Equity Speaks: Culturally Sustaining Stories in Education

Podcast 3: Culturally Sustaining Wraparound Services for Student Success

Host Krystal Andrews: For our third episode, we will explore the culturally responsive wraparound students support services that administrators use to support racially minoritized student populations on community college campuses. We will hear from Gabrielle Thompson, director of access and opportunity programs at Jefferson Community College in New York. Alvina Thomas, dean of student success services and Title IX coordinator at Louisiana Delta Community College in Louisiana, and Antonio Jackson, dean of arts and humanities at Fayetteville Technical Community College in North Carolina.

I was also joined by my colleague Mr. Colvin Georges Jr., a graduate research assistant in the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, for an insightful and engaging discussion about the critical role that administrators play in creating campus spaces and services that reflect the needs of racially minoritized student populations.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for being here today and for giving us your time and your energy and being willing to share your experiences about what you do on your campuses for underrepresented minoritized students. And so to get us started, please introduce yourself, where you work and your role, and describe some of the work that you are leading at your community college specifically to advance culturally responsive, wraparound services for students.

Gabrielle Thompson: Hi, my name's Gabrielle Thompson, and I work at SUNY Jefferson in Watertown, New York. I have been working with TRIO Student Support Services for about 12 years and recently we reorganized in the institution where we had additional grant programs brought to the institution and, therefore, they were all directly targeting specific population, and so we reorganized. So all of those specific grant student-support programs fall directly under me. So we have TRIO student-support services; we have C-STEP, which is collegiate science technology entry program that part of the population has to be a racially minoritized group; we also have our educational opportunity program, which, historically in New York state, represents our racially minoritized groups.

And then we also have a Start Now program, which is a partnership program with four-year schools in the region that looks at students from more urban areas within the state and connects them to our community college for their first two years, with those transfer wraparound support services built in so that they get to that next level.

Alvina Thomas: Okay! Good morning, everyone. Hello. Thank you for inviting me to this. It's very exciting to get the invitation. I am Alvina Thomas and I'm dean of Student Success Services and I'm the Title IX coordinator at Louisiana Delta Community

College. We have eight campuses throughout northeast Louisiana. We have a diverse population of students with academic programs, technical programs, and adult education. And so our goal of excellence is always our targets. I've worked in higher education for 30 years now at several different types of institutions, predominately white institutions and HBCU and now at the community college, which is the work that I love. I've been here at Delta for 15 years. So, my work really brings departments together to meet the needs of our students, specifically our racially minoritized students.

The students want to have a sense of belonging, and so it's up to us at the institution to create opportunities and conditions for success for our students.

Being respectful of their backgrounds and their cultures and things like that, and the need to have these diverse populations. Therefore, wraparound services for us is having services that meet our students' individualized needs—that's what we do. And I've led quite a few things for our institution.

One, I led a team of individuals, academic and student services where we wrote a grant and received a veterans Upward Bound grant, and I think that has been very significant for us in helping our veteran students. We've created both academic, again, and student services. We call it Lunch and Learns and that gives us an opportunity to reach out to students and give them specific information and serve lunch to them. About three years we've had these Lunch and Learns and different topics such as mental illnesses, and then specifically we also talk about math anxiety and students being able to get beyond the anxiety of taking math and passing math courses.

And we saw in looking at our data that many of our minority students, especially our black male students, are ones that are coming in and having to take those developmental courses, especially in math. And so, we have a program there where we have combined some of our math courses to get them through those developmental math courses quicker and also to reduce the payment that they have to pay for having several courses that they have to take. So I think that we reach out to our students and foster an environment, especially to our racially minoritized students, to help them move through these programs to be successful.

