

SEGUE: SIU System's John Charles Shares Journey throughout Career in Government

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On this week's episode of Segue, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's weekly radio program exploring the lives and work of the people on campus, Chancellor Randy Pembroke interviews John Charles, executive director of government and public affairs for the SIU system.

This episode of Segue airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Sept. 15. Listeners can tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or siue.edu/wsie.

Charles is a native of Lexington, Kentucky and began his career in government after being selected as a member of the 1995 class of Illinois legislative staff intern program. The following year, he was hired as a member of the communications staff for the senate democratic leader. Since then, he has also worked as director of communications, director of operations, Senate floor manager and deputy chief of staff.

"John, you've worked in the Illinois government for most of your career," Pembroke says. "What were some of your responsibilities when you started as an Illinois legislative staff intern?"

"The Legislative Staff Intern Program is a ten month internship that starts in the fall and works through the spring session of the General Assembly," Charles explains. "Interns are placed with a legislative staff member and are treated just like a regular staff member.

"They have the same responsibilities and work the same hours as legislative staff while receiving a great opportunity to learn about what legislators do and how the government works."

"Finding out how a law passes must have been an eye-opening process for you throughout those early years," notes Pembroke.

"You aren't taught where ideas for laws come from," Charles says. "There is a lot of involvement from the public and it takes a lot of effort and negotiations to get each bill signed into law. It was very eye-opening to see the process. I love it and have made it my career."

"Can you tell us a little bit about what a Senate floor manager does?" Pembroke inquires.

"As floor manager, I made sure that things moved along quickly, that committees got schedules, and that bills were heard in committees in a timely fashion in order to be discussed and voted on the floor and moved into the House," answers Charles.

In 2013, Charles was appointed to his current position as executive director of government and public affairs for the SIU system. In this role, he manages both state and federal government affairs for the university system and coordinates governmental activities and outreach on both campuses.

“In your current position, are you involved in coordinating air traffic control regarding legislators and higher education?” asks Pembroke.

“We try to be as involved as possible when we have a legislator visiting campus,” explains Charles. “Most of the time, my office is the mediator in terms of those visits and we coordinate between the elected official’s office and our campus offices.”

“You’re also the spokesperson for the President’s office and the Board of Trustees. What do you do as spokesperson?” asks Pembroke.

“After a Board of Trustees meeting, I organize a brief press conference that is held by the chairman, the president and the chancellors,” explains Charles. “I also work with the communications directors on both campuses to address issues system- or state-related impacting the universities.”

“Recently, Governor Pritzker was on the SIU campus to sign legislation so that both the SIUE and SIUC student trustees on the board would be able to vote,” Pembroke notes. “Why do you think that was an important piece of legislation?”

“For the SIU system, it was an important step in our evolution,” says Charles. “It is important to give students from both campuses the opportunity to have a voice and represent their constituents by voting.”

Along with managing governmental affairs for the university system, Charles works with other members of the system to put on events that showcase the cooperation and coordination of both campuses. This includes an event that allows the system’s researchers and experts to showcase their best work. This year, the SIU Technology and Innovation Expo will take place on Saturday, Oct. 10 in Chicago, IL. To learn more, please visit tie.siu.edu.

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