**Margaret Prothero 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 Margaret Prothero. Margaret as English Faculty and Guided Pathways faculty coordinator at Santa Barbara City College. She's been a faculty member since 1997, previously teaching in K-12. She earned her master's from UC Santa Barbara in Ed Psych with a reading specialist emphasis, and a B.A. from Wellesley College. Since January of 2018, she has served as the faculty coordinator for Guided Pathways, where she's engaged with leading institutional reform to remove barriers and redesign the student experience with equity intentionality from point of entry to completion. Welcome to the Student Success Podcast, Margaret.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:00:40] Thank you, Dr. Al. What an honor and a joy to be here. I've loved your podcast since its inception. You do an incredible job for us all. Thank you.

**AS** [00:00:48] Oh, that's very kind of you. And please, Al. Al is fine. I like to start the podcast with something that perhaps a hobby you wouldn't mind sharing, a talent, or story.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:01:03] That's a dangerous question to ask an English teacher. Absolutely. So many things we love, right? So many things we love to do, but I would have to say, when I think about all of them roller skating and being in my garden and taking photographs, really the best thing, the thing that gets me up in the morning is music. It's just always been music. Every aspect of music, playing it, listening to it, being on stage, singing a musical. I like to deejay our meetings. I just think music speaks to us on a completely different kind of level. It speaks to us without anything else. It can change your mood. It can change your feeling. It can make you feel connected in a way that nothing else can. And it just works on a whole other level.

**AS** [00:01:50] Let's unpack that a little bit, because I've seen your performance at Santa Barbara City College. You are an amazing singer and performer and you have been part of the theater arts. Can you tell us a little bit of what it takes to make a production happen, to actually implement that, to go from design to actually implementing it. And from your perspective, you are a participant, not necessarily directing it, but you have that perspective of what it takes to make a production become a reality. Can you unpack that a little bit?

**Margaret Prothero** [00:02:30] Sure, sure. Well, the deejaying is very different, right? I ran a radio station in college and that's where you have your own radio show. It's your own music that you're playing right when you're in a theater production. When I started at Santa Barbara City College, I took all the theater classes we offer here just for fun as a student. That's one of the things about us educators, right? We educators, we we love learning. And one of the joys is being on a campus where you can continue your learning. I mean, I'm talking to someone who's whose website is called continuous learning, so you get it. I took all the theater classes we offer at City College, and it was a very different kind of singing experience because I grew up singing. I'm Welsh. So of course, you know, it's a prerequisite we sing. And then I was in choirs in high school, and choir singing is very different because you're trying to blend with all the voices singing around you to make one, one sound. In musical theater, it's completely different kind of singing. The singing is forward and bright, and you're supposed to be a character singing. Even when you're singing in a chorus, you're your own character having your own voice singing. So it's a completely different thing. I had to learn about how to tell a story and how to have a character and how not to blend in with everybody else but have your own character and in a production of the director really is putting together this wonderful story for the audience. And there's something about live performance. And again, we talked about that kind of invisible connection. And live theater is just like nothing else. It's just a beautiful thing that's happening right there that you're creating with the audience. It's not a movie. It's not a recording, something you create together with all the energy in the room. It's hard to describe, but it's beautiful and I'm just such a big fan of people who can put it out there, be creative and try and go for it. It's it takes a lot of courage and it's a special kind of people that are willing to do that. And I always love in theater also the people behind the scenes. You don't see the people who have built the set, who are running the spotlights like my kids do tech theater, and they've been in production through running the spotlights. There's people doing the costumes, there's people on the headsets, there's more people backstage than on stage often. And this is a lot like what we do in education, right? There's the forward facing components of people who are with students, and there's all the things that happen in the background. There's all these components and all these invisible pieces that somehow have to fit together to make a production work. To make it work.