Antonio Jackson: Well, greetings everyone. My name is Antonio Jackson. I serve as the dean of arts and humanities at Fayetteville Technical Community College, which is located in Fayetteville, North Carolina. At my institution, I'm involved in two programs that are designed to target minoritized students. The first program we refer to as being our First Year Connections program, and so with this program we target those first-year students by providing those culturally responsive wraparound services. This component is primarily based on our understanding that our minoritized students are more susceptible to attrition during that first year, so we want to stay connected at the hip to these students as *much* as we possibly can to try and help them navigate all of their first-year roles that many of our students experience. So we do very similar activities such as we schedule

lunches with program faculty so that these students can come in and engage faculty within their academic programs, fellowship, get to know these individuals and hopefully from there, foster or build relationships so that they can develop familiarity with these individuals that they'll be working with throughout their tenure at the college.

We have staff that routinely contact these students as a means just to simply check in and determine if there are any services that are needed. Our goal is to create inescapable opportunities because we recognize that students have a tendency not to do optional, and we've heard that quoted before, but many times the student might have academic or even nonacademic issues, but they'll fail to reach out for help. So our goal is to stay in *constant* communication and contact with the students and not *wait* until they do finally decide to reach out, and then in some cases, it's a tad bit too late to be able to redirect or to employ whatever resources that are necessary to help the student address the challenge. So that's the purpose of our First Year Connections program.

And then the other component is what we refer to as our YES program, which stands for youth, effort and then success. And this particular program only targets minoritized males. Our data show that there are significant disparities with the various achievement measures with regard to retention, persistence, and completion for these categories of students. And so, we provide these wraparound services, hopefully to try to eradicate some of these issues that our minoritized males face at our institution. So, for the most part, those are the two main programs that I am responsible for at our college.

Host Krystal Andrews: Well, thank you, everyone, for those wonderful introductions, and it sounds like you all have some very interesting yet important roles at your institutions. And so flowing with everything that you all have said about your experiences on your campuses and experiences in higher ed in general, what do successful culturally responsive wraparound student-support services *look like* and what are some key elements or factors that are critical to providing strong culturally responsive wraparound student-support services? And could you give us some examples?

Gabrielle Thompson: This is Gabrielle again. I think what you need to do primarily when you're looking at what strong wraparound support services look like is involve your students in exploring and defining what that means. And a student voice in this area is extremely crucial. An example of this would be our hours of availability within our direct-service department. So, because we're professional staff and faculty members, we all have this idea of working an eight to four schedule or a nine to five schedule. Well, students and primarily students that are living in non-residence, halls don't necessarily keep to that schedule. And so, offering evening weekend hours is something that we've chosen to explore, and we've also kind of incentivized that, offering free meals during that time to assist us with getting more student traffic in the area and spreading the word, too.

Another important factor would be connections to the community, your local community and things that are important in your local community. This summer

during our EOP Summer Institute, the students that we bring in primarily are from out of our area and from a more urban setting than what Watertown is. And so, we made intentional connections with some of our local for successful not-for-profits so that students can see what opportunities were here for them to volunteer and connect with. And that ties to the next point of tying in service-learning projects to tie them into the community.

Our local SPCA constantly calling for volunteers and our students were very receptive to going over and giving volunteer hours. We actually have a couple that have carried on through this fall semester, in which they are doing volunteer hours on a more regular scheduled basis. So that's been very important.

At our institution, our biggest groups that we tend to lose are African American males and our Latino males. So we look at those groups, and most recently a Men of Excellence in Tennessee, we were allowed to nominate three students. Two of our African American male students were chosen for that program, and they'll be going later on this month. It's a great opportunity and their families can attend as well, so involving that family group for them they otherwise wouldn't have had that opportunity has been really important. And when they see that we're investing in them at this level, they want to make you proud and they want to stay and they want to be retained students. Maybe that's not what they're thinking in their head that, "Hey, I'm going to be a retained student," but they're thinking, you know, "These people care about me and I want to stay on this campus and make these folks proud."

I think if you have any sort of faction of student employment within your service area, you need to make sure that your student employment force reflects the student body that you're trying to effect. If you're really trying to make an effort in increasing the retention rates in the student success of, let's say African American males, then you really need to have African American males working in your area with these students so that they can make those relatable connections.

