

## **A Conversation on Student Success with Kathryn Morris, Butler University January 2020 recording**

[00:00:05] Hello, I'm Sherri Hughes, assistant vice president for professional learning at ACUE, the American Council on Education, and I'm very pleased to welcome you to this conversation on student success. This series offers an informal opportunity to learn from a range of leaders and experts on timely topics relevant to student success.

[00:00:29] A conversation on student success is produced in collaboration with the Association of College and University Educators. Our guest today is Dr. Kathryn Morris, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Butler University. Dr. Morris is here to talk about Butler's participation in the Consortium for Instructional Excellence and Career Guidance through this collaboration of the Council of Independent Colleges and the Association of College and University Educators and with the support from the Strada Education Network.

[00:01:09] Nearly 500 faculty across twenty six CIC institutions, including Butler, learned how to embed evidence based teaching practices, career guidance and skill development into their courses, creating value for students, faculty and the institutions themselves. So, Kate, it's a pleasure to have you join me today.

[00:01:36] Thank you, Sherri. I'm happy to be here.

[00:01:39] All right. Well, many in our audience may know Butler because of its frequent success in the NCAA men's basketball tournament. But I know that's only a small part of who you are as a university. So can you tell us a little bit about Butler and specifically about your goals for the university around student success?

[00:02:00] Well, Sherri, I think it's great that you asked about basketball, because basketball has been a really great front porch for Butler in terms of raising our national profile. It used to be years ago when I said I worked at Butler University, my friends and family members from other places didn't know what that meant. And as we rose in stature on the men's division, one basketball front, people started saying, is that the Butler where you work? And so we've done a really good job, I think, of capitalizing on our basketball success and raising our national profile, which is great.

And I would say that using basketball as an entry point to talk about Butler, we have a really interesting story related to basketball and student success. When we were in one of the two years that we were in the final game of the NC double play men's division one basketball tournament, the tournament was happening. The Final Four happened here in Indianapolis downtown, just a few miles from our campus. And that Monday of the final game, our players were in class and their opponents certainly weren't in class because their institution wasn't here in the city. But I think the fact that our basketball players went to class that day is a good reflection of the fact that Butler really values student success for our student athletes and for all of our students. So thanks for allowing me to share that little story about Butler basketball as an institution.

Butler It was about forty seven hundred undergraduate students and maybe eight hundred graduate students. We have a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and we have five professional colleges. We have business, education, pharmacy and health sciences, arts and communication. So we would say we're a liberal arts based institution that combines liberal arts education and professional education. We obviously want all of our students to have great student success. And if you look at the traditional measures of student success, things like retention rate and graduation rate, we do very well and we're higher than the national averages both for our students overall and for students and each various demographic group. But we want to do better. And we know that there are certain subgroups of students who don't perform quite as well as the rest of the student body as a whole. And we feel obliged to make sure that we're doing everything possible to have all of our students have as much success as they can.

[00:04:46] Terrific. Thank you. Can you tell us more about the Consortium for Instructional Excellence and Career Guidance and particularly why Butler wanted to participate?

[00:04:57] Sure. Yeah.

[00:04:58] The consortium was funded by Strada and I feel like I should say thank you to Strada and administered through the Council for Independent Colleges and thanks to them as well for the opportunity to be a part of the consortium. I was the person who wrote the grant to be a part of the consortium and was delighted when we were selected to participate. And the grant allowed us to have 20 faculty members go through ACUE online course about effective college instruction and then my office matched that. We had 40 faculty members who went through the course last academic year. They were from our two colleges with predominantly liberal arts based disciplines. That being the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Communication.

In terms of why I wanted to be a part of it. There's a couple of different components to that answer. First of all, I was already thinking about partnering with ACUE to bring their course to our faculty members, and part of that is because we don't have a center for teaching and learning on our campus. We do have a vibrant program of faculty development that's led by a faculty director of faculty development. But we don't have anything that is as long or comprehensive as the ACUE course. The longest thing or the most comprehensive thing that we offer on our campus would be a semester long program for faculty who are interested in moving into online or hybrid teaching environments. But we don't have anything that's a whole year along. We don't have anything that can handle the numbers of faculty participants that the ACUE course can. And the other thing about the ACUE course that was really of interest to me is that we have maybe seven or eight of our own faculty members who are highlighted in it as exemplars of excellence in various evidence based teaching strategies. So I knew that if we offered this course to our own faculty, it would automatically have credibility on our faculty because they would see their colleagues speaking about their own teaching experiences on our campus. So that was appealing to me as well. So I was already thinking about going down this pathway and when the call for proposals for the consortium came out. I thought this might be a really good way to not only test whether the ACUE course works well on our campus, but also to be a part of something bigger, to be a part of a bigger project, to determine if a sizable faculty development initiative across the nation would have an impact on student success. So those were the reasons that we were interested in participating in the consortium.

