**Rebecca Kaminsky Interview**Learn about inquiry and action teams and how they help college educators continually improve their craft.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a pleasure to have Rebecca Kaminsky. Rebecca is an English professor at Irvine Valley College and former Guided Pathways Coordinator. As English faculty, she participated in multiple measures and developmental education reform implementation. In her role, working on guided pathways, she helped institute design teams, implement interest areas, develop academic roadmaps, work on the college's, find Your Pathway Web pages, and later, Irvine Valley College's new website and launched completion teams. It's a pleasure to have you as part of the Student Success podcast, Rebecca.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:00:39] Thank you very much for having me.

**AS** [00:00:41] So something that I like to start off with for all guests is if you wouldn't mind sharing something outside of work, a story, a hobby, a special talent, anything that you'd like to share?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:00:53] Well, I always like to joke with my students that I sort of came to teaching at the community college in a roundabout kind of way. And in fact, I always joke that this is sort of my second career, my second life. Prior to that, I worked a lot in sort of corporate environments and marketing departments and even ran several businesses, both on my own and with partners. And what I found is it gives me sort of a unique experience, a unique point of view with students. They like to hear the story. And then I've also found that it gives me sort of a unique view in my role or my former role as Guided Pathways coordinator as well.

**AS** [00:01:31] Oh, I want to unpack that. So, tell me the skill set, the experience from working in a sector outside of education and how that has informed, specifically the work that you've done in education, because as you know, education could have a significant amount of inertia that we don't always see in the corporate world. You can do things, for the most part, depends how big the organization is, a bit quicker. And so love for you to to expand on that.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:02:09] Well, one of the things I think that I learned that you kind of learn as you go through college, but, you know, depending on the kind of student you are, you don't necessarily learn, it is the power of relationships and building trust over time with your colleagues, with your clients, with your potential clients. Right. You need to put the time in to get to know people and let them get to know you. And when you do that, there's all kinds of new opportunities and projects that you can bring to each other and that you have to be just as willing to bring things to other people as you are hoping that they will bring to you. In fact, they won't bring things to you unless you bring things to them. And learning that sort of skill of getting to know people, their strengths, letting them know your strengths and in some cases your weaknesses is invaluable in your job. I think it allows you to be more creative. It allows you to be more flexible. It allows them to be more creative and more flexible. And I think it just makes overall for a more positive work environment and a more fulfilling experience as you work day to day, oftentimes in the same place with the same people on the same kinds of tasks. And so that's one of the things that I think I really benefited from, was learning how to develop those relationships. And that's not something we teach necessarily in our classes unless we have those students that really spend the time to come to our office hours, which for a lot of students is a very scary proposition. So how do we extend that so that students learn how to have those soft skills with us before they go into the job place? I think it's something we still are figuring out.

**AS** [00:04:04] Yeah, so that cuts across all industries, right? The relationship piece, you're so good at that. Are there, in terms of how in your experience outside of education, the processes, the way you go about implementing action, whatever that action may be, how do you see that differently from your experience in higher ed when you're trying to implement, whether it be some sort of strategic plan, some kind of change, even if it's within your own department? What's the difference that you saw between the two sectors?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:04:41] When I worked in the corporate sector, they provide the vision to you and you work to support that vision. When I worked at my own business, I got to decide what that vision was and how to work towards it and how to share that vision with others. One of the unique things about running a business is how quickly you can do things and how quickly others are to want to get things done. So you move on things a lot faster than we do. I think at the college, and I think it's positive and negative in certain ways, I think it's good to take your time and really investigate and understand things and research them. But I also think taking the time to research things and investigate things, you lose opportunities, you learn valuable time, loses that all that time. You often forget about the urgency of the circumstances under which our students, our faculty, our classified staff are working, are involved in. Right. And you don't see that in the private sector as often. Like a decision is made. You go, you try it, and if it doesn't work, you pivot as quickly as possible to the next thing or to make an adjustment to see if that works. I find at the college sometimes we don't pivot quite as quickly and or the pivot doesn't happen. It just sort of fizzles out. And that can be the right thing, but it's not always the right thing. And I think that has to do with an entrepreneurial mindset versus an academic mindset. Just big institutions are harder to move quickly anyways. There's more people involved. And again, that's not a positive or a negative. It just is what it is. And so it's how you choose to navigate that. I think that can make the difference in the long run.

