. So think about Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Chicago. I mean, Chicago's a financial center now, but it was hemorrhaging jobs at a point. And so people clinged to their sports. And you mentioned it, it is a religion. If you go to a house of worship on a Sunday, so I guess, if it's Sunday, then it's probably a church, and there's a football game later, the leader, whether it be the priest or the pastor is probably going to mention something about the game in the middle of service, all right?

I mean, I don't have... My favorite teams are the Buffalo Sabres, the ice hockey team and the Bills. I grew up playing ice hockey at a reasonably high level, so I always have a... And given how close we are to Canada, like you said, ice hockey's very popular here. The weather helps with that.

I can chart a lot of my life, not that I do this, I don't sit down and do this, but I could very easily chart my life by events that have happened with both the Buffalo Sabres and the Buffalo Bills, right? So the Bills were cheated out of a playoff game in 1999. I was nine years old. And also when I was nine years old, later that year, the Sabres were cheated out of the Stanley Cup by an illegal goal that shouldn't have counted at the time. So I guess I'm proving the question, I guess, maybe a little bit-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. Yeah, people hold on to their grudges. Yeah.

Peter Bouris:

Yeah. No, I would say for anyone who comes from... especially for someone who's maybe not from the States, an incoming prospective student, a great way to get to know people a little bit is just learn a thing or two about the Bills of Sabres or both. And even if you don't understand the sports really, you'll make a friend just by asking them what they thought about how last game went or something.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. Right. Yeah, it's a very easy way to make strong connections with people. Sports is such a great unifier, and especially if you support the same team-

Peter Bouris:

Yeah. Well, even if people who support opposing teams, sports is always a unifier in my opinion-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. And [inaudible 00:31:18]-

Peter Bouris:

People clink their beer glasses together and even though they disagree. It's the way politics used to be. You say, "Wow, we agree to disagree," clink the beer glass, have it. That's how sports is now. It's always been that way. Anyway, and I'm paddling on, so...

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

No, ice hockey is definitely great. I was lucky enough to actually go to a game of the Sabres with a couple of friends. And you're right, I met four people there that I had never met before and now we are weekly drinking buddies. We go and have a pint every Friday night or every Thursday night, something like that. It's actually a lot of fun. Now, speaking of beers-

Peter

Bouris:

Sure.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Buffalo does have a lot of local breweries. It definitely is a beer drinking town. That is the unofficial drink of the city.

My question was going to be, what are your top three or top four breweries? But let's just focus on, what is your favorite local brewery that you frequent with your friends or grew up going to? What is your number one?

Peter Bouris:

So I do differ a little bit from this median denizen of the town. I drink beer, but not a ton. I would say I've never really visited a brewery outside of actually one in Rochester, Genesee Breweries. I did that with my corporate champions team. But that was a little different.

As far as product goes, I think I'm probably very partial on the Southern Tier. They'd become pretty big. And Southern Tier is, for anyone who would know, Southern Tier of New York state relative to the border with Pennsylvania, which is probably an hour and a half south of Buffalo. So I think their IPAs are great, in my opinion. I think all their other, not IPAs, are also very good.

I also like the fact, there's a Canadian line called Labatt, which has its U.S. headquarters in Buffalo. It's a standard commercial lager, mass-produced, but it's a standard go-to. If you're having a lot of people over you'll be fine with Labatt and nobody will complain. Yeah, it's just very steady.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

But, to me, it almost feels like they caliber it and make it so that it goes really well with wings and bread,

pizza dishes. It's almost made to be incredibly drinkable with that kind of food, which is what is famous here and which everybody eats.

Peter Bouris:

That's interesting. I never thought of it like that. But yeah, I mean, that's what, if you see people tailgating at a football game, if they're tailgating for a long time, maybe they'll do Blue Light. But sometimes it's people who are just in their own homes, they got a bunch of beer and they're letting you park on their lawn and you pay them 10 bucks for it and then you got a bunch of beer and you say, "Can I have a can for two bucks?" And then you don't have to pay at the stadium.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right-

Peter Bouris:

But in that case it's typically Labatt, is what I'm saying.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right, right. It is the one that's consumed the most. But the variety is incredible and the seasonality of it is also great, especially when we have the warmer weathers, which we are all hoping show up sometime soon.