[00:07:48] Great. Well, thank you for sharing that. I also understand that you created a learning community of the faculty participating in the program. Can you tell us a little more about how that worked and why you think that was so important?

[00:08:03] Yeah. So we had last year we had 40 faculty members who participated and we created a learning community for those 40 faculty members.

[00:08:13] And our faculty director of faculty development was the facilitator of that learning community. She was taking the course herself, serving as faculty development director and serving as the facilitator for her learning community. Turns out that was a little too much for one person. God love her. She did all of that and she did a great job. But we are and this is sort of a fast forward. We're doing another community this year. We have 30 faculty participants who are taking the course and we're doing two separate learning communities and two faculty members who went through the course last year for facilitating them. So that's a lesson learned. But we just didn't think it's really important to make sure that faculty going through this experience have other people who are also going through the experience that they can talk to about what's happening in the course, the challenges that they're having as they're teaching their own classes, the successes they may be having as they're implementing the strategies they're learning about in the course. And this year, at least, we've really intentionally created the most diverse faculty learning communities that we can because we see it as a good thing for brand new faculty, really senior faculty and faculty from all of our colleges and different disciplines talking with each other, because we think that hearing how somebody else in a different discipline might tackle a particular problem might give an

individual faculty member an idea about how to become a teacher, a better teacher in a way they hadn't thought about before. Because that knowledge is coming from outside their discipline. So it's just that the learning community was simply a place for those faculty members taking the courses to chat through their experiences and to learn from each other.

[00:10:07] Great. Thank you. So can you tell us about the impact of participating in this program? What has it done for your campus? And what was the faculty response? I know.

[00:10:22] Yeah, absolutely.

[00:10:24] Yeah. The faculty responded very positively. You know, one thing that I will say about the ACUE courses, they are really great at assessment.

[00:10:32] They have a very comprehensive assessment program where all throughout the course, the faculty who are taking the course are providing feedback and reflections. So they have both numeric data and narrative responses that they're able to provide to the chief academic officer or whoever is facilitating the whole project. And so I have pretty good evidence of what our faculty response has been. And they have a pretest post test kind of design. And if we look at basically any and every item that they measure, how comfortable are you talking with students about career development in the context of your courses or how confident are you about how you are using assessment data to alter what you're doing within a course or whatever the item may be? Our faculty member is much more strongly agreed with those with those items after they took the course or after they did that particular component of the course than they did before they took the course or before that particular component of the course. So really, every single item on their assessment, we have better outcomes post than pre, and some of them are pretty significant jumps in terms of how faculty feel about their own ability to teach well after taking the course than before taking the course. So their narrative responses, their numeric responses are all quite positive.

And as a social scientist myself, I always hesitate to talk about anecdotal evidence. But I'm going to share with you a piece of anecdotal evidence that really supports the numeric and open ended answers that we have. And that is I got an email from a faculty member at the end of the course and she knew that I was trying to decide, are we going to go ahead and do another year of this or not? Which we ended up deciding to do. But she said, hey, Kate, I want you to know that if you're questioning whether or not this was worth it and whether we should continue this effort next year, the answer from my perspective is absolutely we should do this again next year. And this was a faculty member is a very fine teacher and a fairly experienced teacher. She is an associate professor who's been in rank for a while. And in her email to me, she basically said, I've been feeling a little bit stuck and I have this vision for where I want my teaching to kind of go in the future, but I can't figure out how to get there. And it's really frustrating to me. But this course helped. And this course was the breakthrough. And now I have concrete ideas about how to get to where I want to be. And I'm super excited and feel more energized about my teaching than I have in a number of years. So that story is a nice anecdote that is backed up by actual data.

So the faculty response has been very positive. Now, as as we know, faculty are excellent critical thinkers and they certainly had some critical feedback of their experience as well. And so as you develop, the new consortia are not the new consortium, the new cohort for this academic year. We did make a few changes based on their feedback. And though the old core cohort knows that we made those changes and then we've told the new core cohort that we made changes based on what their colleague said. So I think the faculty feel really happy that we've listened to what they had to say and acted upon it.

[00:14:19] Well, that's that's a really great story. Thank you for sharing that. So one component of this program is to help faculty be better prepared to provide career readiness and skills through their interactions with students in the classroom. Can you talk about the successes and challenges that the butler has encountered in that arena?