**AS** [00:06:49] How you choose to navigate it. And I also love that your dog had something to say about it too what's his name and how old is he?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:06:57] His name is Murray and he was six this month and he always has something to say.

**AS** [00:07:04] Send me a pic and I'll include him in the show notes.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:07:08] Absolutely.

**AS** [00:07:11] So in the intro to you, at the end, I mentioned that you helped to launch completion teams. That is the name that Irvine Valley gave to what I call the inquiry and action teams. And I'd love for you to talk about how did you get to that point of being able to actually launch this. I talk a lot about the coalition of the willing. Colleges throughout the country were creating these meta-majors and then they call them different things at different campuses, everything from interest areas to schools to CAPs, academic and career pathways, etc.. And I've been advocating to have some kind of team per interest area. And the challenge has been these case kind of management teams, especially in California, because there's just capacity issues, you can have a career and academic pathway that has maybe four or 5000 students and really three people who are already overspent are going to do case management for them? It's just very difficult, especially here, because California doesn't have advisors, right? So there's this different model where we bring in the coalition of the willing and we have them think about how can we improve practices within this interest area. But you went beyond interest areas. You had other teams that you were able to form. But before we get to that, can you explain how you were able to get the coalition of the willing to launch these teams?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:08:38] Sure. So if I go back far enough, the first thing we did is we had a team of people doing a lot of research on the different models that were available. We finally, after a couple of years of doing this research, got to a point where it was, okay, we have to go do something. And so before we took what that vision was to the rest of campus, we immediately wanted to go and make sure we had the support of our administrators. In particular, we met with our VPI at the time and shared our vision with them to see what they had to say about it and make sure that our goals were aligning with the larger college goals that were happening or that we were working towards at the time. And it turned out what we wanted to do and the vision that our VPI had were the same, that they wanted these teams launched within the next academic year. And we said, Perfect, that's what we want to do too. And the biggest question was going to be, Well, that was a lot of teams. How are we going to motivate all of these people to add to what they're already doing and actually participate in a meaningful way? And that was the biggest challenge. So we spent a little bit of time over the summer prior to fall or I should say in spring, prior to summer, figuring out, well, what is the best way for us to communicate our vision, and then who should we start with? And what we actually did is we started with the people that were most anxious to do something, and that was our classified staff. Our classified staff had participated in Caring Campus, and they already had a core team that was really motivated. And so we said, Let's do it. Let's get you together first. Then I went from there to my own school and department and said, Here's what I want to do and here's why. And I sort of test drove the messaging with them and I heard their feedback. And then we modified the messaging and then we went to a second school and said, Here's what we want to do. Will you participate? So we had those three teams and what we did is we provided them support to work over the summer and get something done or at least start the process, because we knew for the rest of campus what was going to be really important is not just what I had to say about what our vision was, but was they wanted to hear the experiences of people who had already started doing it. And so we really focused on here's what it is, here's what we want to do, here's why we want you to do it. And, oh, by the way, these three teams, here's what they're working on and here's why and here's what they've said have been their experiences up to this point. And we also want you to include your part time faculty. This is not a full time faculty only proposition. And we're going to provide you with data support and data coaching, and we're going to provide you with someone who's going to come in and help coach you through the process. And we're going to provide you with an embedded counselor so you don't really have to know how to do anything. You just have to be willing to participate. And oh, by the way, all the work is going to be done in the meetings. So when you leave every meeting, you're going to feel good that it was productive and you're working towards something. It's not going to be where you have a lot of homework. Now, on top of all of the other things we know you're already doing, not everybody responded immediately. In some cases when we went to each interest area, which happens to be our sort of schools or divisions, depending on how it's labeled at your campus. But there might be one or two people. And we said, Great, that's all you need. Bring them in. We don't need everybody to participate. What we are going to ask, though, is that you go back during your school meetings and your partner and just share what you're doing because ultimately you're going to need them to support your efforts if you really want to make big and lasting changes. The other thing that we did and that we shared was that this was an opportunity for all of our faculty to really take a deep dive and look in how to support the students that are part of their academic communities and neighborhoods. And you are in charge of your neighborhood. You are in charge of all of the students in your neighborhood. You are in charge of all the faculty and all of the staff in your neighborhood. And so where can that be strengthened? Where do we need to put support so that ultimately everybody is experiencing more positive outcomes? The final, I think, point that really hit home for a lot of people was you're going to go through this process and you're going to decide what that means and what that is. We're not going to come in and say, You have to do these things. All we're going to say is please do our process that is available to you because it's going to help you make decisions. And we're going to start first without any answers. We're going to start first with the questions. And that's when we did the data coaching and a lot of data review what's actually happening versus what we think is happening versus the anecdotal stories that we hear from person to person and believe are happening. What do we actually see in the data and what in the data do we need to understand better before we can make any decisions about any big or long lasting changes? And I think for our campus, what really resonated was that every team can choose whatever direction they wanted to choose in order to get something done on behalf of their students in their programs. So it wasn't us coming from the top down saying, You have to build this thing into all the things you do. You don't have to change what you're doing unless you want to. It was, what do you think was going on in your in your neighborhood and what would you like to see improved? And then let's figure out how to start the process of improving that for our campus. That really resonated. And the teams got started a lot more quickly than I think we imagined. I was personally going to feel very satisfied if I had 50% of the teams by the end of our first year of implementing these. But we ended up with 100% participation and commitment. By the end of the following spring semester, what also really helped was we as a Guided Pathways group, the oversight work group that had or that has stakeholders from all areas of campus in there providing input in helping to vote and make decisions is we really decided that after this first year, if we really want this to be a practice that lasts for a long time at our college, we need to make sure we don't lose any momentum that we had just built. And so we all voted to provide the financial support for all the people on the teams who wanted to work over the summer, to continue working over the summer and to add to what they were doing as opposed to just working on their projects. We also provided a lot of professional development and it could be individualized professional development, or it could be group settings where people came together to talk about common areas of investigation or areas of concern. Most of it around equity, DEIA, and other kinds of things that while people might feel like they understood, I don't think people really, really felt like they entirely understood. And so it gave them an opportunity to learn what they felt like they needed to learn and to concentrate on those areas that they wanted to learn in a way that also rewarded them financially for the time they were spending to do that on behalf of the campus and our students. And so we had, oh gosh, 45 faculty, full time in part time over the summer working on teams and participating in these professional development activities. And what came out of that were people ready to start launching things in fall, just in time for me to step away and let somebody else come in and take over. And it worked out so much better than I think we dreamed it was going to work out. I give a lot of credit just to the openness of all of our faculty and staff that we presented them something totally different. And they said, You know what? I'm going to jump on this opportunity and see what happens.

