**Denise Maduli-Williams**

Learn how to improve accessibility for students and the campus community.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast is a pleasure to have Dr. Denice Maduli-Williams. Denise is an associate professor of English and English Language Acquisition at San Diego Miramar College teaching online, hybrid and in-person. She earned her master's and TESOL from Teachers College, Columbia University, and her Ph.D. in Educational leadership through the joint doctoral program at the University of California, San Diego, and California State University, San Marcos, where her research focused on factors of connection and social presence of students of color in online community college courses. Denise taught English and ESL for over two decades in various settings, including a California prison, a village in Botswana as a Peace Corps volunteer and New York City public high schools. She finally found her home in community college, teaching at Harold Washington College in Chicago and the City College of San Francisco. In addition to her faculty positions, she has also served as the online faculty mentor, online accessibility mentor, and faculty evaluations coordinator. A soon to be empty nester, she loves the beach as well as her Jack Russell terrier Bella to bits, and has recently become addicted to Zumba. Welcome to this Student Success podcast, Denise.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:01:21] Hi Dr. Al. It's a pleasure to be here.

**AS** [00:01:24] Thank you. So I always like to start the podcast asking our guests something beyond their work, a hobby or a story or a superpower. Would you share something, please?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:01:37] Sure. I will begin with the last line on that bio you just read, which is about Zumba. And I think over the past year, I've gone from taking Zumba classes, once or twice a week just for fun that I stumbled in to taking classes or going to Zumba every single day and many times twice a day. So the number of steps I have now is pretty high per day because of Zumba. I think that there's multiple reasons why that's become such a big part of my life. Some of it is that just post-pandemic. It was fun to be in a space, a face to face space and community with people. But just this idea of moving my body. I'm not a trained dancer in any way, so learning something new. I also don't speak Spanish, and many of the Zumb songs are Spanish based. Being in this room with just a very wide, diverse group of people and really super fun, talented, clever instructors just reminds me of being a community college educator and a student because it really is, you know, zumba for all, access for all. You'll be in this gigantic room with people from 18 to 80 years old. Some people have physical challenges. Some people are doing it for the first time. Some people are regulars that have been going to the same instructor for many months. You know, you have all these levels coming together in community and it's just so much fun for me. It's fun to try something new to fail. We always talk about this with our students, but to have this feeling of everyone else is going left and I'm going right now. Everyone just turned around and I'm still facing the front and to know like it's okay to make mistakes and then to get better every time. It's also really fun to see multiple instructors and see the ones that shine and why they do, how they build that community with their courses. And they never know who's going to walk in the door. So I'm just so always inspired by them. Whoever shows up is there. So they have to somehow include everyone but then retain consistency. And I've also made some really close friends through just going to so many Zoom classes. So that's pretty much my second home right now and I've just been really enjoying it.

**AS** [00:03:50] That's so cool. I have heard of Zumba. I never went to see one. I think I saw a video of it. So can you describe it a little bit? How is it different from other forms of other hobbies? Either because it looks to me almost like it's an aerobic setting and it's through dance. But what what kind of dance is it? Why is it called Zumba? Anything else you can tell us about? What is Zumba, exactly?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:04:15] I've always actually been kind of a gym rat and I've always loved group fitness. I'm going to age myself. But, you know, back in the day, I was the first one doing step aerobics and I've done lots of group fitness classes. And Zumba is yes, it's aerobic, It's Latin inspired dance. Dance fitness is basically kind of how I would call it. And instructors, you know, are Zumba certified. That's huge, right? It's international, really. They're zumba certified and there's a really particular way of being a Zoom instructor. One thing I think that's really interesting is that in traditional Zumba classes that I go to, the instructors don't actually cue through speaking like back in the day with my friends out there that did. Step aerobics or, you know, done other kind of group fitness classes. The instructor will always tell you and then shout out things. But it's all through hand motions. And so you just kind of learn, literally learn by doing and kind of follow the crowd. And I think that every instructor has their own spin on it. So it's not like you go and it's the same every time. Different instructors do different, you know, choreography, different songs. People are inspired, everything from like, you know, salsa, bachata to reggaeton to Indian inspired dance to kind of more hip hop, you know. So it's just you kind of never know what you're going to get when you walk in, which keeps it really fun. But then there's also this fine line that instructors have that where they do consistently some of the same songs so that people know the dances, you know, apologies to the real zumba experts out there that know more of the background and meaning behind it. But it is really, really fun if you haven't tried it, I highly recommend.