[00:14:42] Yeah. So if I even speak just from my own personal perspective as a social psychologist, during the 16 years that I was in the classroom here, I knew very well how to get students into graduate school for psychology or how to get them into medical school or law school, but going directly into the career world right after college was not something that I personally felt confident in my ability to do so. I can certainly resonate with that concern as a liberal arts and sciences faculty member. And if we are to look at what our faculty said after their experience and the consortium was designed, this is a little sidetrack. I should have clarified this before. The consortium was designed for liberal arts faculty. So faculty and disciplines that are educating students to be good thinkers and good writers and good speakers and to prepare them no matter what their post college careers. I think those faculty sometimes have real challenges. Thinking about, how do I set students up for a specific career path? And if I can take just a moment to look at my data, which are right here, if we look at how our faculty responded. We asked our faculty after completing the course. How confident are you that you are effectively able to embed career guidance into your course before the course, only 24 percent of our faculty who participated agreed with that statement. Afterwards, 62 percent agreed with that statement. That's a huge increase in confidence in your ability to talk with your students about how what you're learning in a particular course is preparing them for a specific career path or even go in this assignment. We're going to hone your critical thinking skills, and that's going to be effective for you. Whether you go on to med school or law school or go work in a business environment.

[00:17:08] Terrific. Thank you. That that is just a that's a great story for our times when we hear so much about you. Is college worth it? Are students prepared for success and meaningful careers? And so to hear that faculty feel empowered to help them make those good decisions. This is really terrific.

[00:17:32] Yeah. You know, if I if I could give a little bit of follow up as well.

[00:17:37] Several of our staff members in the Career and Professional Success Office, which is our career guidance office, also went through the ACUE course alongside our faculty. And so we tried to make sure that in addition to helping faculty have better self efficacy for how to talk about career in the context of the classroom. We also tried to make them feel more comfortable about their connection to their colleagues who are in the career office on our campus.

[00:18:10] That's that's that's really terrific.

[00:18:12] So why do you think it's important to invest in and focus on faculty development and to enable these kinds of positive changes?

[00:18:23] Oh, my goodness. Well, as I always say, faculty are the key employees at our institution and faculty are the key employees across all of higher education.

[00:18:33] And we do learn more across time about the science of teaching. Well. And it's really important, I think, for faculty to learn about what the new science is telling us. The scholarship of teaching and learning is a vibrant and growing field. And we need to help our faculty understand what we have learned about what works and what doesn't work. Many of our faculty are involved in the scholarships, teaching and learning anyway. But hearing what's coming out of other disciplinary scholarship of teaching and learning can be helpful to what they're doing in their own courses. In our class, our cohort of the ACUE course and through the CIC consortium, the vast majority of the faculty who participated are really dedicated teachers, teachers, scholars. But they're good teachers as it is. They're great teachers and as it is. And they're the kind of people who always want to improve. And I think when you when you have a faculty that is full of engaged, energetic, enthusiastic faculty members who care deeply about the well-being of their students, providing them more opportunities to engage and learn and get even better, really helps them to be excited and energetic and enthusiastic. And a course like the ACUE course also provides an opportunity if you have a faculty member who is struggling. If you have a new faculty member, maybe without as much teaching experience or a faculty member who is hit kind of a struggling point in their career and not doing so well anymore. The course provides us with an opportunity to

say, hey, why don't you do this? And nobody knows that that's what's happening. You know, they are a part of the cohort along with everybody else. And it's something because ACUE is an outside organization. It's not obvious to anybody else inside the institution that this person is struggling. So I think it can work well for faculty who are already excellent in the classroom and for faculty, it might be struggling in the classroom.

[00:20:47] That's terrific. Thank you.

[00:20:49] So what advice would you give to leaders at other universities based on your experience?

[00:20:56] Oh, goodness. Well, there's a few things I would say there.

[00:20:59] One of them is, if you're looking for something like this, if you're looking for a year long, intensive experience for faculty to help with teaching and learning. I think the ACUE course is certainly a good one. I know that at other institutions, people have really focused on first year, second year faculty members at some. Tensions, they focused on faculty members in particular disciplines. So there are different ways that you could really utilize the course to meet your own institutional needs. I do think it's important to be clear with the faculty who might participate in the course. How much time and effort is required? The first time we told people one to two hours a week. Turns out it was not one to two hours a week. It was more like three to four hours a week. So we wanted to be more upfront with people about what kind of time commitment they were making. One of the cool things about this course is that as you are going through it each week, you are required to implement an evidence, evidence based teaching strategy in one of the classes you're teaching during that semester. And it doesn't have to be the same class each week, but they just want you to get practice at implementing these evidence based teaching practices and then you reflect on them. So one of the things that we learned through participation in the consortium was that having faculty members involved in in this cohort who were on sabbatical or otherwise on leave didn't work so well. ACUE does have an alternative for people who aren't actually teaching. But that was a challenge for faculty who were on sabbatical. So this year when we launched the cohort for the 19 20 academic year, I specifically said if you are on leave, sabbatical or otherwise, you are not eligible to participate. And of course, we had some faculty on sabbatical who asked for an exception to that rule, and I held firm to that. So I think that's a moment of learning. Another one that I share it already is I think it's a great idea to have a faculty learning community where the participants in the course can actually talk with each other about their experiences. But you've got to keep that group small, so that's manageable. Otherwise, it when we tried to do that with 40 people last year, it was just too much. So those are some of the take home messages, I would say, based on our experience.