Peter Bouris:

Yes.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

So let's talk about the least favorite thing for a lot of people, especially those who are not from Buffalo who move here, especially international students who come from the Tropics or hotter places. Buffalo winters are probably their least favorite thing. It does get freezing cold, especially in January and February. And the worst thing about it is that every time you think that the winter is over, it comes back with a vengeance. It almost always does three or four circles like that. So you just have to hold onto that little bit of hope that the sunshine is coming eventually.

As a native, what advice do you have for people, especially those who come from warmer climates, about surviving Buffalo winters?

Peter Bouris:

So obviously at the risk of stating the obvious, make sure you have appropriate attire. Some people who are native can handle a 30 degree day with a windbreaker. People who are, like you said, maybe from around the Tropics, 30 degrees, you need a full bundle up ski coat until your body gets used to it. So there's that. A proper pair of boots for when it snows. So that's adapting to the climate a little bit.

The other thing is, try to embrace things that are unique to the winter. So ice skating. We have outdoor ice skating rinks here, indoor ice skating rings here. If you've never tried skiing or snowboarding, there's that available nearby. Just generally being a fan of ice hockey as a sport, if you find that you like it, that happens all winter. Same thing, basketball is all winter for that matter, at least on TV. And just, there are things that happen in the winter. You just need to embrace those and that's how you get through it. And we also are fortunate, we still get some theater shows that come through in the winter at the performing arts centers.

And yeah, it's really just about making sure that you're not... the biggest thing is just ensuring you're not by yourself in the dark at five o'clock in the evening, because that's what happens when we change the clocks here. Just don't let that happen. Obviously, if you're studying and doing homework, it's one thing, but if you have a night free from the weekend, then do something. [inaudible 00:37:45]-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. Yeah, I think the advice about, it does get dark very soon. By 4:00 PM it will be dark, dark in the peak of winter and it'll feel like it's midnight.

I love the advice about brighten up your surroundings. Have a lot of light.

Peter Bouris:

That's right.

Yeah.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Wear appropriate clothing of course. But also try not to be by yourself all the time. Because the weather can get to you. The cohort helps. Your corporate champion teams are there to help their support system. Never think that whatever you are feeling, let's say you're not used to the cold weather, depressing weather as people call it, and it's affecting your moods-

Peter

Bouris:

Moods-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

It's affecting your mental health, there's so many resources. Never think that you're alone and that there's no help. There's just so many resources available at UB, outside of UB to handle that.

And as you said, it always helps that the people of Buffalo are so helping and so forthcoming and so kind and nice because you can always reach out for help. There's people who'd come and... I've had complete strangers come and clean our driveways and I don't even know these persons-

Peter Bouris:

[inaudible 00:39:02].

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

They live a couple of doors down. Never spoken to them, but they come and they're like, "Hey, we were just doing this for funsies." So it's like a fun family activity kind of thing. So that's definitely there.

Now, the weather aside, Buffalo is also a place that is blessed with a lot of great natural beauty. There are tons of lakes around, especially when the ice starts to melt. There's forests, parks, national parks, state parks, and they all are extremely beautiful, especially when the sun comes out, right, sometime in May?

What are a few outdoor activities that people can do in Buffalo, especially when it starts to transition into the warmer climate?

Peter Bouris:

So there's, because the winter is, as we've discussed, the summer is a lot of pent-up energy that gets released in the summer. And so there's a ton of musical concerts all over in the city in the suburbs that including famous label artists. Canal side opens up, you could go walk on the boardwalk, go kayaking, and there's along the Niagara River and along Lake Erie you have waterside restaurants to go to, if you wish.

And let's see. There's also, if you're into sport, we don't have a major league baseball team, but we have a team that's one below that, the feeder team for the Toronto Blue Jays. So go catch a ball game.

Baseball's much better, especially for anyone who maybe is outside international, America Baseball, first of all, if you're from India, it's very similar to Cricket. You'll pick it up right away. And second, it's also very entertaining. Maybe not. It's a nice time to go to a ballgame versus watching a game on TV. So there's that to do.