**AS** [00:05:56] Oh no, that was really helpful. Thank you. And I love the connection that you made between Zumba,this place of community and the instructors that say, all right, you're here, you're all at different levels and let's make this happen. Let's learn. And it's okay to fail. And I really like the connection you made that community with with that key word. That's sometimes we just miss it when we say community college. That word community is so important. And that's what we do try to do at at these precious institutions is create community, have an institution of higher ed, that, by the way, is college. There's a college which just happens to be part of the community. So I love that connection. Thank you for that. And we met a few years back actually, when the pandemic started. I was so privileged to help Miramar College, and one of the things that they were really interested in was the inquiry & action team model and the college did set them up. And it was beautiful. And you were a part of one of the teams, the Humanities inquiry & action team. Would you mind telling us a little bit about what was produced? For the audience, the inquiry & action team is a model that I developed over the years. It's a six step model. I'll put it in the show notes, links to other podcasts about this model, but basically it allows a group of the coalition of the willing to come together, primarily faculty, because faculty, I've always thought they can play a much greater role in guided pathways where it tends to be student services heavy and come together to look at some data, form a purpose statement to help guide the work, and then you do a little bit of project management. You choose one or two projects and then you implement them. And so what's the project that you worked on, Denise, as part of this team?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:07:56] Sure. That teamwork was so valuable. Part of it was because although I knew many people in the humanities at my college, we were working with adjuncts, we had counselors and other professionals on our team. So it was super well-rounded and we had multiple disciplines within the humanities that were part of our team and we focused on community building basically. And so our team worked really hard on how that can support student success in all disciplines, beginning with the humanities. We did things like create really specific beginning, middle and end of semester surveys so that students could give feedback and faculty could get feedback throughout the semester, and that those surveys would also touch upon things that in student services and counseling, things that sometimes we as faculty don't think about and be pushed out to everyone. We worked on finding ways to do alternative assessments, authentic assessment to really reach out to students early on before the semester starts and begin with a warm welcome so that everyone knows that they can and will be successful in our classes. And our final product was a Google site which housed all of the different things that we co-created, from surveys to activities to sample projects. That is now still available to the entire college to pull from. And we made things really public. So like the surveys can be copied and just put right into your canvas shell. And we had some special assessments and authentic projects and ideas that people could just pull from and plug in right away, because some of that is learning about it, but then not having the time and space to actually apply that to your classes. So we wanted there to be products that people could use right away.

**AS** [00:09:47] Thank you. Yes, that was such meaningful work and then it has a ripple effect. The work continues. Sometimes it's maybe not within the team, but then the baton is passed for other parts of the college to continue that work. So I'm so excited to have you here because there's a group of remarkable, amazing faculty that I follow on social media. So I've had a podcast with I think you can call her your sister, Maritez Apigo. And she really unpacked how to be equitable online. I did one with Michelle Pacansky-Brock, and most recently with Dr. Dayamudra Dennehy and she's just all about kindness and equity. And it's just so nice to have had a podcast with them. Now, I've always had you in mind, but I know you were busy with your dissertation. Dissertating.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:10:47] Yes. Finally. I'm so glad to put that behind me. Dr. Al.