**AS** [00:18:01] Yeah. Your experience outside of education really came in handy, Rebecca, because you, it was not just the messaging, it was the relationships that you were building over time and the calls that you were making, the texting and everything, just to get that coalition of the willing and then aligning with already the strategic goals of the campus. So I couldn't believe it. I remember going, Wow, now it's up to it's really going to 12 teams? And I just I was so elated. And we can talk actually the entire time unpacking everything that you just said. But we got, let's get to the work of the teams. Right. And for the sake of transparency, many people already know this. I developed this process over the years and it's not prescriptive, but it is and also under specified, it gives a team sufficient enough and guidance for them to own the process. We spend very little time actually with the data because. Oh, and you have fabulous researchers. I wish we had researchers like this at every campus to support these teams who kind of spoon fed the information from the very beginning. We did a lot of prep actually to launch that. 12 is a lot. So maybe take us through a few of the teams and kind of the the a-has that you saw because you are in almost every meeting. Beautiful. You were there to witness so many aha's. You're there to witness really what is a productive struggle, something that is messy. But that's okay. That's what learning is. Learning could be messy. So could you tell us a story or two or three or four about some of the teams going through this process?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:19:45] Yeah. So first I'll share. We have 12 teams. Ten of them are our interest area teams. One of them, as I mentioned before, is our classified professionals team and the 12th team is our support centers. And so a lot of our tutoring center or math center or writing center, our language acquisition center, our library, career center and transfer center. Also, they created a team to figure out how to how do we get more students to utilize the services that are already available to them? It's been a really interesting experience. I have really come out of my silo and gotten to learn a lot more about how different areas of the campus function, the culture of those different departments and different schools, which are in many ways very similar, which was very, very exciting and heartwarming to learn in many ways, very different in often the very best ways. And so it kept me energized to be able to go to all of those meetings. And as you said, our institutional research office has given us 1,000% of their support. We couldn't have done this without their support from the very beginning with guided pathways. And so I can't emphasize enough that I hope everyone is developing that relationship with their institutional research office, because how we've been going about making decisions is very different now as a result of better understanding the data and where that data is, how we can even find the data and how to interpret that data has been really good. So we have a few things that have come out of this that have been really good. We're having our second annual First Generation Students Day, which really is sort of a series of days, and this got launched from our classified team. It was one of the first things they decided to do, and they did it pretty quickly in that fall semester. And it was a tremendous success and we're supporting that and doing it again. And that's coming up actually next week. So we're really excited for it. We've had a series now of syllabus workshops that have been hosted for the campus on equitable syllabi, practices and policies, and that's actually been a merger of two teams that might be unlikely partners, but two different teams that started working both on this idea of what is an equitable policy to have in class and how do our policies, our late policies, our attendance policies, our participation policies, how do these things impact students in a very real way in our classrooms? How do we know how much all of our faculty actually know about the information that is required to be on a syllabus versus what is sort of recommended and a best practice to have on the syllabus, as well as all the different ways that you can sort of frame those things on the document itself. So we had a humanities completion team that was really looking at those policies and how those policies in practice affect student behavior and ultimately student grades in the classroom. And then we had our business sciences completion team that was really interested in and started with, well, how much do all of our faculty, full time and part time understand about the resources available to students? And in doing some discovery there, they realized that there was a lot that needed to be communicated to faculty about how to support students, because if they don't know what exists, how can we possibly expect them to recommend that students take advantage of it? And from those discussions and from putting together those materials, it turned into, well, does everybody know that they need to have student learning outcomes for their courses on their syllabi? Do they know they need to have this policy or that policy? Do they know that they don't have to have this policy, but that it's really recommended that they do? And so at some point, I you know, I just sort of connected the two teams and said, do this syllabi workshop business sciences. You've put together this amazing syllabus template that explains all of the different items that need to be on a syllabus recommended and required and provides examples and rationale for how to write those things and how to put them together. And then humanities. Here you have all this understanding about the the practice of those policies in real time. So let's start putting these syllabi workshops together. And now we've held two. They're in the process of designing a third syllabus workshop for the campus and it's going to be based on equitable grading policies is something that comes up over and over again in conversations. How do I make that work for my class and my discipline? And so it's meant to start that conversation in a more in-depth and meaningful way.