People, every summer we have the Gus Macker, which is a basketball tournament for regular people. They have a similar thing for road hockey. People are out, I think the bars now close in Buffalo at 2:00 AM, it used to be 4:00 AM. But people will stay out as long as they can having fun at the clubs, having fun at bars, and it's, you just do it. Whatever is your definition of a party, you'll be able to recreate it during the summer here. And there's always a good party to be had, especially when the weather permits.

There's also great hiking opportunities. We have a lot of state parks in the area. Letchworth Park is probably the most notable. Any kind of boating on the river Niagara or in Lake Erie. If anyone fishes, there's plenty of opportunity for that here. To be honest with you, I don't like the heat. I'm so wired as being here that when it's cold, I feel good. When it's warm I recoil. But that's not to say there aren't a lot of good things to do, so.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. No, you've shared a lot of incredible things that people could do in the warmer months, but a lot of those things also carry forward into the colder months.

For those who are looking for resources about Buffalo and what to do, Step Out Buffalo is a great resource. They usually have information about tickets, events. They also have information about what's open, when is it open. They also put together a lot of their own events. So that's definitely something that we would encourage our listeners to go and check out.

Now, Buffalo also has a lot of history, right? You mentioned some of it in the sense that it used to be a manufacturing town, now it's transitioning to become more of a tech hub in Western New York. Its historic Allentown is something that often gets mentioned when you're talking about Buffalo for its charm, the food scene, and also the nightlife. It has a lot of the clubs that people go to for partying.

What are some activities people can do when the sun sets? What's the nightlife in Buffalo like?

Peter Bouris:

Well, Vish, you may be talking to the wrong guy on this one. So I will tell you a little bit of factoid. So all the places that are now in Allentown, they used to be on Chippewa, near Delaware's, Delaware Avenue. They all just moved. The city wanted Chippewa to be more of a cafe type, whatever.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Upscale [inaudible 00:44:19].

Peter Bouris:

But yeah, if you're talking nightlife stuff, it's not something I do a whole lot about. Especially now, even when I was younger, I only did it a little bit. So I don't really know, to be honest with you. I mean, there's something late to be done. I mean, we've Shakespeare in the Park, there's Artpark there. So they're outdoor theatrical performances that happen in the evenings. And-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah-

Peter Bouris:

I mean, there's always a pub open, I'll tell you that, so...

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right. There's always something happening somewhere in downtown or Allentown for sure. South Campus is typically known for its party scene more so than North Campus. North Campus is more, as you mentioned, artsy and outdoorsy activities, that kind of stuff.

Peter Bouris:

Sure.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

But yeah, I'm in the same boat. I'm not a nightlife person. I know about trekking, I know a little bit about sports, but that's pretty much it. But-

Peter Bouris:

Oh, there's... Nevermind. I was going to mention... I don't know if they do this in the dark, where you can go with some friends on the pedal bike. Is that what trekking is?

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's one of the things, yeah.

Peter Bouris:

Yeah. Okay. Anyway, you basically drank the whole time, but you're powering the vehicle that you-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Right, you-

Peter Bouris:

So you're not driving?

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

You're not driving, you're just powering it, yeah. It's a concept I think that we borrow from Amsterdam or one of those European cities.

Now, Peter, we can talk about Buffalo for hours, right? There's so much to do. There's so much to talk about, the people, the food, the cuisine, the fable, all kinds of things.

Peter Bouris:

Sure.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

But I want to make sure that we give some actionable advice to our listeners, especially those who are trying to decide if Buffalo or UB is a good fit for them, if they want to come here and spend two years of their life here.

What advice do you have for students thinking of making Buffalo their home, let's say, for the next two years?

Peter Bouris:

Yeah, so I would say, relative to comparable American towns, Buffalo's public transit, it's pretty good. Relative, but the key word here is, relative, to American towns as compared to maybe where someone might be from, or even another part of the States. An example would be, if you're from New York City, you will be surprised by the lack of public transport, or if you're from Europe or whatever.