**AS** [00:10:53] There's so much to learn from each of you. And one of the things that I appreciate about you that I've seen that you've really been focused on a lot, has been on accessibility. So we talk a lot about the DEA but it's really the DEIA. And I would love for you just to explain, take us through your journey about accessibility and what you have learned so that we can learn from you.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:11:24] Sure. This is a journey that is kind of rife with all of the things that I just didn't know, right? We don't know what we don't know. And once we learn, we do better. And what I learned was I was doing everything wrong, even though I have always been, you know, committed to DEI. All of the people that you just mentioned have been very influential in my work as an educator. And, you know, Dr. Michelle Penske Brock with @ONE. When I first got my own teaching certification, obviously accessibility was part of it. But at that time, in at least for me, it was very much the side note that like, okay, there's this issue that some students need accessibility, support, and that seems super complicated and I'm just going to wait until I have a student who has this need and I'm just not going to worry about it. And that's just kind of how I approached it for quite some time. And then as we moved in to COVID, at least at the San Diego Community College District, DSPs office was starting to report that there was a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities in the online learning courses during our remote time. As someone who's very involved with online learning and loves it and really believes in it, that was disconcerting to me to realize that, a very wide swath of the population was struggling not because of how online learning can support students, but because of the accessibility concerns that were that were not being supported by them. And then I had taken with Lené Whitley-Putz, she did a ten day accessibility challenge through Foothills College, and then she's also one of the OGs @ONE educators that I learned from very early on. And that was the first challenge that was like really short YouTube videos. I'll make sure you have the link. Dr. Al, that just made it really, really clear and really, really easy. It wasn't like accessibility with all caps. It was like, here's how you add meaningful links, here's how color contrast is a problem. Someone finally explained to me what alt text was like. I had heard all of this, but that seemed really complicated. So I kind of did that. And then around the same time that happened, an opportunity arose at my district because of the disproportionate impact to DSPS students to become an online accessibility mentor. And that program came through our Dean, Brian Westin, and also Poppy Fitch. And they saw this need and saw that we as faculty, we didn't know what we didn't know. So that mentor role was really meant to train someone and then have that person support faculty. So that's really where my learning curve began of being trained to be the mentor and then basically doing at the same time as training, kind of trying to disseminate this information to others in my in my college, which was basically like, here's what I've been doing. I just found it's wrong. Here's what we should do. And just kind of these little step by step things. And then just you know, the other thing about social media is that to people I started following on social media. Dr. Anne Ganier and Dr. Thomas Tobin just became very influential to me in terms of accessibility. I do not know either one of them. You know, I stumbled upon them on Twitter. I've been to many of their keynotes, read every single tweet they have, and just really, I think the power of a personal learning network online to support you. I wasn't getting this at my college, not because nobody cared. People didn't know. So I was just learning so much from them, learning from being trained as a mentor, kind of. And looking more closely at some of these things that were coming out through articles and blog posts about accessibility and being really, really aware that there's a wide swath of students that need our support. It's not just waiting for the one student to come in and say, Hey, I have this paperwork from DSPs. They have jumped through so many hoops to get to and then now have to come to you and just, you know, kind of almost apologetic. I'm so sorry, which is they're apologizing for the civil right. They have to have their education. I'm sorry that I need these accommodations, so that just really turn on a mind switch for me that either we are truly inclusive and we truly care about all students or we do not. And if we don't focus on that, the A in DEIA, then we are not at all supporting our diverse student body. We are not being inclusive and we know that students have intersectional identities. So there's a huge portion of students that aren't being supported, not to mention that accessibility for students that need it supports all students. We care for our all students accessibility supports all students. So that was my journey just kind of as a big picture. And then as we went along the way, I just was able to make kind of little tiny, small changes, almost like every week or every month. While I was a mentor, I learned each kind of small thing.

