

Shaping the Future

Meet Dr. James M. Ludes, executive director of the Pell Center.



Dr. James Ludes

PROFILE

EDUCATION: Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.: Ph.D. and master's degree in history, 2003; Providence College, bachelor's degree, 1993.

MEMBERSHIPS, HONORS AND AWARDS:

Council on Foreign Relations, Term Member 2005-2010
Manfred Wörner Fellow, Bonn, Germany, 2000
Daniel F. Reilly, O.P. History Award, Providence College, 1993

PUBLICATIONS:

"Iraq Uncensored," editor and contributor, Fulcrum Publishing, 2009.

"Attacking Terrorism: The Campaign Against International Terrorism," co-edited with Audrey Kurth Cronin, Georgetown University Press, 2004.

"Twenty-First Century Weapons Proliferation," co-edited with Henry Sokolski, Frank Cass Publishers, 2001.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Dr. Ludes is the former executive director of the American Security Project, a bipartisan, nonprofit public policy research and education organization focused on national security. As a member of President-elect Obama's transition team, he served as chief of the Department of Defense Senate confirmation team, successfully directing the confirmation process for four priority nominees. Dr. Ludes was also a legislative assistant to Sen. John F. Kerry, and editor-in-chief of the National Security Studies Quarterly. He served with the Center for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, and as a lecturer for the Defense Leadership and Management Program.

When Dr. James Ludes learned that Salve Regina was seeking an executive director of the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, he was immediately interested. Ever since his sister, Julie Ludes Jensen '90, attended the University as an education major, Salve Regina has been a very special place to both Ludes and his family.

"This was a unique opportunity to take on a new challenge at a great school," Ludes says. "It was almost too much to ask. And when I met Sister Jane Gerety, Salve Regina's president, I was sold."

Now, with a semester under his belt, Ludes has had the chance to listen to many people, ask numerous questions, and think about where the Pell Center is going.

"I've been telling people that my top priority is first, to do no harm," he says. "The Pell Center has such a rich history and has accomplished a great deal."

A history scholar, Ludes is quick to point out that the Pell Center was founded to honor the late U.S. Sen. Claiborne Pell, whose greatest legacy was his service to the people of Rhode Island and the nation.

"We'd like the Pell Center to carry that legacy forward and be a real resource for both state and national policymakers," Ludes says.

Q. *What's on the top of your to-do list?*

First, we're going to launch new research on emerging issues in foreign and domestic policy, and also on the relationship between science and public policy. Second, we're going to expand the excellent speakers program that has been the hallmark of the Pell Center. Our traditional evening events will be supplemented by more day-time events focused on increasing student participation. Finally, we're going to be more heavily involved in the community, conducting events, hosting forums, and reaching out to people – both online and in person.

Q. *What's on your agenda for upcoming speakers and in what direction would you like to see future seminars go?*

In the near term, you will see us continue the evening lecture series with events on the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, as well as Iran's nuclear program. Over the longer term, you will see our events become more interactive. We're going to explore different settings and formats, from roundtable conversations and panel discussions to Twitter chats and more.

Our events will also have a broader public policy focus in the areas of both international and domestic policy. More than ever, you cannot separate discussions of America's role in the world from our health at home. The Pell Center's programming will reflect that truth.

Q. *What is the biggest challenge you face as director of the Pell Center?*

I really believe there is no limit to what we can achieve at the Pell Center, and as Sister Jane likes to tell me, "Go big or go home." So the biggest challenge I face is in setting the right pace for us to achieve the kind of impact we know we can

have, while making sure that we're building an enduring pillar of the University in the process. We want to put the Pell Center on a path to continued strong growth, with the resources it needs to contribute to the University community and to the broader public debate in a meaningful way.

It's very tempting to run out and announce a grand initiative, but we know that good ideas produce impact only if they are funded. We have to make sure that we do the hard work of building our base of supporters and new contributors, and develop the intellectual capital that will really distinguish us. This all takes time.