We have a bus system that's rated very highly, but it is a little Byzantine. If you're in South Campus,

you'd be in a better spot, more closer to the city to take advantage of it. It doesn't travel out as much to North Campus. So I guess my point is, the first thing I would say is, just be aware of the transportation situation.

A lot of things are, it's very car dependent. Not that you need to have a car, but make sure you're living at a place that has transportation to the campus, if you're living off campus, and make sure you can get a plan in place to go buy groceries. You can use Uber and Lyft and all those things to get from place to place, whatever, but that obviously is expensive. So you only want to do that once in a while, if you can help it.

So I would say the biggest thing... because in my experience that is the biggest shock people have, is the transportation matter. So I'd say that it would be that outside of really taking the winter seriously, I'd say that's the biggest thing.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah, that's a great point and it's a good place for us to mention that UB does have an excellent shuttle service that's free.

Peter Bouris:

Yes-

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

That's available to students. If you want to shuttle between South and North Campus, there's the Stampede bus, it's called the UB Stampede. It goes everywhere. There's UB South Campus shuttle, North Campus shuttle.

The campus is also pretty spread. It's pretty vast. Just the North Campus alone, I mean, it's big enough to have a giant lake in the middle. So it's a vast campus. It's not always feasible to walk, especially when it's snowing and there's a ton of snow on the footpath. So using the bus system or understanding the bus system is definitely very helpful.

I would say one thing though, that I definitely think the subway that connects downtown to South Campus can be extended to North Campus so that it just improves connectivity for students. And obviously because a lot of the nightlife scene is downtown and Allentown, it'll also encourage people to use public transportation, especially if they're planning on drinking.

So, that's a great point. I didn't even think that we'd touch upon transportation in today's conversation.

So let me come to my final question, right? You mentioned that people of Buffalo were your favorite thing, or at least one of your favorite thing about Buffalo. Beside that, if I had to ask you to choose one more thing, and obviously not family, because that won't be something that... everyone can have it-

Peter Bouris:

That doesn't apply, right.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

It doesn't apply to everyone. Other than the people of Buffalo what would be your most favorite thing about this place?

Peter Bouris:

In my opinion, it's the perfect sized city. You don't have the hassle and just the hustle and bustle of a bigger city. However, you have a lot of the amenities of a bigger city, Broadway plays, professional sports, world-class art museums. If you want those sorts of things, but don't want to have the big cost of living that comes with being in a big town and you don't want to have a hassle that comes with being in a big town, then this is a great place. Some people like the big city, all right, that's their deal, I mean, obviously. But if you don't and you're looking for a place where you can have it both ways, Buffalo's a place you could definitely have it both ways.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Yeah. Peter, thank you so much for taking the time. As I said, we could talk about Buffalo for hours and hours and we do have to keep the podcast to a reasonable length, so I'm going to try and bring it to a close.

We learned a lot from you. The passion for Buffalo is definitely there. And also your passion for just people in general. The idea of putting... You're clearly someone that thinks a lot about, how do you run a business in a people-centric way? And we are grateful to have you in the program, and I'm sure you're going to be a great asset to the university in the future too.

Peter, thank you so much for taking the time and speaking with us and sharing your experiences-

Peter Bouris:

Sure.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

If our listeners want to follow your journey, they want to follow what you're up to professionally or personally, where can they find you?

Peter Bouris:

Sure. I would say just find my LinkedIn. My name's spelled P-E-T-E-R. And then, my LinkedIn profile has a dash R for my middle initial, and then it's dash my last name, B-O-U-R-I-S. And yeah, I really don't do any other social media, so that's the best place to find me. Or you can send me a message, if you want.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

Perfect, efficient, and to the point. Peter, thank you for taking the time and I'm sure our listeners are going to learn a lot from this conversation.

Peter Bouris:

Definitely. Thanks, Vish.

Vish Gopalakrishnan:

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If you would like to be featured on the podcast or you would like to share comments and suggestions, please write to us at gopalak2@buffalo.edu. That's G-O-P-A-L-A-K2@buffalo.edu. Hope you have a great day and we will see you in the next one.