**AS** [00:16:21] Thank you for taking us through your journey. Yeah, we don't know what we don't know, right? So you have to seek out and learn. So what are some practical, some applications? Things that you felt like, Oh, I was I wasn't really doing this correctly, and now I have made the adjustment. Can you take us through some of those specifics so again, we can learn from you?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:16:45] Yeah, absolutely. Well, first of all, I forgot to mention this. One big thing I realized was that I was really thinking of students with disabilities are as this separate population, when really disability is part of the human condition. This is something that I've really like. This has been uncovered for me that I don't know why I didn't think about this before, but disability can be temporary or it could be situational. And it's like a it's not a yes or no. Right. There's a scale of it, like both of us right now, Dr. Al, we're wearing glasses, right? I have reading glasses. My husband is colorblind, which is actually quite common, especially for men. So he doesn't see red or green. So all those times that I was like highlighting students in red for my students or green, all my canvas shell as that's what's important actually. If you're colorblind, you're not noticing that as a separate thing. That's important. I have two sons that played sports and multiple times they've had casts or broken wrists. My younger son, who just graduated, had a broken wrist during AP exams this year during the final part of his senior year and couldn't type. So now he has this temporary disability where he had to use speech to text. Even sometimes my computer will be slow and then whatever is going on. But like the images or fliers coming into my email don't show up. And so if someone's not using alt text, I'm not seeing the image. So that whole mind shift for me helped me switch over. One of the first things that I really learned about was alt text, and I had heard this kind of bantared about and I didn't really know what it means. And basically what it boils down to is if someone has a challenge where they're not able to see visually the images, the infographics, whatever visual you're posting and you're either putting into your coursework or putting through emails or communication to students, if there's not text, alternative text to describe the image, then those students will not know what it is because the screen readers will actually read out loud whatever's on the page. Right? So if you have a document or some content for students, it's just reading out loud and then they'll come to an image. And if there's no all text for the image, it'll just say image. Or it might say in my case, when I first was horrified and like turn on screen, we were on my canvas page, it was it would say whatever the title was, that I had saved the image, as in I do all kinds of weird things. So it would be like screenshot 9925 or like image 5592. And I'm like, Oh my gosh. And meanwhile it's like this important graph for my students to understand. Or it's an image that I felt supported, the text that was below it. And the first time that I heard the screen reader read one of my pages and I realized so much of my information that was visual because I want to make things pretty. And I think that lots of students have, you know, they enjoy visuals and it helps you with your learning. So that's helping all of the sighted students. But then no one else that's listening to on a screen are whose computer is not able to get those images, they have no idea what's going on that page. So that sent me on you kind of an alt text journey where. I learned how to add alt text that described what's important in the image. I learned that most of my social media was, and I do a lot of social media for students, like I'll post on Instagram or Twitter or whatever. I wasn't putting all text on that. So then if I'm putting like a flier, like, Hey, come to this amazing workshop at this, you know, at the library. Students aren't getting that information if there's no alt text to it. So that was one of the things that I first started kind of fixing. And I think part of my journey was like, let me not focus on all the things. I can't go back now, right? I have, I don't know how many classes on canvas. I can't go back and like, fix it up. That just sounds so overwhelming. But as I go forward, every time I add an image, now I'm making sure that there's all text. Every time I add something on Twitter, I'm going to put that alt text. And the other thing is once you see that, you kind of can't unsee it. Like, I can't unsee that many of my district social media comes out without alt texts that college presidents in my district, the social media marketing that they're putting out on Twitter, they're like, this is to publicize events to students. And we are showing all of our students, showing our students that we don't care about all of you because so many people can't see that. And again, it's like what? What we don't know, we e don't know. Right. But I think it is a change that can happen easily once we know how to do it.

**AS** [00:21:28] So alt texts, so people understand this. So because I've used it in social media, there's a little button that says alt. And then when I click on it, it says, describe the image. I'm trying to get better at it. I'm not always the best at describing the images, but what happens is that so those who are, they're impaired, their eyesight is impaired, they can use a technology, a screen reader, right. So that screen reader verbalizes. And then when they hit an image, like to your point, without that alt text, it wll say image 19992.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:22:13] I'm not so good at taking images like with the correct title or. Yeah.