**AS** [00:25:07] For the sake of the audience, just to let them know the process. Why institutional research is important is that they come in with data, and it's usually data about who are our students, enrollment, what are success rates, what are equity issues, what's completion. And then the teams form. And we spent sometimes two or three meetings, but it's worth it. They create a data inform purpose statement and then that purpose statement is then used to create an action plan. And we always encourage, please only do one or two, maybe three things at the most, but do them well. And so the teams reach consensus around, okay, this is what the data is telling us, let's try this strategy, that strategy. And they create this beautiful action plan that forces them to really think about the specifics. And so that's how the syllabi workshops came about. And what I loved about classified was so funny to me, but I loved it, is that it's a six that process and they did like the first three or four steps in two meetings and we see the data. We got it, first gen equity gap. All right, here's a purpose statement. And now we're going to do we're going to put together these first gen events. And I just I love classifed, because I like to say about them, they GSD, they just Gets Shit Done.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:26:37] They're very entrepreneurial.

**AS** [00:26:40] Very entrepreneurial. And we don't.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:26:43] Yeah, working with our classified professionals feels very much like I'm working with small business owners. Because they want move quickly. They feel urgency. They understand this is important and they are 110% want the best for 110% of our students.

**AS** [00:27:02] Absolutely. I love their energy. And again, I love it that Irvine has this team because you are in these meetings, Rebecca. And they already as faculty were thinking about their syllabi. Can you talk a little bit about how you saw, how you witnessed some of these shifts in attitudes and behaviors and how some faculty, while they're doing these action plans, decided, I'm going to give this a shot, and they already started to change their practices a little bit, Right? Can you unpack some of those ahas that you saw in the in the process?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:27:38] Yeah. So as we would go through the process, we were always doing a little research at the same time. So something would come up and I would say, Oh, there's this great article about this, you should read this. Or I would simply say, Are you sure that's the best way? Like I did a lot of pushing back, a lot more pushing back than I anticipated, given that these were not my schools and not my departments that I was working in. We would start doing these readings and then we would start having these conversations. Well, I understand this. I don't understand that or that feels scary to me. Right. There was a lot of people really opening up and sort of being not just open to, but really wanting to understand how their current practices were impacting students versus if they changed something and being very open to hearing in a very positive way about what they might be doing might not be the best way. We would have these conversations and then that actually for one of our teams ended up being the catalyst for how we put together this syllabus template is, Well, let's look at it for those faculty that are most comfortable with lots of flexibility. A policy might look like this for a faculty member that just wants to sort of maintain sort of rigid deadlines. Let's say if we're talking about a late work policy, here's what that is, how that policy might be written. Here's if you want to sort of do a little bit of both where you're not quite sure, here's sort of a middle of the road policy. And what those conversations did is it made us question what our written policies were versus how we actually treated those policies in the classroom. And very often we came to understand that there was a disconnect. We had this very rigid policy because we thought it was covering us in case of student issues. But in practice we weren't that rigid. We were very flexible. Right? If a student came up and said, I'm sorry, I had the flu last week, is there any way I could turn this in? Most people were like, Yeah, of course, turn it in. You have the flu. You can't control having the flu. Right. Because we're all human. And so we understand that. Yet in the syllabus, it would say under no circumstances can you have late work turned in. I don't accept any late work. And so it became. Well, shouldn't your policy reflect what you actually do? And not this sort of very rigid way of doing things in the past and being rigid on paper and flexible in the classroom is actually kind of what gets you in trouble with students because they see in it's particular. And then it got to especially after looking at the data and realizing where the equity gaps were. It became a matter of, Oh, well, if I'm a first generation student, I don't know that it's okay to ask you because you're syllabus says under no circumstances will you accept work. So if I'm first gen and there's not somebody behind the scenes advising me saying just ask them what's the harm? The worst they can do is tell, you know, just ask them or they don't have a counselor or another faculty member or a sibling or a friend who'd been there before. That student would just lose out on those points. And that, of course, ultimately affected their grade. And that's just from lack of knowledge of how to talk to an instructor in college. Right. It has nothing to do with the validity of why the work didn't get turned, which is ultimately what I think we're most concerned about, is like, do you actually have a valid reason for not getting it done because it's so I'm happy to give you this grace period, but if not, that's not okay. Right. And I think that's sort of where many, many faculty tend to lie. And so it's in those sort of conversations of reading a little bit, talking about our experiences, having somebody like myself that's a little bit more extreme in their views in the room then maybe a typical faculty member is, I believe, in radical flexibility. So if you have somebody radically flexible talking to someone who's a little bit more rigid, then the only option is to meet in the middle, right? Or to get nowhere. And since everybody really wanted to get somewhere, we would meet in the middle and then people would say, Oh, and then because this is an ongoing thing, they can change their syllabus the next semester and then we can hear how it's going. We have some teams now that have learned a lot about these things and just decided to change their policies. We're collecting data now to see how the outcomes from previous policy to new policy is changing things or if it's changing things. And again, we always want to build in those measures to collect the data to make sure that what we're doing is the right thing so we know when to pivot. And I really think one of the reasons these teams worked is because there was somebody in the room every single meeting helping one to decipher this process and to to help push back in those conversations and be that alternative point of view. And in doing so, you build that relationship, you gain the trust. I'm here with you in the trenches trying to figure all this out. And that's not my program. And I think that went a long way to building sort of goodwill and good relationships. And oh, by the way, I'm not just telling you to do these things. Here's my syllabus. Look at what I'm doing. I'm doing the same things that I'm pushing back and asking you to do. And you might think I'm crazy and that's okay. And I realize my discipline is a little bit different than yours, and so it can't always work the same. But those were really important conversations to have, and it was done in such a safe space, and there were no judgments, right? It was people just learning and questioning and there was no wrong way to look at something. It was just here's all the ways to look. Let's figure out what's going to work best.