Alvina Thomas: This is Alvina. We found that for us, the way to reach our students is to go *to* our students. So, as I'd mentioned before, we have eight campuses and one of the things that our team does is to reach our students and foster racial equity by visiting the classrooms and the campuses and talking to these students and letting them know where the services are. Because we may be able to say we have services, advertise the services, but then if students do not know where to go to see us and reach us to get the services that they need, I think it's very important that we take the message to the students, and that's what we do. We have a team of people that includes people from the Student Government Association that talks about the Student Government Association from all of our offices, the career services as well as counseling and disability services.

And I talk to them as well about Title IX and equity-driven information about a 504 and things like that. And we found that the students are just *floored* that we

have all of this at the college and we are ready to share with them and help them. As I said, helping students individually is the key for us. And I think that hiring individuals that have certain behavioral attributes is very important when we're hiring people because the students do want to see someone that looks like them, to know that, yes, you can be successful. Yes, there are jobs out there where I fit in. But hiring individuals that have, as I said, behavioral attributes that can be persuasive with students and to help them to understand stuff that they're going through and how they can move through that is very important.

And we, as I said before with our career fairs, we've divided those career fairs into those where we could connect to the workforce development because we think that is extremely important as well for those specific programs. And along with career fairs, we have the resource fairs where we connect with the community and we have community representatives who actually come out, meet with our students and let them know the different types of resources that are available within the community and how they can get resources that way as well.

So, again, I think as we've talked about, the one on one as much as we can with our students. I think these different types of programs and activities that we have for our students, and then going out within the community and bringing those resources into our students is extremely important for our wraparound services.

Antonio Jackson: Okay. Again, this is Antonio Jackson. And just to kind of piggyback on something Gabrielle said, I also believe that in order to really provide strong culturally responsive wraparound support services to students, I think we should consider assessing the needs of students and hearing from them and getting their feedback, as it relates to what are the kinds of things that they need. Also, at my institution, we tend to take a more of an interdisciplinary approach, and what I mean by that is that we can't assume that we know what those needs are. However, I think we can organize a system of *support* that's composed of people that have the skills or that may be connecting with the resources that can address the various needs of students. In our program, we have a team approach, so we have an academic advisor, a success coach, and a mentor assigned to each of our students.

So if the student is dealing with, let's just say an academic issue, then we have the success coach and the academic advisor there to assist with those types of needs. If it's a nonacademic issue, we have the mentor. So essentially each team member can help address *multiple* areas of concern. I also think it's important to recognize that there may be challenges that I can't relate to or that I'm not equipped to address, but there may be another team member that may be able to do so. So I think taking that approach can be very helpful.

We've also learned that many of the issues that our minoritized students are facing sometimes are nonacademic, for the most part, so it's not necessarily a lack of academic ability. It's often the other life factors that tend to occur on a

day-to-day basis. The things that they're facing off campus have a tendency to have a *huge* impact on their *academic* performance. And so, putting a team together that can better, not only assess, evaluate, but address those nonacademic issues I think are potent as we attempt to help this category of students progress.

Host Colvin Georges: The student demographics for higher education are changing and diversifying at alarming rates. Within the past decade, we have seen an increased amount of students of color matriculating to college, particularly at two-year institutions. Students of color are also entering higher education with multiple intersecting social identities that are even further minoritized. For example, students of color who are differently abled, part of the LGBT plus community, adult learners, et cetera. This has resulted in a demand for faculty and staff that are sensitive to the needs of these students, both physically and mentally. How does your department strive to equitably meet the needs of students with these intersecting identities and provide services that are culturally responsive so that *they* feel a sense of belonging?

