**Dr. Christine Harrington Interview**

Learn about culturally affirming and meaningful assignments.

**AS** [00:00:47] For today's podcast. It's a pleasure to have Dr. Christine Harrington. Christine has been working in higher education for over 20 years, and is an expert on student success and teaching & learning. Currently, she is a professor in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program at Morgan State University. Previously, she launched and coordinated the EdD in Community College Leadership Program at New Jersey City University and worked at Middlesex County College for 18 years in a variety of roles, including Professor of Psychology and Student Success, Director for the Center for the Enrichment of Learning and Teaching, First Year Seminar course coordinator, counselor and disability services provider. Christine also served a two year appointment as the Executive Director for the Center for Student Success at the New Jersey Council of County Colleges. Christine is the author of numerous books and articles related to teaching and learning. She is the editor of an upcoming book, Creating Culturally Affirming and Meaningful Assignments: A Practical Resource for Higher Education Faculty. She is frequently invited to give plenary presentations at national and local conferences, as well as at colleges and universities across the nation. Welcome to the Student Success Podcast, Christine.

**Christine Harrington** [00:02:05] Thank you so much and it's such a pleasure.

**AS** [00:02:08] I've been wanting to have you on the podcast for so long. It's so nice to finally connect. One of the things that I like to do is to start all podcasts, if you wouldn't mind sharing a a hobby or story or to something outside of work.

**Christine Harrington** [00:02:23] Sure. It's kind of a funny story because my older son always likes to joke that writing books is my hobby. But that's an academic thing. So I'm going to talk about something nonacademic. And I just stumbled upon this new activity. Maybe you've done it before. Ax throwing. I know it's like way out of the league of this. And I know I'm really not good at sports. I was always the last one to get picked for the gym class and all. I'm, you know, even, like, cornhole and all. I struggle with these things. But for some reason, now I got the ax throwing. I hit like, the first one. I'm like, oh my gosh, I got it on the board. It was very rewarding. And my kids were amazed because they couldn't believe I was actually hitting the target and even got the bullseye sometimes. So, it was kind of fun. And it was a nice family activity. And I've also done it with some of my friends as well. So it's fun, something different nonacademic.

**AS** [00:03:22] You know, I tried that for the first time last summer.

**Christine Harrington** [00:03:24] Okay.

**AS** [00:03:26] It was a lot of fun. It was kind of a little vacation. And. Yeah, I need to take more, though. I might just work too much. But anyway, I was in the Sacramento area. I flew up there and I was walking by downtown, and I go, what is this? I walk in and. Oh, my. So first shot, I got it right in the bullseye. Right? And I'm like, oh, yeah, you're so good. Look at you. And then the more I did it, the more I sucked. You know, Christine, there should be some research about beginner's luck, right? There's a reason there's that saying. There's something. There has to be a science behind it. But anyway, it would just fly off the board and wouldn't stick. So it's so funny that you mentioned that, gosh, you know, axes and targets. So there must be some metaphor for higher ed in there somewhere. We'll explore that.

**Christine Harrington** [00:04:26] Oh yeah. It's easy to miss, that's for sure.

**AS** [00:04:29] Now, one of the things that I was super excited about is you mentioned that you have this upcoming book about culturally affirming, and I was wondering if we can have some common language first, what is in your mind, the definition of culturally affirming? And is that the same as culturally responsive? There's so many terms now with culture and instruction. So can you enlighten us, give us some clarity on what that means?

**Christine Harrington** [00:04:55] So I'm so glad that you asked that question, because I really did struggle and grappled with what I wanted to call the the title of the book. And to me, there's so many good terms out there curtually responsive, culturally relevant. But I wanted to step it up a notch and call it culturally affirming. I feel like that has a validation kind of component to it. That may not be quite as obvious in the other terms. And I'm going to share with you one of my chapters because this book that's coming out is actually my first edited book. So it is comprised of chapters written by an extremely talented, diverse set of authors, one of whom is Adrian Martin, who wrote the chapter called What is Culturally Affirming. I'm going to share his definition with you because I think it's a really powerful one. He says that culturally affirming assignments are learning tasks, endeavors, and exercises that reflect a value for students cultural identities. Acknowledge how content and learning processes are culturally constructed, and uphold cultural diversity as a productive, meaningful, and generative learning asset. So I thought that was a really powerful definition and kind of sets the tone for for the entire book.