**AS** [00:34:08] Yes. And it's part of the process, when they are picking that one or two or three things, they are asked to go do some research. What does the literature say? And you are so good with that you would come back like this, says that! And so I don't know if it was so much pushback, but I think you had your teacher hat on and you're just trying to teach them, look, there is this other way. It's important for people to understand that when you have a faculty Guided Pathways coordinator, which is always fascinating to me because they're kind of, they're charged with go make wholesale change, go change the culture, go make these, and you have like no power. But when you just so good about relationships and bringing in the coalition of the willing and you create these settings and you have a process, you are able to use the power of persuasion and data and research to say, this is why you might want to reconsider. So often I call it internal versus external attributions. To me, that's foundational for equity work. So sometimes some of my researcher equity colleagues, they get a little bit on me about equity comes first. I'm like, But I'm an implementer and you got to soften the ground and get them to shift from external attributions, meaning, Oh, well, you know, we got to do something about the high schools. Can we go do some about the high schools? No, you can't. I used to coach K-12. Believe me, you cannot do anything really substantive to change that culture. Oh, wait, they you know, we actually we need to prepare them for the real world. Well, they have deadlines and I'm like, well, the real world, they actually sometimes extend deadlines so what are you talking about? And so you would come in with this perspective, but you also had leads. Each team had a lead and they were also part of that. They they began to learn to kind of speak up to I wouldn't say push back, but to teach. Right. So let's talk about this practice that you've been doing and let's reimagine how that would look a little bit differently. So I wish we would have recorded all those conversations because they were so, so amazing. So thank you again for sharing that. What came out of some of these these these action plans? Anything else, any other ahas about the process or any other teams you'd like to share about?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:36:38] I think you touched on it in just what you said there is that you have to be very patient. It is very human to want to look at those outside things, those external factors that might be impacting our students or our faculty or our staff before we look internally. And you can't disregard that because that's a really important part of the process. And in some cases it might actually be the thing to. And so we can't disregard it because there are going to be times where it's like, Oh yeah, there is this external thing and how do we adjust for it? But it's very human to want to do that because especially when you're talking about teachers. And at a community college we really our view, I think our identities is not professor, it's teacher, it's instructor, it's coach, it's facilitator. And when that is what you believe, then you believe in the power of change through what students are learning. And you believe that you're doing these things and you are genuinely and you are and such a you believe it, you are genuinely doing these things to help somebody else learn valuable skills in knowledge. And it's really, really, really hard. And we have to be really patient and I have to be patient with myself about this too is. That doesn't mean you're doing everything perfectly. And just because you've been doing things for a lot of years doesn't mean there's not something new for you to consider and potentially change within your practices. And so it's really hard, especially when you look at that data and you see the data telling you there is very specific groups of students that should be doing a lot better than they're doing. It's hard knowing how much time and energy and effort and heart that you're putting into that to accept that, oh, some of that might be because of my practices. And so you have to make space as a college, as a department, as a school, as a community of educators to say, It's going to take us a little time to figure that out and understand what I have control over and what I can change in order to make improvements. And again, most you can't mostly change what's happening outside. We can't change that. Our students might need to work multiple jobs, but we can change our practices in the classrooms to accommodate those students that have multiple jobs. Right. We can be more flexible as a result of that. We can't change whether or not our students are food insecure, but we can walk them over to the food pantries on campus with the whole class so that nobody feels, you know, that they're being pointed out in this way. There are a lot of external things that we can't change, but it's hard to accept when we haven't changed the things that we can change. And sometimes getting people there can take longer. And honestly, that's okay as long as they get there.