Gabrielle Thompson: So, this question's kind of timely. This is an area that we are really looking at with Jefferson's newly developed strategic plan 2020 to 2025, and specifically in my department we are handling accommodative services for students. We are handling the adult learner population, in addition to the students of color who have other things going on in their lives, like Antonio mentioned. So, I think the first thing that you need to do is look at what equalizes all of these students. What are some *common* things that you could think of that these students would all relate to? And what it comes down to, at least for the populations that we are seeing and we are dealing with, is hunger and financial aid. So, food insecurity is a *huge* issue on our campus among our racially minoritized students who are living in the residence hall with a food plan, surprisingly enough, as well as our students who are commuting and possibly can be adult learners; they're all kind of hungry.

So food seems to be that great equalizer. Sometimes we've put into practice, informally, a Thankful Thursday meal in which teams of volunteers among faculty and staff develop a schedule for the semester. So each Thursday there is a hot meal provided where we also have fellowship. *All are welcome*. You can work here, you cannot work here, you can be a family member of a student. We don't question. We don't take an intake form, we don't track it, we don't monitor it. We try to make as much food as possible among our team. And it's not expensive food, it's soups, it's crockpot meals and it's kind of like a potluck. That practice alone has brought our nursing students, who are typically outliers of our community, into our space, voluntarily, mingling with our traditional-age students of color or our LGBTQ population of students that are living in the res hall that tend to hang out together. On those days, I don't see them in cliques and I don't see them keeping to themselves. I see them all eating and enjoying a meal, and it's been really good.

Our financial aid, our financial literacy and knowledge of how to navigate that financial aid process is that in a process of itself that lends to students dropping out of college. Those barriers that our colleges aren't responsible for, but are agencies that have you, I would say "jump through these hoops" as my students would say, it becomes a barrier for each of these students. If you have a student who, for example is a black male who also identifies as LGBTQ, who also may be an adult learner, the FASFA form, they haven't ever done that, and let's say that they're defined as an adult learner but still have to file FASFA under a parent or guardian, it becomes cumbersome for them if they don't have a connection. Let's say that they're an outlier because of their identity in the LGBTQ community and their family may have disowned them. It becomes problematic.

So we offer workshops, again, days, times, and one-on-one financial aid counseling right within our department so that students know that these are available—we have people here to help you. And we have people ready to write appeals to our financial aid office and go up the chain. And I think the last thing that we haven't wanted to address but I brought up the topic is that the other equalizer are relationship problems. Students have relationship problems regardless of who they are, and that could be a relationship problem with a significant other or a parent, and creating a safe space where they feel comfortable talking about those problems that could prevent them from coming to class the next day, again, shows that they belong and they matter and they're important to you as a staff member.

So I think that that's *really* important and to go back on what Alvina mentioned about hiring a workforce that is representative of those students is also important. We are in a not as urban place in New York state as some people like the think, so we don't necessarily attract a highly diversified workforce in this area. But you have to look at where you're putting these job ads out and try to take a targeted approach with those available positions as they come open in your institution as well.

Alvina Thomas: This is Alvina again. Quite interesting as we all are sitting here talking and we are from around the country, different areas, but we seem to have the same concerns and the same types of things going on with our students, and through the creation of some of our clubs and organizations, we have been able to reach out to students with multiple social identities. And we're really taking a harder look at what we are doing that would be able to assist our students and support them in these areas.

And again, through our clubs and organizations, one of the biggest clubs now that we have on our campus is our anime club, because with that club students of any race, nationality, gender, have been joining this club, and they are connecting with each other. And it's just exciting to see this happen because we have not always had this happen on our campus. And so, this particular club also won an award on a state level for the work that they're doing within the organization.

And we chartered the National Society for Leadership and Success because we want to show our students they can be leaders. And we have found too with this organization—it's just really amazing—that we're getting these students and they are coming to talk about their experiences. And I think the more that we talk with students and *hear* from them and hear what they are saying, we can be relevant in the things that we're doing to help them.

Recently, looking at our data, we noticed, and I did mention this before, but again, I think it's worth mentioning that our black male student population was not advancing and receiving associate degrees. And so, now we're moving toward having a black male initiative. And that black male initiative consists of all black males no matter what their social identity is or anything like that.