**AS** [00:05:07] Yeah, let's use that for a moment. Because I've noticed, I work with so many educators that were handed a multimillion dollar grant. And it's very interesting. Over the years, I've noticed that there are two people that tend to do really well with implementing a very complex set of initiatives. The first one I've noticed over time, chemistry faculty. They just I guess they have a lot of experience with ingredienst, you know, different chemicals and how to combine them, how to not. And they're very process oriented. And the other group are those who have a theater arts background. They really know what it takes to bring people together and have them perform right. But performing differently with a grant, which means just having them implement. Moving beyond talk. Moving beyond planning. But actually doing. So you've been a guided pathways faculty coordinator and that's a very interesting position to be in because as I've said many times, you are tasked with: go out there and make change. You are the change maker, and yet you're given absolutely no power. So it's different from theater arts. At least the director has some power. But could you imagine trying to direct a performance where the director has very little power and has to persuade people to do things and to come along? So one of the things that I wanted to focus on today is because, and for full transparency here, I've been working with Margaret now for a couple of years. I was brought in to help with action. I'm all about action. How can we get some action going? Campuses throughout the country have created these career and academic pathways, also known as meta majors, and they really haven't done much to actually change the student experience. So one of the things that I developed over the years is this inquiry and action process, which you just took ownership and you did such a great job with it and would love for you to unpack your journey along with all the faculty, everybody who's been involved in these data inquiry action teams per career and academic pathway. And then in a little bit, I'll ask you about the discipline-alike one that was launched at Santa Barbara City College. So, yes, if you can take us through the journey of the first inquiry and action teams, Margaret. Thank you.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:07:55] Thank you so much, Al. And I am just so overjoyed that we got the chance to get connected. And you've been helping us on our campus and bringing us your incredible inquiring action process. 2020 was a really terrible year. We all remember if there was any silver lining to that event, the events that occurred in 2020, it would be that you and I got connected with our campus and got this started. I know with your travel schedule prior to the pandemic, that probably wouldn't have been possible, but we were able to start wonderful data inquiry and create action teams because we were able to meet on Zoom together with all those teams and get all that done during that time. So I am by no means any expert at any of this and really rely on everybody's willingness to jump in and learn as we go and figure things all out. But we owe it to our students to try. So that's what we do. And I believe that when you get enough people together in the room who care, who want to see things change, who want to improve things for our students, and we're all have a shared process and a coach like you in the room helping make sure we're action oriented, student focused, equity focused, that good things are going to come of that. And so that is what happened with these data and create action teams. And we started off with their data and created action teams around the CAP, the career and academic pathways. And we also found the same process works just as beautifully with discipline alike, and it also works just as beautifully by program. So we have our data inquiry action teams in those three categories. So you asked me about the CAP category, so we can start talking about that. We have three data inquiry and action teams now around our career and academic pathways. We have one for arts, one for health care, wellness, public service and one for business and entrepreneurship. And the first ones we created were when these programs were really struggling because of the pandemic, it's very hard to teach a theater class, we talked about theater and music, when you are remote. How do you teach acting on Zoom effectively? How do you have productions and how do you do music classes? And gosh, our faculty were just incredible at how they tried to navigate all of that and what they tried to do. But with all of the enrollment problems across the state, plus the pandemic, programs were really struggling at that time. And we thought, well, if anyone can benefit from our taking a new process and really trying to make changes through a new process, it would be this group. So that's where we started and we began in your process with looking at the data and it was disaggregated data across all of the programs in this CAP, and then identifying the needs statement based on that data and then researching strategies for addressing that need, determining what things we were going to implement, talking to students to getting feedback on those strategies and then doing them. And it we did a lot and it was very specific and action oriented and the things that have come over have been amazing. So specifically with the arts, one of the goals we had was when we looked at data, we noticed that students were not signing up for all the variety of intro level arts courses that they were tending to go towards one or two courses mainly and need not know about all their different options. And we thought, what if we were to help students really see all their options for all the arts classes at the intro level and to help students understand the value of arts. No matter what your major. So their goal was to get more majors to get more people no matter what your major to see the value of arts classes and to see the great variety of arts classes. Theater alone, you've got costume technology and makeup technology, you have stagecraft, you have engineering, lighting, design. There's such a variety of things. And from a unit perspective, you can get units working on productions or building in the sound, you know, in the stagecraft classes and so on. And then those are all the departments. Graphic Design has a wonderful creative thinking class that is supposed to be wonderful for business and entrepreneurs and engineers and people who need to think creatively. It's all about learning, brainstorming strategies and creative problem solving, things like that. So that team built a Trello board of all introductory level arts classes for all the departments in that CAP, and filled it with examples of student work labeled them all by which courses were CSU transferable, you see, transferable, etc. Put in the kind of selling features of the class like this class has a zero textbook cost. This class is hands-on, this kind of projects that we do, this is what you'll learn. And this whole board was created by this team reaching out and connecting with all the other departments. Additionally, this team also created a pop up online art exhibition that connected all of those programs as well around a theme. And we published that online and it was featured in local newspapers, and all the students got this beautiful chance to be seen, all their beautiful work across all these wonderful departments, including ethnic studies, arts classes and photography, documentary filmmaking. It was it was beautiful. And they're going to be doing another version of this both online and now in person this year with a new theme. And that's just two tiny examples of lots of the work that particular team has been doing. And did you want me to share about other teams at this point?

**AS** [00:14:13] For the the Arts team, the data showed, as you mentioned, that there was an enrollment issue and with the host of all these beautiful art classes, the second thing was looking at, kind of this realization that we could be more culturally responsive in our teaching. And so can you describe the theme that all these faculty worked together on, and then that highlighted students?