**AS** [00:40:14] Let's talk about that a little bit because some teams move a little bit more quickly than others. And it's not a judgment. It's just some, for example, there's part of the process there is an option if the team wants to use it, is if they have the data and then they want to explore more. So we've had surveys. We want to learn more about students. So surveys have gone out. We've done surveys with faculty. In fact, I'd love for you to talk a little bit about one of the surveys with faculty because I love that the the finding of this kind of is like a mini study almost, it was this survey about grading. And you use the word lottery. That it's a lottery for students. Now, this team is still, they're taking a long, it's going to take longer to work on this. But can you explain a little bit about what lottery means and what the process of them of actually going through this survey, what faculty in those discussions. Can you? Because to me, that was really powerful as part of the process for this team.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:41:21] Yes. So, and that team has done a lot of really wonderful work. They have developed OER materials for their classes. They're developing additional support materials for their students also. And so but one of the things we did is we looked at the data that showed the range of success rates for a specific course over time. So for all the sections of a single course and how big of a gap is there between the lowest success rate and the highest success rate? And first, as a team, you have to decide where how big should that range be that we as faculty feel comfortable. And so that was sort of the that's always the first question. Well, is that an okay gap, right? That 40% at the lowest and 100% at the highest? Is that too big of a variance for students because. If you have large ranges in course, success outcomes like that. One of the ways to understand that data and there's lots of different things that we can pull from this data or understand from this data. But one of the things to consider is, well, given how students enroll in their courses, is this now becoming a lottery for students that randomly? Which course they take at what time with what instructor already provides odds of whether or not they're going to pass the class simply because over time these certain sections always have low success rates and these other sections always have very high success rates. What does that do to outcomes for students unless they're the very best student? Or they had the very finest educational background, or they can afford tutors, or they can have the time to go to regular tutoring. What does that mean for them? And after looking at the data, this team said, Well, let's find out what our faculty are doing. How different is what we're doing in the same class, following the same course outline a record from one section of this course to another. And so they did sort of an anonymized survey with their faculty to find out what are your policies, what are your grading practices? Are students given second chances? If they don't do well, how are we support students that aren't doing well When students aren't doing well and they come to talk to you? What kind of advice do you give them? All these different kinds of things. And what we learned is just how great a variation there can be across sections of the same course, some of which is pedagogical in nature. These differences, some are different because faculty teach at so many different colleges and the COR for each of those classes is not the same, even though it articulates as the same class two universities. Some of it is just a need for professional development so that everybody can sort of be normed. And what can we do about it if we think that this is a problem? You can look at that data and decide it's not a problem and choose to address something else. And that would have been perfectly fine for a team. And some teams have looked at that and said, we don't consider that to be a problem. We consider that to be an issue of academic freedom. While I may not personally agree, but that's not my team or department. But that does bring up these questions is are the way that we are grading practices or policies, having this kind of huge variation on student outcomes from one section to another over time? Because it's not as though we were looking at this data in a vacuum. We weren't saying this one semester this happened. We looked at years worth of data and saw this was a pattern. And at that point, that's when you have to stop and say, is there something that we need to dig into and do something about this? And if so, what is that thing? And how do we do it without infringing upon that really necessary and important academic freedom that all faculty need to have in order to do their jobs well.