[00:23:33] Well, I'm sure I'm sure our colleagues will find that really very useful here at ACUE. We're spending a lot of time understanding the public's perception of higher education. Do you think these kinds of investments might impact that narrative about the value of higher education on a national scale?

[00:23:53] Yeah, I think they could and they should. And I hope they do. And I hope that ACUE talks about the ACUE as a partner to ACUE and that any faculty member who goes through the course gets a certificate from ACUE in effective college instruction. And that's a really nice thing for those faculty to be able to recognize that they've got that. So I appreciate that you do that. I think that there's a lot of people out there in the non higher education world who have no idea how hard it is to teach well, how much time it takes and the extent to which faculty care deeply about their teaching efficacy. And even the fact that we had over 500 higher ed professionals, faculty from across the country last year that participated in the consortium, that that that's a reflection of how deeply we care.

[00:24:50] And I hope that ACUE uses that kind of information to help shape the conversation. These are not people who aren't working hard. These are people who work very, very hard to continue to hone their craft and to become better as teachers. As we look ultimately at the student

outcomes data, which I don't believe are available yet. Then I think that's another piece of evidence that ACUE and others can use to kind of say, you know, when you do invest in your faculty, it is the students who benefit from that. And as we build more scientific evidence for that argument that the students are really benefiting, then I think that resonates out there in the public domain as well.

[00:25:39] Great. Thank you. All right. So last question on a more personal note, what attracted you to Butler? Would you tell us a little bit about your story and your and your journey in this role?

[00:25:55] Sure, absolutely. So my higher ed story began the moment I was born. Both of my parents were higher ed professionals. My mom taught at a branch campus of a major state university and a technical program training adult learners who were in the midst of career transitions. And my dad was a faculty member and later a provost actually at his institution, which is a top 50 liberal arts college. And I grew up in a house that was in a faculty restricted neighborhood on campus property. And so I really did grow up in a higher ed environment. My dad was a psychology professor and as a little kid, I would go to his laboratory and like many psychologists of his era.

[00:26:47] He studied rats and pigeons. I wasn't really into rats and pigeons, but I do remember as a little kid recognizing this one way mirror and being fascinated by the fact that you could look at somebody behaving when they didn't know they were being watched. And I think that was the beginning of my career as a social psychologist. And so I went on and I went to college. I also went to a top 50 liberal arts school and I then went to a big state school for my graduate work all the while with the idea that I wanted to be at an undergraduate focused, residential liberal arts based environment as a as a professor.

[00:27:33] And I my ideal was to be somewhere in the Midwest and to be in a city where there was a medical school just because of my husband's career. And even twenty five years ago, the job market wasn't grand for faculty members and I had a pretty targeted set of criteria. I was looking for. And Butler was a place that I applied. And it was actually the first place that made me an offer. And it was a really good fit on all of the characteristics I was interested in. So I came to Butler. I spent 16 years on the faculty here, and the last eight years I have been either one year as interim provost and then as provost. And it's been a really wonderful ride and a wonderful fit for me. I I my own experience growing up in my own college experience was a true liberal arts environment. Butler is a liberal arts focused university that has professional programs and I have really come to appreciate this kind of environment. And I think it's wonderful that the combination of liberal arts and professional meld together so well here. So it's not unusual for our liberal liberal arts students to be talking about post college career, and it's not unusual for our professional students to be talking about the liberal arts. And to me, that's just a really wonderful place. So it's been a great ride and in higher ed.

[00:29:03] Well, thank you so much. And it's interesting listening to your experience. My discipline in psychology as well. And I had the had the rats and pigeons in my undergrad program. And so it's really great to hear your new talk about that and to see how far it has taken you. And I know that that that experience is really valuable for your students at Butler and certainly for your faculty as well, to know that they have a leader who believes so passionately in what you are doing and what they are doing. So on behalf of all of us in higher education. Thank you for that for that dedication and that, Kate. Thank you so much for making time to join us for this conversation today. And thanks to all of you for joining us for this conversation on student success on ACUE Engage. We hope that you'll take the time to look around this exciting new virtual platform and connect with your peers. Take a micro course or download a toolkit or a checklist that will help you with the important work on your campus. We look forward to being able to be with you again for our next conversation on student success.