**AS** [00:06:14] Thank you for that. That's a beautiful definition. Now let's get into some of the the how that's going to be unpacked in the book. So what are some ways that we can be culturally affirming. Right. We got to know who our students are. So how how do faculty do that. What's the process for them to become more culturally affirming?

**Christine Harrington** [00:06:36] One of the very early strategy chapters is getting to know your students. And how can you be culturally affirming if you really don't know who they are. I think it's so critical for us and, you know, some faculty might say, well, how can I do that? Before the semester starts, I'm supposed to have my assignments all worked out. Well, I think you may not know all of your individual students that semester, but getting to know as much as you can about them through different techniques. Knowing your demographics through your college stats, looking at your previous students and really understanding who they were, reaching out to your students before the semester starts, and asking them some questions about who they are and what matters to them. You may not get every student to respond prior to the start of the semester, but you'll probably get a number of them to, and they'll probably appreciate you asking for their voices to be heard even before the start of the semester. So I think that getting to know your students is a really critical element, because it's impossible to be affirming if you don't know much about their lived experiences or what is a value to them, what their career aspirations might be. All those variables, I think really need to come into play. And I think that getting to know your students can help. But I'll tell you the one strategy I think there's so many great strategies that the authors have talked about in this book, but the one that really rings true to me, and I don't think you can really say you're doing culturally affirming assignments without this is choice, because you'll never be able to create a one size fits all assignment that's going to affirm every student in your class and be meaningful to every student in your class. So giving students choices around their assignments is probably at the crux of being culturally affirming. Now, ensuring those choices line up with your outcomes and are still going to provide you with good evidence that they've learned what you expect them to learn, but also ensuring those choices are culturally affirming. So you don't want 2 or 3 choices that I'll like, maybe lean on the same voices or perspectives or sources of data you may want to provide different avenues or all need to be done in a certain way. A lot of times faculty give choice in terms of a topic for a paper or presentation or something, and that's a good type of choice. But I think we can go much further than that. I'll go into what is often talked about as being like a product choice or process choice. So not just a content choice. But all three of those choices really do make a big difference for students and can really just allow them to take some ownership and pull on their strengths and what matters to them, and build on who they are and help them shape into who they want to be and where their next step is.

**AS** [00:09:34] So what an example of a choice be, I'm a student, so we're approaching the last 3 or 4 weeks of class. I have a choice of showing what I learned, whether it be through a paper, through a presentation, through a podcast. Do you happen to have, Christine, an example of a discipline and the kind of choices that a faculty provided?