**AS** [00:22:17] Right. So that's really, and then what's interesting is that I find myself now reading the alt texts because yeah, some of the descriptions are really cool. So I get the image and then I get that extra explanation that I really appreciate. Like so many things, this is how I often describe the equity work, especially the racial equity work. I work throughout the country, so I still get some people like, Oh, why do we need that? You know, that's, you know, they're not necessarily the most equity minded people. And I tell them, look, when you help these groups, everybody benefits in one way, shape or form. And this is a perfect example. So alt text is one. Is there something else in your journey that you have noticed that you're working on or, you know, this is my next thing that I got to work on that we should learn about?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:23:12] Yeah, I think that we all know about captioning, but I think I was not super careful with it. I also think that captioning of videos has become a lot easier. You know, the technology just gets better and better, right? So it also might be because I do teach ESL, so I try to limit some of my casual commentary or I sometimes speak just very specifically more clearly or slowly at times depending on the learners. I want to make sure they understand me. So the, the automated captions are really good now. I mean, when I use Canvas Studio to do auto captions for videos, there's minimal kind of correction I really have to go into. I remember when I first started learning about this, it was upload to YouTube, deal with YouTube captions, which were notoriously not great, and I think even those have gotten better. But I kind of would have some videos that would in some way and I wouldn't really kind of worry about it too much. But now I'm very aware of that. I make sure that they are clear. I run through it and see if there's especially, vocabulary or wording or phrases that are really pertinent to understanding the content that at least those are corrected, even if I'm not correcting every little or and they all my name is always felt wrong, you know, like whatever. But I think that captioning is something that is easier than we think. A lot of people, when we start to talk about captioning kind of get freaked out about it. I think that the tools are there to support that. When I actually did my dissertation research, it was not on accessibility, it was just about supporting students of color and online classes and accessibility came up just organically as ways that supported students of color. Almost every student mentioned something regarding accessibility and they all mentioned captions. And I want to also bring out something I hadn't thought about. But situationally captions are super important because students can't always have the sound on. So like if there was an example of a young mom and she was going through some of her coursework, you know, with her baby near her and she can't have it on, but she can read the captions and still be completing her work. If the students in a crowded area are in a library and you can't actually have the sound on, you can still see the captions. So situationally you might think, oh, accessibility in captioning is only for a certain population, it's not for all of us. And I just read this really, really funny article. Not funny, but it was by the Atlantic last month and it was called something along the lines of why? Why is everybody watching movies with the subtitles on and the author blamed millennials saying like, why are you doing this? Like you're ruining the movies. You're not focusing on, you know, you're not focusing on listening, you're just reading the screen. It's like that did not surprise me at all. Everybody benefits from accessibility options. And so now this this is a thing not just for millennials that people are watching TV and movies with the captions on.

**AS** [00:26:09] I'm part of Generation X and I really don't like how there's this bashing against millennials. I think they're so tolerant, I think they're so innovative, and we get to see them, a good chunk of them at the community college. And there's this kind of, it's sad how there's this perception of them being entitled. And I don't know, maybe some of them are that have really wealthy families and in the Ivy League, maybe that's where that perception is but not not community college students. It really bothers me. So what's really funny, though, is when I was younger, I didn't really care for subtitles. For me, it was a little bit distracting. But as I got older now I cannot watch a show without subtitles. I don't know. It's an age thing, but I have to have the subtitles. I don't know why. It's funny to me now that I put them on every show I watch.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:27:12] So funny. Yeah. And I do agree generationally. I think that's one of the great things about community colleges kind of like Zumba, but you have someone, between 18 and 80 and your classes and everyone's accessing whatever they need to. And I think about captioning like you said, not just shows, but you know, students are accessing a lot of information on tik-tok on Instagram stories, you know, in other ways. And when we're pushing out information, I watch my sons, my sons are 20 and 18, so they're like looking at stories and you know, they don't want the same, I don't even think they, I think I feel like they never put the sound on their phones. Maybe that's just around me. But, you know, the I stories has everything captioned, the tik toks that are captioned like they're able to access that at any time. Whereas if you need to put the volume on, that's not always an option. So it supports everybody having really clear and, you know, easy to read captions.

**AS** [00:28:04] And what you said was so powerful, I think that there are those who have long term disabilities. But what you said just really was so powerful to me that they are disabilities that are temporary and situational. And that becomes even more so when community colleges, they open their doors to everyone. And we have people that it's a privilege to teach them that not a burden, as I always say. And they have had challenges in their lives and. To take that extra step to make things accessible because we don't know how many of them are dealing with a situation or temporary disability can mean the difference between staying or leaving. Right.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:28:59] Yes. 100%.

**AS** [00:29:01] For all my administrators out there, accessibility could be an enrollment strategy.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:29:07] I think, I don't, I went to a really great presentation during South by Southwest Edu on disability and higher education and I will find out the source of the statistic. But basically this idea that we think there's just a small portion of students, but what I learned was that over half of students with disability are under or not reporting because of just either the stigma of this or the hoops that they have to jump through to get the correct paperwork, or maybe they did for one semester and that it was just not helpful. So they just didn't you know, administratively, we want to make that easier for students, but we also want to be aware just because someone didn't come into our course with, the paperwork, it doesn't mean that a good portion of our students will benefit from this and that they really do need our support in many different ways.