**Margaret Prothero** [00:14:44] So the theme of the first arts pop up exhibition is justice: environmental, economic, racial. And this theme was decided because it was also the theme of our Honors Program Conference, and this was a student determined theme for the Honors program, and we wanted to join them in this wonderful theme justice, environmental, economic, racial. The theme for this year's has just been determined and it's going to be transitions. And this is going to combine with our creative writing department, because that is the theme of this year's creative writing publication. And it also correlates very beautifully with our new Dream center that has just opened up on our campus and all of the legislation and current work with DACA students right now. So we feel that's a very nice and broad and open and lovely theme for us all to explore together. Transitions.

**AS** [00:15:53] Thank you. And, and I'll have in the show notes a link to that Trello and to the pop up exhibition so you can see all that beautiful student work. Could you describe, there was, you know, what the pandemic and what you mentioned earlier about the arts. There was kind of a little bit of, let's say, a little bit of low morale. And as a result of going through this process, there was a by product of this that you had shared with me before about how faculty and others were able to collaborate more. What was that by product of the process in addition to the beautiful action that they took?

**Margaret Prothero** [00:16:30] That's a great question. I think when times get tough, it's often that arts is the first thing that gets on to the chopping block. People tend to think it's dispensable, and I believe that that's when we need the arts the most. Right. Like we started the show with we talking about the power of music, we talk about theater, the power of storytelling. Right. And all these things that we need as people to connect. We need art, we need beauty. We need all of that creativity. So when all of this was happening, yeah, there was some serious concern about arts programs being cut, frankly. I mean, people were very anxious about the low enrollments across the state and these trends. And people would be throwing out, you know, crazy ideas about cutting arts programs. And it it worried everybody very much. So bringing this group together in this very intentional way to do something, to be in action about it really helped and connected departments, which typically only I mean, typically we work within our departments, right? We have our colleagues in our departments that we work with. And unless you're on committees where you're meeting with other people, it could be fairly insular. So bringing together all the faculty from this whole camp really helped us connect these different departments together by CAP. And when you look at the data by CAP, it tells a different story. I really am a firm believer in looking at the data by CAP because the needs of arts students when you disaggregate the data by CAP are very different from the needs, say, from the health care, wellness, public service students. It tells a different story. And if we look at the data just as a whole campus, we missed that story. You missed the needs by CAP. And one of the things you've always been a proponent of, Al, is being very intentional about CAP data and that leading to very specific actions in real time. What do we know? What can we do now? What can we do tonight? And that drive was really something the arts team in particular really wanted to do something right away because they were in that moment of really needing to do something. But I see every department is in that place really when you look at it and every CAP has that same sense of urgency. We all really have to do something now. And so having this process really helps you do something now. Then you're not just guessing, you're not just going, well, I think this will help now. It's based on actual numbers. You've looked at the data, you've talked to students, you've researched. It just really feels very deliberate and intentional, which is the only way then you're going to know you're doing something that's going to actually help. But we talk about the way the the faculty feel. We've seen this in all the inquiry and action teams. The chance to work collaboratively with our incredible coworkers and colleagues is something it is just indescribable how terrific it can be and how it is. The level of trust, the level of creative problem solving and teamwork that comes out of all these different people coming together with one intention of improving things for your students. And what ends up happening is how much you learn from each other, but then just how much can get done right.

**AS** [00:20:06] Thank you. And some nuts and bolts information for everyone. Margaret, did all the recruiting, sent out the call, got the coalition of the willing. We had, it was less than ten people, but that's okay. That represented a wide range of disciplines. And we met twice a month for an hour and a half, so we met for 3 hours and we made every minute count with minimal work in between the meetings and something that's critical too, it's it's just so important because of my three month rule, which is really the typical campus really only has about three months in a year to get stuff done. So getting that coalition of the willing to even do some work, meet, not a lot, over the summer and a winter so to keep that momentum going and so when you have these highly productive meetings, they are data informed and we only spend two or three meetings on the data, that's it. We already come in with the equity gaps. We don't spend a semester or a year, "Oh, what do you think that data is telling you? Oh, or so let's explore that some more." I mean, that's fine, but people just get hung up on the data and don't do action. So that's a little bit of the nuts and bolts. Can you explain more, the journey of one more CAP, and then we'll get into the discipline-alike one, Margaret?