**AS** [00:46:07] So back to the internal attributions that if we finally look in the mirror, we've finally go to the microscope and look at something like our grading practices. We begin to internalize that and realize, well, we actually have a lot of control over that, and it has so much control over success. So that internal attribution is key because then, when we dig into the data and for example, we see racial equity issues, they're more inclined to do something about it because foundationally they see that it's a problem. And by the way, look at these groups. That's what I've been saying for a long time. You cannot lecture. I call them equity red lighters and yellow lighters. And there's green lighters. You cannot lecture an equity yellow lighter to move to green. You have to engage them in some kind of work so that they can come up with that self-realization. That it's my practice. I got to improve my craft. And then it's so, we really just plant the seeds there for these beautiful equity type of strategies and for them to think more, more equity minded. And while it's important to note about these teams, they're small in nature and they themselves are not changing the entire school all in one academic year. The purpose of these teams is A, let's start doing some work because as you know, you've seen it in the corporate sector versus higher ed, we're very slow, but let's start doing some work. And then these teams serve as a catalyst. They're kind of like little think tanks that do this little bit of work. And as they do the work, they expand and then they bring more people on board to the coalition of the willing. So it takes time, it takes patience, and it is a huge, productive struggle. And by the way, earlier what I meant about this team, I didn't mean that negatively. It's just taken them a bit longer to move through, what are we going to do about it? Because they took the time to do this survey, by the way, we did it all in the meetings. Even the other team, we have a physical science team. There was a survey done with students. We did all that in the meetings. And so these things can take time. But the these rich ahas about our practices. To me, those are the golden nuggets, right? Those are the things that I look for, what I like to call the in-between. We got all these things we need to do. We have all these inputs in education mandates, strategies, operations, and the outcomes that we want, at the other end, the outputs are student success and equity, but there's that in-between. And we got to do work in that in between to change attitudes and behaviors. So then it really that's where those rich discussions happen, but then they move to action. So yeah, thank you for unpacking that one about the grading, because we don't have those kinds of conversations. Any other ahas that as we begin to wrap up here, any other ahas about the process overall that you would like to share?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:49:34] One of the things that we talked about a lot as the teams were getting up and going was that there's always a lot of equity discussion. Your profession, professional development during flex week where people talk about equity, what is equity, What does this mean? We'll bring in speakers, We have equity speakers, we have book clubs where we read about different equity related items and what where we think we really were able to take off was this is where we actually got to put that equity work into action, where people actually got to do stuff and they were institutionally supported to do it. There wasn't fighting. There was no, how are we going to get this funded? It was we're going to fund you. We want your part time faculty to participate. We're going to support them and fund them until we run out of money, which is basically what we've done. And now we're finding other, now we're working with the institution to find additional funding to keep our part time faculty participating and to compensate them for their time. But you have to, at some point go from discussion to action. And this is what has led our campus to do a lot of the equity work that we were hoping was going to come from the discussions. And it formalized it in such a way that I think everyone feels like this is how the school now is going to try to operate, because we feel the support from our administration, we feel the support from our deans, we see the support from each other in the conversations and we see just how wonderful of teachers we are. And we see that in each other, right? We don't often get to see how great a teacher somebody else is, especially if they work across campus from us. And in that way, I think it's created this common ground to have the conversations that can lead to equitable change. But it is in a larger sense where people actually get to act in the ways that they think is best, again, for their academic neighborhoods and all of the people in them. I hope it continues and I hope we see it more colleges and whatever way that it comes to be. I think our students deserve it. I think our faculty and staff deserve it. I think it's good for everybody when we start doing these things. And we have to do it in a way where we're not blaming. Where it's more about let's come together to solve some of these bigger problems we have and not blame and do the things that we can do that we actually have control over.