**AS** [00:29:55] Yeah, I think back I've had some issues throughout my life and it would have been nice to have an accommodation, but I didn't take the extra step to even ask for it. So the alt text, the captioning, is there anything else along the way that you feel we should know about?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:30:15] Yeah. I think the two other things that were really important learning curves for me were color and then also meaningful links. So I mentioned that my husband's colorblind and it's very common, you know, colorblindness for red and green. But I love, I used to love to make things really colorful and pretty, and I was highlighting things and underlining things and making things in different color. And I still see that, you know, in presentations, in content. But the fact is that it can be one really distracting. So you can go into a color contrast app or you can go into canvas, will actually let you know if the color contrast is not strong enough. So that like let's say you do something like a light blue and white or something, the contrast is not strong enough for someone to see something just in normal text or in a presentation. But more importantly, if you are using color, is your only way to highlight something of importance. And then the students cannot tell it's a different color, then they are not going to know it's important. And I did this all the time. I'd be like, you know, in all green or all blue or all red, something really important, like make sure you read this or deadline or this. And it's like, Oh my goodness, that is actually not getting the information to all my students. So you want to bold it, you want to make it bigger, maybe you want to italicize, but you cannot just rely on color to give you that information. And then you want to make sure that that color contrast is really clear. The other thing with meaningful links that came out to me when I went through and looked at some of my or listen to some of my pages as a screen reader, is that whatever you are putting in the title is the link. It should be a descriptor to what that is because otherwise the screen reader will read it and a student listening will not know what it means. And for example, I used to say things like If you want to know more about, you know, this book, click here. And then I would highlight and put the link and all it said was Click here, click here is literally no information or go for more here. And I mean, I think the first time I looked at my page, I had click here for I think every single link. And what you want to do is go back and actually put the title of what that is San Diego Library website. If you want more information, click on the San Diego Miramar Library website in San Diego, where my library website is the hyperlink. So then it reads it. The other problem is if you just copy paste the whole you URL because then it will literally read each letter out loud because it's not a word. And we all know that URLs are really long and unwieldy. So then it's just this long, long string of things which also gives no information. So writing meaningful links, it's just kind of a mindset change how to kind of I am actually have problems like figure out how to work my sentences to make that clear, to write the sentence so that it included the link correctly. But that's a small change that is really, really powerful because then if the student is going through and just clicking through and listening to the links, they know what link each link is instead of just click here for every single thing.

**AS** [00:33:19] And again, it helps everyone because when you see click here, now you took a little bit of extra effort to actually title it and that's that's super helpful.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:33:30] Yeah, Yeah.

**AS** [00:33:33] Quick question about that. So if I'm providing a link and it's hyperlink, so I have the title and then I embed the hyperlink, does the screen reader get confused or should I put the the title and then colon the link? I'm not sure how to do that. What do you recommend?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:33:54] Yeah, you don't need it. Won't get confused so it will just read whatever that title is so you don't need to worry about it being hidden or anything like that. The other thing I learned about color too, was, so you don't want to do anything else blue or underlined because blue and underlined means it's a hyperlink, right? So I used to underline for emphasis all the time. And then I learned that underlining really indicates a link and so does blue. So you want to just kind of take those out of your repertoire of colors for students because it will automatically make that a blue underlined hyperlink and then students will know they can click on that.

**AS** [00:34:34] Wow, just a littleist things, right, can make such a big difference.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:34:38] Yeah.