So, I think that when we help our students and listen to our students, they go out and tell other students. Our students are different in that some of them have families and jobs and nontraditional students and things of that nature. So we have a mixture of them all. And we also see that the programs within the counseling center, we are able to reach out and touch our students. One comes to mind, a program that is with domestic violence, and that touches all aspects. We've had male on male domestic violence, and to actually being able to help these students move through those processes have been a good thing for us, but it's also teaching us that we need to do more and reach out more to the students.

Antonio Jackson: So, in the same vein of what Gabrielle and Alvina expressed, and I'll be very honest and transparent, this is a challenge at my institution and certainly many others. I know that it does depend on the community that you live in, of course. But in my community and at my institution and in many others like mine, we don't have very many faculty, staff, and administrators that *look* like the students that we serve. So in many campuses there's an absence of representation. So as we consider the demand for faculty and staff that are sensitive to the needs of these students, I think we first must be more diverse in our hiring practices so that there are more people like them on our campuses that understand their plight and their experience. I believe that training and professional development centered around faculty, staff, and administrators so that they can develop a level of relativism is important as well.

Helping them understand that their life experiences may be very different than the people that they are serving. I know that we have a tendency to engage people based on *our* experiences and not based on theirs because of that lack of ability to relate to the experience of others. I know that training and professional development are critical as we attempt to serve these students, and I think without it, we'll fail. Because I think there are some biases that are deeply rooted and embedded in our thinking, and because we've internalized these belief systems for so long, I think there are times when we don't realize that we're operating within those belief systems as research students. And sometimes that can be a major deterrent in our ability to address the needs of these students.

So I think helping people self-identify and helping them become self-aware of all of the preconceived ideas and thoughts regarding the different populations of people that we serve are helpful as we attempt to better address the needs of these students. But definitely, I think one of the most important factors is getting more representation on our campuses.

Host Colvin Georges: Thanks everyone for sharing those unique perspectives. The services that each of you offer on your campuses is essential to our practices here in higher education, *especially* for those students holding intersecting minoritized social identities. And for this next question, we would like for you to reflect on the work and practices of being a culturally responsive leader within higher education. There are times when our personal values, beliefs, and professional practices may not align. This idea was mentioned in an earlier episode of this podcast, where one of our guests mentioned that there are times when a person may go against their own held beliefs to ensure that they are doing the right thing for the campus community. How do you make sense of this within your own professional practice? Are there examples that you wouldn't mind sharing where you were asked to do something? For example, creating or enforcing a policy that went against your personal beliefs but it was for the betterment of the campus community. How did you navigate through this circumstance while limiting your own biases and being culturally responsive?

Gabrielle Thompson: So, in my professional career, I tend to look at a lot of data, and I think institutions, overall, you're making data-driven, data-informed decisions. And in doing that, sometimes you can make a good practice almost clinical in nature and kind of cold and isolating for the students you're serving. So, there are a lot of times that we have programming or we're meeting students' needs in which I want to gather as much data as possible. The institution needs it, we know that we need it because we can talk in circles all day long about anecdotal evidence, but at the end of the day, we've got to find a way to assess certain data. So an example that I was thinking about, one in which we blended a bunch of service departments under my leadership was our department has just a walk-in feel. We have our own computer lab within our department, our own study area. There is a book-lending library, a school supply closet, and then we're soon going to move the campus food pantry over to my area.

So there's little study nooks and other spaces, and when there was just TRIO back here, students had the policy where they would sign in because we had to track them. And so when C-STEP and EOP and these other programs that are here to serve students of certain backgrounds came in under my leadership, I was like, "Oh, well they all need to be signing in." Well, our EOP students are, for the most part, traditional age, 18-year-old males and females who don't understand why they're stopping and signing in. That's a formality. And the project coordinator came to me and said, "Gabby, I really don't feel comfortable. I'm going to keep track of these students as they come in and see me in the office."