**Christine Harrington** [00:10:03] I think that, yes, I love that you threw in the podcast. So I think that's a great example. In fact, it is one of the examples in the book. I think the idea is, is to be not so restrictive because many faculty and, and this can go across disciplines. I know you ask for one in a specific discipline. I do have some examples, because one of the things that I think is going to be really exciting for the readers is that there are 20 examples from faculty in a variety of disciplines that share a culturally affirming and meaningful assignment. So I can share a few of those with you as well, in a moment. But more broadly speaking, I think the key is, is to not be so traditional in the paper versus presentation, and to allow students to come up with more creative ways to show. You know, the authors of the chapter on choice, Myra George and Jennifer Thompson, they caution us to to make sure that we don't overwhelm our students with choices. So sometimes we give too many options. Even the choice of a topic can overwhelm students, and they don't know where to start. It's not their area, and then they don't even know how to begin. So I'll, you know, what they suggested. And I'm a really big fan of this as well as guidance choices, kind of like go to pathways, right? We heard about that in the whole Guided Pathways movement, making sure we're not giving students too many options because they sometimes, you know, freeze and don't take action then and instead giving them guided choices really can be more helpful to them. But I like to always put like that kind of fourth option where if you have another idea about how you can demonstrate your learning, then come and talk to me about it. So that way you're not stifling the creativity of the student who really is like, oh, maybe I could do this. I wonder if I could, you know, share my expertise in this way. It becomes something that you may not have even thought of as a faculty member that they might bring to the table. So I like having that as like the fourth, third option, depending on how many you're giving. But I think a short list is a good idea. And I think that using multimedia options is also really powerful. So whether it's a podcast, a website, a video, it can be lots of different kinds of things, infographics or other. Another, I think, underutilized assignment option, because so many times in the world of work, we're asked to create these really short, visually effective documents that convey so much depth and information. So get it. Giving them some practice at creating an infographic or an executive summary or a book review. Maybe it's something that can even get published right away so that they can get their their voices out there and heard in a, in a more academic way as well. So there's lots of options. There are no limits to that. And some will work better for some disciplines than others. Obviously if you're in a biology class doing an experiment, you're going to have a lab report or something. I'm sure something like that's going to be required. And we probably would want that to happen. But does that have to be the only kind of assignment that they get to do? If there's another learning objective that maybe lends itself more to some creative options, allowing students to have that creativity, you just engage them and makes them more in charge of what's happening. There's so many different examples that my contributing authors gave. I won't be able to give them all face time right now, but let me just share a couple of examples. And these are really easy to implement examples across disciplines. So I, I purposely wanted to talk about these because I know the listeners are going to be representing all different kinds of disciplines. So Meredith May did an oral history project, and what she had them do was they had to interview someone to learn about the history of that topic, that area. And what I loved about this was two things. One is they obviously had choice around who to interview. They had some choice around the questions that they were going to ask during the interview. So they had choice around that part of the process, and then they created a product that had real world, authentic value, because it was then she had an arrangement where it was housed, as an it was archived, actually in a local museum. So it was all about the history of that area. And these personalized stories were then all really treasures now in that community. It was a kind of like a treasure chest. When you open all these stories up from all the students and it becomes a part of their history. So I think there's a couple of pieces of that, the choice around who to interview, what questions to ask, what they wanted to learn about, and then, this isn't really the choice piece, but the authentic, meaningful part is that this lives on because so often our assignments are only for our professor's eyes only. So adding this additional dimension really made so much, I think really bring so much value, for the student to feel like, hey, I'm a part of history now, like, I did this. And the other piece, I'll just say briefly about the oral part, is I feel like so many of our assignments are so focused on academic resources versus people resources. And it was interesting. One of the, this is a different book that I have, but in my student success in college doing what works, it's a first year research based student student success textbook like in first year experience type courses. I integrate actual peer reviewed journal articles into it, and one of the articles talked about alumni reflections on their information literacy skills. And what they said was that, you know, I walked out, I knew how to use the databases and all, but guess what? I don't have access to those anymore. And what I need to do in the world of work is rely mostly on people as resources. And I didn't get much, direction or guidance or practice at that. So I don't think we do a lot of that through our assignments. And that's what I also really loved about this assignment that Meredith May shared, because it had that oral and valuing people as resources. So you could see the multi-dimensional culture of information piece of that assignment. I was really impressed with that. So I'll pause there to see if you have any comments. I see you're spinning your wheels are turning and I'm sure.

**AS** [00:16:56] Oh, this is great. I think foundationally the the choice or guided choice, right. I'm wondering how faculty or is this more an organic process for students where the culturally affirming, so let's say you're at a college and it's federally designated as an HSI, Hispanic serving institution. So let's say your campus is 65%, using the federal term, Hispanic. How much should faculty say, well, now that you're going to do this oral history, please remember to talk to someone within your culture. Do they have to say that or can that be organic? And many of these students would naturally talk to some people from their culture. I'm wondering that dynamic.