**AS** [00:52:29] That's right. And the data piece is really interesting, right? Because we can as educators, we can wallow in the data and ask for data that's actually not going to help us, because some people, not all, they're looking for data to validate why students don't do X, Y, and Z and why the outcomes give us what they give us. And it's that kind of curiosity data. I'm just curious if they came from this high school versus that high school. You know, I'm just curious. It comes a point where that data doesn't really matter and in many cases, not all cases. So it's important. Then I want to end with the elements so audiences listening, how do I begin to do something like this? So, number one, I'm sure that there's questions about funding. So yes, if you have funding, that's great. I also know of colleges that provided a little bit of seed money and now these teams are coming together, they're part of college service or and or in faculty have certain hours of commitment per year that they have to do for professional development, some campuses are considering that. So we don't want the funding to stop you from from doing that. There are ways to bring the coalition of the willing. And that's the second element, is if you have built these meta-majors or schools or academic and career pathways, whatever you whatever you call them, bring in a small group of the coalition of the willing. I think, Rebecca, there has been, we've had as little as four members to almost ten. It's not that big and you find a setting for them to meet and it's usually 3 hours a month, 2 hours, I'm sorry, two meetings, an hour and a half. And this is the key. You mentioned this because of my three month rule, which is there's only really three months in a year for the typical campus to get priority work done. And I say, well, don't be the typical campus. And one of the ways to not be the typical campus is find a way to get the coalition of the willing to do some work over the summer. That's another important element. And then use a process. You don't have to use mine, use whatever, use plan, do check act, whatever process is out there, use some something so that your meetings are productive and you're not looking at data all day that it moves you toward an action plan. Those are basic elements. Rebecca, are there any other elements from your perspective that should be considered for someone who says, hey Rebecca, what else do I need to know? What's the 411, what else do I need to do to launch and launch these successfully?

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:55:11] You have to be willing to put yourself out there. It's really hard, I think, to be a faculty lead. We are not always nice to each other. I think we have very high expectations of each other, and I think those high expectations are really good. I think that's a really positive thing. If you have a vision and you think it's the correct way to go, find a way to say it over and over and over and over and over again until people finally hear you. I feel like I've been very fortunate that I had warm receptions from my faculty colleagues across campus. I think there's been a level of openness that has has and continues to impress me and makes me want to do better. I think you have to sort of embrace your entrepreneurial spirit a little bit and take a little bit of risk. I think sometimes taking risks is scary and we don't want to do it. I think you have to look at it a little differently and taking risks to sort of start something exciting and creates opportunities in start small if you have to and figure out but plan big.

**AS** [00:56:20] Beautiful. Rebecca. Thank you so much for participating in the Student Success Podcast.

**Rebecca Kaminsky** [00:56:26] Thank you for having me.