And I'm like, "Oh, what about the students that are just coming into the computer lab?" And she said, "Well, we'll get a handle on them, we'll collect the data another way." She had a plan to connect that data the other way, in which students would notify her via text or an email letting her know that they were there. But I didn't see that and I thought they had to sign in just like students had always signed in. There was one way in my head of doing that, so I had to revisit the policy for that particular practice to collect the data.

The other side of this, and this is where I'm trying to be better about how I think about meeting students' needs and to make them feel welcome and that we're meeting the service first, not collecting data, is that the food pantry on our campus has had many iterations. It started out about a decade ago as a food closet. We didn't see a lot of traffic with it and we had a very prescripted method in which we would collect the data for students that were served by that.

In addition, there were qualifiers set up for the students that were utilizing the food pantries. It was almost like they had to provide paperwork so that they demonstrated a need. There was some decisions made on our campus recently in which it wasn't feasible for our food pantry to live where it did any longer, and with some other campus partners and our human services academic program in which we would employ student interns to run our food pantry, we have agreed to move that over into our department. We're really excited about it. But I knew the first thing that we needed to do was look at the *process* in which students were going to utilize our food pantry. Were we going to make them apply? Were we going to make them give us all whole one-sided sheet of information? *Or* were we just going to allow them to access the food pantry that also includes toiletry and laundry supply items.

And I made a decision that I didn't believe that we needed to collect all of that data. Could we collect the first name or possibly a last initial and would that be enough? I mean, if we were going to really lead this to be student driven and let our Student Government Association and our other student clubs and organizations on campus lead this initiative and kind of reform it as student driven, then if the college wasn't committing financial resources other than space, did we really need to collect that data? Or did we just need to do the right thing to make students feel more welcome? And I had to decide that, no, we weren't going to collect pages and pages of data on each student to utilize it. Nor was I going to say that a student was limited to one trip per semester as there had been in the past.

So I think those are two examples that show both sides of my ability to put my own personal biases away and to think about what's right and what's the best thing to do to be culturally responsive to meet the needs of our students, currently. There's probably a dozen others I could list off, but these are two that were currently in the forefront of my present reality.

Alvina Thomas: Okay, this is Alvina. Looking at the question, I really had to give it some thought, but one thing that really came to mind that I wanted to share is I've worked with financial aid for a long time, and at LDCC we are space limited, so we are bursting at the seams with students. So, a decision was made to move our financial aid office into what we call a one stop. And I thought it was a good idea, but then on the other hand, my heart is really to help these students with the financial aid process because we've find that that is where a lot of the barriers come in for them being able to complete school, is not having the finances to do so.

Also we found that students, their questions that they had about financial aid also connected with the admissions office, also it connected with enrollment services. So, it was a good thing to move it, but I just struggle with the space issue because we have a good bit of students with financial aid and have financial aid questions, and I've wondered whether or not we would be able to service the students effectively in the small area that they were going to be moved to. Needless to say, we did that and we moved the office. When we've asked our students, sent surveys out to ask our students, "How did you feel about our move? How do *you* think the move helped you or maybe hurt you as well as getting your questions answered, getting the type of assistance that you need and so forth?"

So, it has been a good move over the years because we've worked on it. The staff who's working in the office, they have been trained to be able to answer all of the different types of questions that students may have. So, ultimately, even though I was reluctant a little bit to have that move, I think it turned out for the betterment of our students.

Antonio Jackson: I can't necessarily recall a particular situation or experience where I had to go against my own personal beliefs. But I will say that I try my very best to kind of separate the two while still maintaining my belief systems. And I know that kind of sounds oxymoronic. For an example, we have this traditional principle of separation of church and state. However, many of the norms in our society are still based off of those foundational values. So, I try to operate while maintaining my values, but yet operating value free. For example, maintaining my belief in treating people right and responding to situations fairly, but at the same time, not judging an individual student for whatever life choices they choose to make.

So, somebody may not be able to do so, in other words. They may focus so solely on the life choice that they can't handle the situation fairly. When I talk about that separation, I think that's what I mean when I say that. But for the most part, I'm not really having a situation where I ran into that type of a dilemma, so I can't really offer much in that area.