**Christine Harrington** [00:17:42] It may happen. And then, in an institution that, is diverse by nature, but I don't think we should rely on it happening by chance and, and crossing our fingers and hope that they do that. Clearly articulating that expectation I think is important. And it could be, and it doesn't have to be that. You have to, but I strongly encourage you to consider asking a person of color or asking a person of a specific background might be a black person, Latine person, person with a disability, a woman, whatever it might be. I think that you could definitely encourage your students to do that. And by putting it out there, I think it just makes it more likely that they will. And I also think that it it affirms their potential decision making process around that as well. And then it leads to a lot more options. I just did this myself in a class that I was teaching and I, they had to identify some key figures in the field and I just, I really it was a sentence or two. I just strongly encourage you to consider, looking for voices that may not be as visible or as heard and tell us about their perceptions, these theories and concepts. And actually, as students, thank you so much for this. I wouldn't have gone looking if you didn't say explicitly. I encourage you to do that. I would have just went for one of the mainstream voices or, you know, like somebody that was convenient, but you kind of challenged me to go and look for somebody who may not get their voice heard as much. And I so enjoyed that dialog and conversation. And I know that the students got to hear a much more diverse and rich conversation with so many different perspectives and every which way that you can imagine. So I think that really is pretty powerful. I'll share with you, Al, here's another example of an assignment from the book on these two authors, Fahey Richardson and Kathleen Palmieri. They were teaching a nursing class, and they talked about practices or policies and health care. And they specifically called out, you had to include what were some of the cultural and religious beliefs that may or may not play a role here. What are some of the vulnerable populations this may impact, and in what way? How might this impact access to diseases in this culture vary based on who's living in that specific area. So they, and the list went on, I'm giving you a sampling of some of the the kinds of prompts that they gave to their students. So each of these students gave a presentation around whatever policy or practice they chose, so they had some choice around that as well. And then they had this really great follow up activity where they asked students to engage in a reflective exercise after listening to all the different presentations. And they had to synthesize what were some of the similarities? What were some of the differences? How might you use this as a practitioner in the field? What might what questions might you ask now, knowing what you know about how this might impact this neighborhood in a different way than that neighborhood? So I thought that was really very strategic on their part because they did so many layers, like there was such layering of affirming and meaningful aspects of that assignment because not only did it give them, it forced them to have multiple perspectives on their topic. They gave choice around their topic, but then they also had that reflection piece I had it in which I thought was so critical and really very helpful.

**AS** [00:21:50] Those are two great examples. And you have what is it, over 20? That's fantastic. I love the oral history and I love this one on nursing because, well, culture is in every part of our lives. But boy, does it play a role in health care. That's a great example. As faculty begin to think about being more intentional about culturally affirming practices. And foundationally, you have this, guided choice. What kinds of adjustments do they need to make? I'm thinking of grading, right. Because they have multiple ways of trying to assess student learning. By the way, I wrote something on social media not too long ago. Just just a reminder that formative assessments are as much a measure of teaching as they are students learning.

**Christine Harrington** [00:22:46] Yes.

**AS** [00:22:48] So, but our grading policies also play a significant role. And often we inherit, it's not our fault, some really antiquated stuff that. So have you seen faculty make adjustments to how they grade and might you unpack that a little bit?