**AS** [00:34:39] Now the color blindness, do you find that it just varies by person or is there a dominant color where they for a lot of people, is it the green, you said or the blue that they.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:34:51] Read and green is most problematic and then it is the color contrast. And so that has to do with the contrast between the background and then if you have text on top of it. Right. So, and you know, I love some of these different technology tools for creating beautiful slides. Canva's one of them. But you have to be really careful because sometimes these beautiful aesthetic like pastel, the slide templates don't have a strong enough color contrast so you can open up one that's like light beige and light pink and it's really beautiful and you have this pretty text, but the color contrast is not strong enough. So if anyone is, you know, having just, this is something that is part of just the wider community of our world, right? So that if you are in industry or if you are developing technology tools or templates, you have to think about that because people are then downloading them and using them and then those are not really accessible for everyone. And these are things again, like I can't unsee that now. Like I wouldn't have thought about that before. I be like, That's just so pretty. And I'm like, That color contrast isn't strong enough when I see someone's post or something, and it's just like you learn one little thing and then it does make a really big difference and you can just carry that forward and we can just always then ask, right? So then whatever setting we're in, whatever tool we're using, whatever, you know, email, flier people are sending out, we can ask, is that accessible? I did a lot of training workshops on email fliers when I was online Accessibility Mentor because those are so problematic. The fliers have a lot of text on them and then they're really pretty with all these images and colors and there's sometimes not, the color contrast isn't there and then if you just have one image and you have all this text on the image, which is like the workshop time and the bio of the person and all the information, it's not going to have that, you know, in the alt text, in sometimes alt text limits your, you might have a limited number of words or characters. So if you dump everything on this flier with all this text or like infographics are really problematic, then how are you going to, how are you going to translate that into text that a screen reader can read? If you're doing a beautiful flier with so much information?

**AS** [00:37:09] And for non digital content, like a paper flier, how is that made accessible for students typically? Do you know?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:37:21] I have seen some paper fliers that basically will have a QR code or something on it that will then go into a web based version or like a just a text based version, like a word document or something where there's text there. But frankly, most communication that are fliers still go out, you know, at least in our district, through email, people aren't necessarily printing those out. So people are sending fliers as attachments or embedded in emails, and the flier has all the information. And then if you click on the flier, either it's a PDF which has its own problems, or it's an image which will just be image or however the person saved it. So, you know, the easy hack for that is to put all of that information in the body of the email, because anything that's web based, the screen there will be able to read all of that and anyone else can actually read that more easily, especially some of these fliers or some of these templates that have like really different types of typography and images and things that kind of are not super clear cut.

**AS** [00:38:23] So if you were to design a PD, let's say, of flex days coming up in the fall and people listening here like, wow, this is really important, we really need to be more intentional. How would that PD session look like? What would you cover?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:38:44] Oh, I thought you meant the communication. You mean the actual like PD of what to do?

**AS** [00:38:49] Yeah. Yeah. We've learned kind of four components, would it be those, right, the alt text, closed captioning, color etc.. What is that or would you chunk it up because it could be too overwhelming. Would you, maybe in the fall we do two, maybe in the spring we do two because, as you know, I do a lot of work with faculty and I'm trying to help them improve their craft. But I also know, do one or two things, do them well, and then next semester do one or two things, do them well and build up. But don't feel like you need to overhaul everything, right? So how would you design that session or how would you like to teach faculty to be more intentional like you are now?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:39:33] Well, there's two ways. If someone's personally interested, I think that I will just promote again that ten day accessibility challenge through Foothills College, because those videos are like 2 minutes each and I think there's ten. And every day you learn something new and then you can apply it. But for me, when I was going in and trying to support, my college, I was at first doing these like hour long workshops and making these videos and it's difficult, right? So what turn out to be I think the most supportive was is little 15 minute things we called PD snacks. I can't remember who that was. Not my idea. Someone at my college came up with this idea of PD snacks, and they were just little bites. You come for 15 minutes and we just do one thing, and so we be like, PD bite. Here's how we, you know, do meaningful links, Here's a link. Now, we changed and, and each of these little things has like alt text could go on for like a entire year because of things like info. But it's just like, okay, just for alt text, we're going to just learn, you know, here's a picture, here's what you put in when I'm going to talk about maps, like let's not worry about maps right now. And these little 15 minute PD snacks I think were really helpful for people to just to get a dip into it because I know I personally get burned out very easily as a faculty member and I get very, very overwhelmed. So to go in and do a very big presentation on like there's actually the big seven, those are the big seven accessibility things, it's like to go and do one whole workshop on the big seven. Everyone's going to walk away like, Oh my gosh, never mind. But if you do one workshop and say, Here's how you change the like, here's how we, you know, you can do dark burgundy would be great instead of green. And then everyone kind of walks away with this one nugget and then works on that, like you said, for a while for this semester. No, I'm going to add alt text to every image I put up or for this semester when I make an announcement, I'm going to make sure I don't use colors that are problematic. And then you've made like one small step that means a very big thing to so many of our students.