Host Krystal Andrews: You know, this conversation, as I expected it to, is very rich and it has covered a lot of ground, kind of like what the last question said about what a previous guest on the podcast talked about with being able to balance what needs to be

done with students with your own beliefs. And I think that it's very important for us to always be mindful of, as Antonio said, finding a balance between our beliefs and the work that we do. And also as Alvina and Gabrielle said about being able to find a way to make things happen for students. That is *great*. And I know that your students are grateful for all of the work that you all are doing for them on your campuses. And it's good to know that you all are sharing in experiences, knowing that this good work is happening across the country in all regions.

And so to close this out, why are culturally responsive wraparound student services important to helping students navigate their college and career pathways or guided pathways time on your campuses? And we know that guided pathways is something that is growing on community college campuses now. More folks are talking about it with having students make it to get on the track, get off the track, stay on the track. And I know I didn't say those in order, but being able to kind of move their way through their academic programs at your campuses. So how would you say your role supports students in doing that? Staying on path.

Gabrielle Thompson: This is an extremely timely question for us as well. We just found out Monday that our institution is receiving a Title III grant for the next five years, and the key component of this Title III competition for us was our integration of guided pathways on our campus. That being said, it also was a key component in our strategic plan that we spent the last year working on in. And so, when you are working on a strategic plan for an institution, regardless of the size, for more than 365 days and then you grow that work into a competitive grant like Title III, you spend a lot of time looking at why are we doing this. Why is this important and what should we be focusing on in these areas? And I think the number one response for me would be: We do this because relationships are important to our students.

It's good culturally responsive practice because students need to feel connected and they need to feel like they belong. If they don't, they're not going to invest in exploring this pathway with you. If you start out from the beginning, from the time that they're prospective student, and show a *holistic* approach to their education, they're going to invest back. They're going to trust the institution, they're going to trust the folks that they're communicating with at the institution, and they're going to respect the fact that they believe you, that you're authentic in your motivation for helping them. The number one thing that my students have told me over the years is that we realize that you don't get commission based on whether or not we graduate. You do this work because we can tell that you *want* us to succeed.

And I think that wraparound student-support services that incorporate *all* the things that could potentially affect, positive or negative, a student's success in college and place that within a department or within a program or even within your college campus, at least that you identify that and recognize that and deal with it for this student, they'll feel that and they'll invest back.

Are you going to catch all of them? Never. But are you going to get a vast majority of them? Even if they stop out, what is the likelihood of them returning a year or two later and looking up the person that they felt a connection to? I think that that is most important and why these efforts are so important to us.

I would say as far as getting to know folks like Alvina and Antonio, and to know that the work that we are doing on our community college campuses to affect these items that we've discussed today, that we aren't alone because sometimes this work can feel very isolating and very daunting. When you go home at the end of the day sometimes and you think, "Wow, I didn't really make any headway today," or "Oh, wow, I took 10 steps backwards." To know that there are other people doing this good work and that we now have a body of friends because of this opportunity, has been huge for me professionally. It pushes me to go forward each day to know that there are other people in other community colleges across the country that know that this is the right thing to do as well.

Alvina Thomas: So, I said this before, but I think it's worth mentioning again because of my experience and things that I've seen over the years with our students. And I think Gabrielle has hit on this about the connection and the relationships. I think that connecting students to faculty and staff mentors is *so* important that they be able to see these different careers in action and to see individuals who look like them that have made it to where they are. And I say this to students as we do go and visit the classroom: "Where I am, I have not always been, and I have had those mentors to help me."

So I think the mentoring is so important when you're talking about guided pathways and careers and how students could be able to achieve professionally and to have someone to lift them up when they need to be lifted up. And again, in these different careers that they see at the college, and to go outside of our college into the community as well, as we bring in our community partners and those community partners also help our students with their different career choices.