**Christine Harrington** [00:23:05] So I think that is such an important part of this whole process. And actually I do have a chapter on providing support and feedback, which is written by Geneva Murray and Robert Scott. And they did a phenomenal job at really breaking down many aspects. You bring up formative assessments and the powerful role that they play. And they talk extensively about that in the scaffolding of assignments, because it's not just grading at the end of the day, but what are we doing to support them to get to the place where they can be successful on the assignment? So you know what these authors have done? I think they did a terrific job at it was really saying, you know, what assumptions are you making about your students? What background do you expect them to have in order to complete this assignment? And what resources are they aware or not aware of that might help them with that? How can you make that much more transparent? Which is another whole whole chapter is on transparency. And then what kind of scaffolds can you provide, in what ways can you maybe demonstrate, provide practice opportunities? So those formative assessments that you talked about are really good reflection opportunities for us, as you mentioned, as faculty, to know where we need to provide further guidance and support. But it's also really good for students to see where they can start to gain some self-efficacy and confidence and, and where they might need to put a little bit more energy because it you know, the grading part is such an emotional part of the process. And being able to support them along the journey, I think is so critical. So when you structure your assignments in this way that they build on each other and they're not these high stakes exams that are fraught with bias and stereotype threat and all these, really negative outcomes, especially for subsets of students, especially those from historically marginalized populations. We want to try to avoid those and instead kind of build a scenario where students are able to showcase their strengths and in ways that value who they are and help them develop the skills that they need in order to pursue what they're looking for. So I wanted to try to emphasize that first, and then I'll talk about grading more specifically as well. So the grading I think is also key. You're probably familiar with tilts, you know, the transparency framework. And you know, that really involves, sharing the purpose, the why of the assignment, the task, the what of the assignment and then the grading criteria so they know what they're being graded on. And I think we often fall short on clearly communicating that. You can do that in a rubric. And I think there are certainly pros of rubrics, but I don't think we need to get always like with an analytical rubric. Sometimes it's a little bit much. We can also convey our expectations in other ways. I've been a little bit more of a fan of the holistic rubric more recently, I think there's, pros and cons of every different approach, but clearly articulating, what we expect from students so that they there's no surprises at the end of the day. We need to be mindful that grading is a very emotional experience for us as well as, I don't know, but I always feel emotional when I'm grading. I know at the end of the term if someone misses the mark, I feel really badly. I feel like I missed the mark then and I didn't do good by that student. So I need to think through what I could do better to support them and how I can help them accomplish what we set out to accomplish. So in terms of the grading, I would say that one of the areas that I'm a big fan on is giving students the opportunity to revise and resubmit their work. That's powerful. Now, I know faculty out there listening to this are going to be like, oh my God, Christine. I can't go and grade all my stuff after doing it yesterday. I don't want to do it again today and tomorrow. Like, oh my God, it's exhausting. And I get it, I do, I really do. And I do think it's important that we take time out to have some fun. And whether you're going extra when you're doing something else, you need to have some nonacademic time. You can't just grade papers and assignments all day and night. But I do think we can integrate some of that feedback into class time. I'm a big believer in how we communicate our values to students in a classroom situation is often through what is graded and how do we spend our time. So if we grade a lot of these formative assessments and they're not harshly graded, they're incentivized kinds of grades where they're meaningful enough that they feel it's worth their investment, but not so much that's going to negatively impact their final grade, then that's all good. But we also need to spend our class time giving that feedback. So rather than having them submit it when it's not ready to be submitted, we can do some of that in draft mode and all ahead of time. I like to do some spot checking during class while they're working on another project. It really isn't that time consuming to run around and give some general feedback. And then you have that, you eye contact and you can see whether or not they're getting it or whether you need to say it differently or say more about it and give more details because your feedback isn't useful if they don't understand it. I think integrating that is really key. So I know I'm talking more feedback than grading. But I think that revise and resubmit opportunities are really powerful if you're able to. The other thing that I would say that I've seen and I think has a lot of value is not everything has to be equally graded. So let's say you have ten lab reports in a biology class. Well, do they all have to be ten points each like 10% of their final grade? Or should the first one be like 1% and the last one be a little bit more? Because at the end of the term is when you need them to learn and demonstrate that that they learned it. You don't want to penalize a student for not for starting off behind the start line. You know, they didn't just because they had further to learn that that should be something to celebrate instead of to punish them. And I feel like grading can be punitive when we have like four exams and they're all 25% of your final grade. Well, you're going to get better at doing that as you move throughout the semester. And I think we need to ensure that the grades, at the end of the day, tell us the story of whether or not they achieve their learning outcomes. So we sometimes need to look at our policies and determine whether or not they are contributing to that scenario, or whether they're deterring us from having students grades, you know, say, whether or not they achieved what they should have achieved by the end of the semester.

**AS** [00:30:06] You know, you mentioned bio and I think some of the sciences this is where, because I do a ton of work with faculty, where they have a really difficult time. I'm a math instructor, I'm a bio instructor, I'm a physicist. And how do I, how can I be more culturally affirming in my area of expertise? Is that covered in your upcoming book by any chance?