**AS** [00:41:37] And again, it could mean the difference between success, between we lose them or they stay. As we wrap up here, Denise, I was wondering if you would mind sharing another again, this was so powerful that it could be temporary or situational. Can you back about if some students were, Oh, if I could go back, I would have done this because it was situational or it was temporary or going forward, what are you going to kind of be prepared for? Yes, there;s alt text, the color, all of that, but is there some other kind of accessibility, other ways to accommodate that we haven't touched on on yet?

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:42:25] Sometimes we, it's complimentary to accessibility, which is UDL or universal design for learning. So this idea that we want, it's a framework not like, you know, the framework of engaging all learners, right? That we think about the why of learning that we make sure that students are engaged and understand why they're learning the material that the what of the learning the representation comes in multiple ways, right? Visual, audio, video and they can access it in the ways that's best for them. That's presented in ways that are clear for for all students. And then the how right the action and the expression like having choice in how you show your learning the outcomes of your learning, right. That students don't always have to write an essay or take a test. So I think that that is I feel like UDL is maybe more commonly known or thought about then accessibility, but they go hand in hand, right? Because if you're representing things in multiple ways, like your podcast, for example, you have, we can listen to the podcast, which I listen to Dr. Dayamudra's when I was walking my dog, but then I actually went back to look at my sister's, Maritez is and I just looked at the transcript. So that you have these multiple ways of representation that support students that makes it accessible. So I think looking into how we create choice and engagement for students in how we represent the content and what we want them to get in multiple ways, that makes that universal for everyone and that also supports accessibility.

**AS** [00:43:58] Thank you for sharing that. UDL Yeah, there's definitely a connection between that and accessibility. One of the things that I'm not a fan of student deficit thinking, right? And at the same time when I see faculty do some things that are just, Oh, I'll just say that it's horrible. I'm not really faculty deficit thinking toward them because here's the thing, where they learn that. So it was done to them in graduate school and it's what they know.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:44:35] Yeah. Yeah. It's how we. I mean, I just finished my program, and I was taught the same way. Nobody really use UDL in my program.

**AS** [00:44:45] You know, my program, we went back and the feedback we gave them was really interesting because we're like, Oh my gosh. So but again, it's kind of, it is this kind of vicious cycle of, ah, graduate schools really need to do a better job. I understand that researchers are trained to do research, they're content experts, we've got to add UDL, we've got to add the pedagogy because again, people just continue to implement antiquated practices. And as you know, culture change is really difficult. People have just a way that they are accustomed to doing things. And then when we tell them, Hey, look, you can do it this way to be more, oh well now that's extra work. And what there's going to be only one person in a year that that will really need it and really don't see the bigger picture. Right. And so I like your idea of these PD snacks. And I think, you know, I've learned over the years that change, especially with faculty, is when faculty see other faculty succeed and that they see that it's actually easier for them in the long run, then they begin to try things out. But it is difficult to get people to change because they just develop bad habits and it's not necessarily their fault, right? It's just it's what they learn, what they how they were taught.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:46:13] Yeah, I think it's also been very siloed. You know, like we have the DSPS office or we have the accessibility office, but accessibility is all of our jobs, right? And it's not something that can be hacked on at the end. It's as you build your course, you build it in because we care for and support all learners, right? It's the only way kind of to think about it. We can't really just pass it on to someone else. It's part of our own pedagogy, You know, I think faculty and obviously I'm faculty, we get excited when we know that we're making changes that support students. That's our whole job. That's what we want to do. So I think part of it is just making it easily understandable and small, tiny changes make a very big difference. It's not just for our students either. I mean, so if my if I'm, you know, an administrator in my college and I'm sending out a flier or some information for everyone and then it is not accessible. So we are leaving out, we are leaving out faculty with disabilities, we're leaving out administrators, we're leaving out professionals, we're leaving out all of the support staff on campus, not just students. This is like our entire population. We either care about all of us, and we want all of us to have that information or we don't.

**AS** [00:47:31] Well, thank you for bringing awareness to accessibility. Thank you for going through your journey and how you're continually improving your craft. Really appreciate you participating in the Student Success podcast, Denise. Thank you.

**Denise Maduli-Williams** [00:47:50] Thank you so, so much. Really appreciate it.