Q. What's your vision for the Pell Center?

We want the Pell Center to play at the intersection of politics, policies and ideas. In my 18 years in Washington, I was most fascinated by how ideas are translated into policies through the political process. We want the Pell Center to generate new ideas, popularize them, and provoke interest in and awareness of them. We want to put issues on the statewide and national agenda. We want to help understand how government works best – and even where it doesn't work at all. We want to contribute to the intellectual development of students on campus, to the creation of a world that is more peaceful, more merciful, and more just. We want to honor Senator Pell's legacy through service. And we want to be a gathering place where people can come together to find common ground and solutions to public problems.

Q. What is your favorite book?

"The Killer Angels" by Michael Shaara. I had the chickenpox as a 13 year-old, and my dad came home from work one night and gave the book to me. It transported me to the battlefield at Gettysburg in that summer of 1863, and showed me how important individuals such as Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and James Longstreet are to great events. It also inspired me to study history, despite my passion for policy, as the key to gaining a greater understanding about people and events.

Q. What are you reading now?

"The Treason of the Intellectuals" by Julien Benda. Benda was a French philosopher and essayist who, writing in the late 1920s, warned that passions in European politics were being amplified by changes in the press and people's sense of identity. The result, he warned, would be war. It's striking to compare his discussion of the balkanization of the press in the 1920s – where there was no common narrative, and sometimes not even agreed-upon facts – with the state of the media today.

Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?

Every now and then in life you meet people who, for whatever reason, are just mean, unhelpful, self-indulgent, rude, disrespectful, and down-right disruptive. You'd like to know what made them that way. But mostly you just want them to get out of the way.

Q. Who has been your greatest inspiration?

My parents. My mom and dad taught me how to live, how to love, how to think, and how to believe. They gave me my compass; they gave me encouragement when I needed it. They cheered for me and comforted me. They showed me that anything is possible with hard work, belief in yourself, and determination. And they taught me the value of compassion, sympathy, and understanding. They inspire me every day.

Q. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Every time I watch the Patriots play, I wonder if I could learn how to read an NFL defense the way Tom Brady does.

Q. If you could be a time traveler, where would you go first?

Part of me wants to go to Dealey Plaza and save President Kennedy, or to Sept. 10, 2001, to warn people about the plot that was about to unfold. But past is prologue. So I think I'd go to the future. At its core, public policy is about shaping the future. When we look at climate change, for example, we're trying to understand what we can do now to avoid the worst consequences later. It would be remarkable to go forward 50 or 100 years and see how we did.

Q. What were your top three career choices when you were young?

1. Aerospace engineer – that dream died with pre-calculus.
2. Sovietologist – the break-up of the Soviet Union made that a poor career choice.
3. Public servant – there is so much good that can be done, and so much that has to be done. I've been blessed in that I've been able to contribute in my own way to the public dialogue over the last decade.

Q. If you could be a superhero, what one power would you want to have?

The ability to freeze time. I never have enough time in the day. Another few hours would allow me to spend more time with my fiancé, get more exercise, read more, and sleep more.

Q. What is the world's greatest invention?

The wheel. But I do love my iPhone.

Q. Worst invention?

The alarm clock.

Q. If you could have dinner with someone famous, who would it be?

Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa, and Vaclav Havel. I'd like to talk to them about the power of moral leadership, ideas, and the human spirit. Maybe we'd invite Bill Cosby, too, just because.

Q. If you had to choose only one word to describe yourself, what would it be?

Quixotic. If you're going to tilt at a windmill, make it a good one.

Q. What is your philosophy of life – your motto?

Keep the faith.

Q. If someone gave you \$1 million to donate to charity, where would you direct the funds?

St. Jude's Children's Hospital and other medical research centers. Hunger is another plague I'd like to see eradicated.

Q. What do you want people to say about you in 100 years?

He doesn't look a day over 120.