**Christine Harrington** [00:30:32] Absolutely. So I have an example from Carolyn Zehnder, who teaches a biology class. It's a biology class for non majors. I think that the key is, it can be challenging. And some of this is really content. Classes, and I don't want to minimize that. But I think there's some really easy ways to add a culturally affirming piece. So Carolyn's way and this can be really in any discipline, is not specific to biology only. But you called on biology as an example. So I'm going to give you one. And she just ask students to do a weekly journal. And each weekly journal has a different piece to it. It's called Reflections and Connections. So each week there's a different task. And I'm just going to share a couple of the different tasks that she gave. Clearly this first one is specifically is related to biology. But you would obviously modify it to fit your discipline. The first one, she asks students to annotate a picture including you, or a representation of you showing how you take part in the carbon cycle, so you can see that she's asking them to visually connect themselves to the content that they're learning about. Another example that she provides is to find a recent news article related to what we just learned about in class. It has to be within the last two weeks. It has to be like A, B, and C, and it should be of interest to you. So find something. So you're finding a real world connection to the content that we're talking about here. So I think that like this is a very easy way to add a reflection piece. And then, you know, Carolyn's approach, Professor Zehnder's approach is to really do a weekly journal. But you could also do this after an exam, after a project, after any assignment. In fact, I think that's a really easy way to ensure that they're looking at your feedback by asking them to and grading them on it. But also to learn more about their processes and for them to also become more metacognitive around their own learning processes as well. So, afterwards, if you've heard about the exam wrappers in the assignment wrappers and all of those kinds of things where students are just asked to reflect well, rather than just reflect on content, you could also ask them to reflect on how did this relate to you and your lived experiences, or how, you know, might this impact your community or might not? Right. And maybe you need to hear that too. Where are you seeing the gaps between this content and your your lived experiences? So you can do all of these things in non graded activities and exercises and, you'll recall. Adrian Martinez's sample of assignments actually included exercises and endeavors, not just learning tasks and assignments, but it was a more comprehensive definition. So I think there's a lot of different ways that we can do that. And sometimes it's very simple. One of my student contributors in my last book, Keeping Us Engaged Student Perspectives on What Works and Why, I asked students, I have 50 student contributors in that one. It was really fun to do that because really one of my my favorite publication opportunities, and I remember this one student really talking about how at the end of class, they had to write a new card, and on the new card they had to indicate something they connected to in class or a question that they had, there was some kind of personal connection. And then the professor would collect those note cards and would address some of them. He couldn't address all of them, but would address them in class the next session or sometimes put it up online or something. It takes like maybe 3 to 4 minutes to do that at an end of a class. I know that's more of an exercise versus an assignment, but when we add those reflection pieces to our assignments, like I like to say, use 5% of a grade on that after piece of the assignment. And they can reflect on their learning journey and make some of those connections. So those are just a few examples that I hope that, that you and that the listeners will find useful.

**AS** [00:34:40] As I've said many times, I think this is the most exciting time in higher ed. There's so many challenges, of course, but it is the most exciting time because what I'm noticing more and more is the whole being more culturally affirming or responsive. Foundationally, what we hear a lot about, we learned a lot about. It's first, it's a mindset, right? You really looking at your craft, really understanding your students and making sure that we make that shift from external attributions to internal attributions. Meaning I don't have a lot of control over what high school they came from or whatever. But I do have control over my teaching. And now we're moving forward to this next phase that I've been wanting for a long time, and that is to then provide some nuts and bolts examples. And you gave us a few and really appreciate that because I think faculty hunger for that. I get feedback all the time, hey Al, I just went to this webinar and we were basically lectured and yelled out, we need to be more equitable and and like, okay, thank you. But you gave me absolutely nothing that now I can implement in my classroom. And so these just very practical assignment examples that you gave, just I want to say thank you. And, the book comes out, there's a preorder in January?

**Christine Harrington** [00:36:12] January, February. Yeah, January is a preorder and February 2024 is when it will be in my hands, which I can't wait to see.

**AS** [00:36:19] Uh, yeah. And I'll put this in the show notes so that that people are aware of that. One more thing I wanted to mention as we start to kind of wrap up a little bit and it, I go back to what you mentioned about having students do reassignments and do assignments again and just a time and the effort that it take. I love, I really like what you said about, well, take your learnings as a faculty, what you're seeing and student work, student products, and you can articulate that, incorporate that into the classroom. And so a lot of my work, when I work with faculty, I like to say we we reside at the intersection of data analysis and instructional analysis. And that's a hard place to be sometimes because it makes us go, oh my gosh, I can now see a better connection between what students produce and what I did or didn't do. But it's a journey. These are places of learning for us to not just for students, so that as faculty begin to see patterns when they do these culturally affirming assignments and they see where the challenges are, they keep learning. And every semester they just keep getting better and better and better. It's a learning journey for them. I was wondering if you had any other last words, or if you wanted to provide another example. Anything else that you would like to share today?