But then they also see that those community partners, there are people out there that also looks at them as well. And so, they'll say, "I'm not alone." This is not in an area where there's not an opportunity for me because it is. You just have to take that opportunity, and as we talk about individualizing our processes and things like that for our students, we know students are students. Gabrielle said we're not going to be able to help all our students, but we talk about helping one student at a time to get them to the point of where they are successful to move from Delta Community College to whatever else that they're seeking in their career and to go professionally out the door.

Antonio Jackson: So this question made me think about an initiative referred to as Completion by Design. I think it was funded by the Gates Foundation. So we create these guided pathways to try to provide a very structured, coherent program map for students to navigate and to complete their program of study. But while you may

the developed guided pathway, it does not mean that students don't encounter obstacles throughout that path. So the Completion by Design initiative established what they call a loss and momentum framework, and it primarily addresses the various stages throughout that pathway where students might experience difficulty. So even that framework suggests that the point of connection at the time a student shows interest to application, what are those barriers that we must address, even at that point. As a student enters their program and they began to complete those gatekeeper courses, there are barriers that the students are going to encounter, even at that stage.

And then as they progress toward completing 75 percent of their requirements within that pathway, there are still barriers and challenges that the student will face. And then even at that point of completion, they're going to be challenges. And so, providing those culturally responsive wraparound student services — critical — because we know that even throughout that guided pathway, there are going to be obstacles and challenges that that student's going to face, and we have to have those services available to help that student navigate those challenges. So I think we can have as many pathways as we can possibly develop—without those wraparound services, many students are still not going to navigate or progress toward completion without having the necessary services and assistance to make that happen. So I think it's a critical component of those pathways.

Host Krystal Andrews: Yes. I think that all of the work that you all are doing with being mindful of how you as a practitioner, but also as an administrator, you find ways to help students along, helping them to find their way. And it may not be everybody, but the students that you are able to help, the ones that do recognize the services that you all are providing on campus as beneficial, I know that they are indebted, they're grateful knowing that you all are playing the springboard for them to be able to make it to the next level if they would like to go forward after getting their AA, or even if they're just becoming a part of the workforce. But definitely being engaged on your campuses. So, I say all thanks to say, thank you for joining us today. That's all for us. This was a fruitful conversation.

Antonio Jackson: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

Gabrielle Thompson: Thank you, Krystal.

Alvina Thomas: Thank you, Krystal.

Host Colvin Georges: To close out our episode, we would like to thank our panelists, Gabrielle Thompson, Alvina Thomas, and Antonio Jackson, for speaking with us today. Each of their experiences add tremendous value to our faculty, staff, administrators, and students around the world, particularly at community colleges. Here are a few takeaways from this episode that can best support institutional leaders when working to equitably meet the needs of students from minoritized social backgrounds by providing culturally responsive wraparound student support services.

In today's episode, we've learned that students from minoritized social backgrounds are more susceptible to attrition during their first year. Therefore, it is up to us as faculty, staff, and administrators to create opportunities and conditions for students' success while being respectful of their cultures and backgrounds. These environments should allow their students to feel a sense of belonging. This can be done through mentoring, relationship building, and taking a holistic approach toward their education.

Students want to feel that there are folks invested in their success and ability to persist toward graduation. Without this, their chances of attrition is higher. When we think about what successful, culturally responsive wraparound student-support services look like, we *must* involve students from the very beginning to gain a *deep* understanding in order to provide services that meet their individualized needs.

It is important for postsecondary institutions to diversify their hiring practices. This can be done by, one, hiring people that reflect the demographics of the students they are serving and, two, creating training and professional development opportunities for employees where they understand the importance of limiting their own biases and respecting cultural differences.

When discussing bias, as mentioned by our panelist Antonio Jackson, it is important that we treat students right, respond to situations fairly, and not judge them based on their life choices. All of these practices that our panelists offered today can create a stronger and more equitably centered institution.

Thanks for joining us on another episode of *Equity Speaks: Culturally Sustaining Stories in Education*. Stay tuned for our next episode, where we will discuss culturally sustaining practices on race for a better campus climate.