**Christine Harrington** [00:37:48] Sure. Thanks again for this opportunity, Al. I guess I'd share just a couple of other key takeaways or I think they'll be useful to the audience. In the book, I have created a checklist, a culturally affirming checklist. So it's basically a list of questions for you to consider if you're interested in making your assignments more culturally affirming and meaningful. So those are going to be really useful because sometimes it's really just that we haven't been trained. Right? We get so little support as faculty, but depends on where you are. Some institutions have an awful lot of support and others are not so much. But I think that even those that do, I don't know, have another book on assignment specifically, and it's such an important part of a student's learning journey, and it's such an important part of what we do. We spend so much time thinking about what kind of assignments and so much time grading the assignments. It's a huge part of our life and their life in this learning experience and environment. So I think doing it better is good for all of us. It makes it a much more fun and rewarding experience when your students are on target with their assignments and you enjoy them and getting variety of kinds of things. I like all the faculty I talked to who are doing this. They like they feel re-energized by it. They are more excited by giving different choices. And instead of reading 25 of the same exact kind of paper we have. Oh, I got five podcasts, I got five videos, I have five websites. I have all different kinds of things to do, which in the beginning can be more work because it's easier to do what's known and what we're used to doing. But with time, you'll get more streamlined on it, I promise. And it'll be more enjoyable work. One of my chapters, the getting to know you want to actually had a couple of really good questions about doing a diversity audit of your assignments. So I just wanted to share that real quickly. And then I wanted to end, if you don't mind, on making some assignments more meaningful to you because we talked a lot about the affirming part, but not as much about the meaningful, which go hand in hand. But let me just highlight the questions like the diversity audit of your assignments, like even asking yourself simple questions like whose voices and perspectives are represented by this assignment? In what ways? What perspectives are valued or devalued by doing this assignment? I think just asking some of those kinds of questions of ourselves really gets us thinking and sometimes it's a really small shift by just encouraging, like we talked before, like, consider, think about looking for some of those underrepresented voices or marginalized voices. Those are really key. And then I just wanted to end on talking about the meaningful piece. Richard Arends and Erica Carlson did a great job at really identifying principles and really good guidance on how to ensure that the assignments that you're giving have meaning and value to students. And obviously, the more affirming we are, the more meaningful they are. But this is also about ensuring that they're going to meet their needs in the world of work. So I'll share a quick story with you. A number of years ago now it's I lost track of how many, but like, it's probably a decade or so ago. I remember going to a workshop that I was so blown away by. It was the American Psychological Association. I'm a psychologist by trade, and I was, it was a teaching of psychologists session and basically put this big pie chart up and they said, where does psychology graduates go? And I knew that not all my psychology majors were going on to go get their doctor degree, but I never really realized it was only 4% of the work going on to get their doctor degree. And when you take a look at the curriculum that we have in psychology, and I don't think we're unique, actually, I'm just using my discipline as one example. We torture our students, like 96% of them don't need a lot of what we're giving them. And yet we've catered our curriculum to that 4%. And yes, we need to give that 4% what they need to go on to get their doctor degree. But in so many like ways, most of what we're doing is not that meaningful for a lot of our students. Like they're not going to need SPSS. And these statistical, you know, processes. What they probably would better need is Excel. Like we can still get at our learning objectives by using different tools. And Excel is going to be utilized by so many more students. And you could give a choice. You could either use Excel to practice these formulas, or you could go and do SPSS. If you're planning to pursue a field you know a career in psychology, you might want to do this one. But even like APA format we get so worked up around all these and 20 page papers while they're not doing that, you know, that that's not really the norm in the world of work. So, in the book, the authors are really talking about things like the difference between academic and business writing. Are we helping them get there? So many of them are going into business. We need to help them be more flexible, more collaborative, like, oh my gosh, we're going to let them write together. You maybe write like, I don't know about you, but I'm writing a grant proposal now with other people. I did a writing article. I wrote this book with a gazillion other people. Right. This is what we need to do. These collaborative kinds of approaches, practical things and more being more concise. I think that that's another area that we kind of hang on to this long length issue, like, and we focus on how many pages. It's like one of the first questions that students often ask is how many pages should this be? So wrong question, I think, to be asking. But we've trained them to do that. So I don't blame the student for asking the question. I blame us for creating a scenario where they need to ask that question because they want to be graded appropriately and know what our expectations are. So really kind of thinking through how do we make sure it's meaningful. And and that's by ensuring that we have the culturally affirming piece, but also thinking about where they're headed in terms of their career and knowing what industry expectations are and whether or not our assignments are lined up or not. For that. I mean, we didn't talk about AI today, but, AI is all out there to and and thinking about, are we helping our students develop the skills they need to to coauthor things with AI? To collaborate with AI, they're going to need to do that. I mean, there's so many resources that have come out even recently. I mean, the whole thing is fairly recent, but hot off the press in the last couple weeks that are helping higher ed professionals do their job better using AI. So we need to like, think, you know, really about industry and what needs they have and and ensuring that the skill sets that we're giving students and and if you'll let me say one more thing about this we talk in higher ed about learning objectives. And I remember reading an article and I just blanking on, um, the person. I'm so sorry. I'm not able to give credit, but I'll just share. It wasn't my idea. What about talking more in terms of skills language? Because it's not just about ensuring they have the skills, but can they talk about the skills? Do they know the skills they have? So I think a really great, simple thing you can do on your assignments is have a skill section. This is the skills that you're going to be able to learn as a result of doing this assignment, that you'll be able to then talk to employers about. And if you choose this version, these these are the skill sets that you're going to use because they'll vary, right. If you're doing a presentation, a podcast, a paper, some of it will be similar the critical thinking and analysis kinds of skills. But some of the delivery and technology skills will definitely be different. So helping them have language for that I think can really be useful as well. So I'll end on that note. I'll and hopefully the the listeners find that to be of use and value.

**AS** [00:45:51] Oh there's so much there. Oh my gosh. We can spend another hour. You unpacked so much. You made such excellent points. Just alone. You know, there are associations and then departments at R1 universities, and then textbooks, they dictate what the content is. And you're so right. Depending on the discipline, so many of it is just not really applicable. We know it's part of the history of a discipline. And so we want to check off what we have to talk about this. And we have to talk about this. Happens in math too actually, there's areas in math where like it's just not necessary. Why are we teaching that. It's yes, we know this guy from the 1300s came up with it, but it doesn't mean we have to teach it. We're not using it anyway, I actually have a cool example I'll share with you. I have this in inquiry and action process. I work with faculty and we create data informed purpose statements. And, and we do a little bit of research and then we implement something in our practice. And I think it's so cool because it reminded me with what you were just talking about. I've been working with a communications faculty team, and they came up with a way to help students better identify what they want to do in terms of a career. And so they're incorporating communication, it's actually a speech course. They have to do a speech. But their speech is on their research on industries and careers and why they are gravitating and why they chose a particular guided pathway, if you will. Right. That's another example where you give students an opportunity to, especially if they are unclear about their path or maybe they are super clear and then they can articulate that. Again, I'm just seeing all such good work. I think this is the most exciting time in higher ed. I just think that faculty need more concrete examples. So thank you so much for providing that. I can't thank you enough for that and looking forward to when the book is released. Just thank you so much for participating in the Student Success Podcast.

**Christine Harrington** [00:48:15] Well, thank you, Al. And I want to give a big shout out to all of my contributing authors because this book would not have been possible without all of them. And they for many of them, it's their first writing adventure. And others have been doing this a bit. So it's a nice mix of new folks in the field. But I think it's so important for us to all share. And without them sharing their thoughts, ideas, contributions, we wouldn't be able to have this book. So thank you for having me and for all the great work that you do. I love listening to all your podcasts. I always get gain such good takeaways because I know you like you push people and make sure it's practical, which I appreciate. And that it definitely helps me. I have changed many of my actions because of your work, and I know others have too. So thank you for all that you do as well.

**AS** [00:49:03] Oh, thank you so much, Christine. Thank you.