**Margaret Prothero** [00:21:30] Sure, sure thing. So I mentioned that the needs of the arts CAP students, they were telling a different story. They were showing that when students said they wanted to have a theater degree, they got the theater degree. That problem wasn't in the completion problem was more and more of a social, larger social issue of students, particularly students of color, determining that arts was something that was going to be valuable and going into arts classes. Now you look at the data for our health care, wellness and public service CAP. It's tells a very different story. We have now hundreds of students coming in. Let's talk about Santa Barbara City College here. Almost a thousand students a year coming in saying they want to have a nursing major. But the nursing program takes maybe 80 students a year. So where do those other hundreds of students go? What we determined was we needed them to know about all their options earlier in their journey. They need to know about kinesiology, about medical imaging, about cancer information management, health information technology, addictive disorders, counseling, justice studies. All of these things where if you're coming in with a passion for service and helping your community, nursing may not be the right match for you. But how do you find that out sooner in your journey rather than later or the worst case scenario, you don't make it into nursing for one reason or another, and then you walk away feeling like a failure when it just wasn't the right fit for you for a number of reasons. It's not for everybody, but it's the one that people know about. Similarly, a lot of times people will come in saying, I want to be a psychology major. Maybe they took a psychology class in high school and they loved it and thought, Well, that's it, I'll do that. And they haven't heard of sociology or anthropology or any of these other kind of disciplines yet. And they find them later in their journey. So the health care, wellness and public service CAP, we're seeking to address that question and get students information more quickly to get inspired and find their passion and find that thing that they do connect with earlier on. And so they're building a canvas, an online course that we want to auto enroll students in for this discipline to help them see. And we're filling it with videos of current and former students and alum and people in the field talking about what's a day in the life of a kid physiologist? What is this field? What do we do here? What is it like? Advice for students, how to connect with your faculty in your cap, all these kind of things to help. And that's what that group is knee deep in right now. And I will echo what you said about starting in the summer. That's a really critical piece of advice I have is is starting these groups off in the summer and then continuing the work throughout the year. And I will also say that one of the ways I kind of describe a lot of this work is a bit like a train where I'll say, you know, the work takes off and we have a very specific set of weeks and goals. So the summer group, for instance, will start with a team of people, and then when that session is over, that train pulls to the station. New people can come on, some people can come off and we keep going, and then there's the next set. So we have these groups are not just the same people all semester by semester. And some people we're joined by a lot more people. We have others besides the disciplines and the chairs in the team as well. Counselors are part of our team, academic counselors. Librarians have been part of our team. Right. So whoever needs to be a part of this, tutors sometimes have been a part of it. And we always bring in students. So it's it's been very fluid and in some cases, it's even gone outside the CAP. So, for example, in our arts team, we've connected with our American Ethnic Studies professor who teaches the arts-based classes in American ethnic studies, like Chicano art classes and so on, because that has a tie to art, even though it's technically not in the arts CAP. Those kind of connections are really, really crucial.

**AS** [00:25:43] One of the things that I loved about the public service CAP was that there was a team member who really looked at some additional data around Latinas, especially for, specifically law enforcement. So he already had some research that they actually make one of the most effective law enforcement personnel because they know how to de-escalate much better than other groups. And he also looked at the research that they are much better at engaging the community in a positive way. And so we wanted to increase the number of Latinas in this particular area. So can you talk a little bit about that and then what action took place? Because this inquiry and action process is also about, whenever possible, that equity intentionality. So can you tell us about that part of the journey?

**Margaret Prothero** [00:26:39] Absolutely. And the Latinas in Law Enforcement series was really incredible that Dave Saunders put together. It was a co-presented by our Guided Pathways data Inquiry and action team and the School of Justice Studies and the Career Center. There was a lot of people coming together to make this happen. And what happened was he pulled together this incredible group of women currently working in law enforcement, Latina women in our county. And they came in and offered a six-session course or a five-session course for women on our campus. It was incredible. So they talked about various career pathways in law enforcement, how to prepare for them, non sworn law enforcement positions like dispatchers and records techs and so on. Sworn positions about the hiring process, the Academy FTO patrol. And then they talked about career advancement opportunities like pathways to detective work, special assignments. It was just a really incredible series where they got to meet women in the field and really talk about all of this parts of the process and get supported and nothing like that had ever been done before on our campus. And it was a really intentional way of addressing a specific need that Dave saw. Well, you mentioned the other series also, which was called Best Series, which is Beyond Expectations and Stereotypes. And this was Co-Presented also by EOPS and the Career Center and Justice Studies Department and our data inquiry and action team. And this was looking at a diverse group of Santa Barbara County legal professionals. And they, the speakers were a combination of underrepresented groups in the legal field who had similarly diverse backgrounds as Santa Barbara City College students and the panel shared their experiences and offered insight as to how they overcame the same struggles many students face. And they aimed to provide students with practical tools and information to pursue a legal career. So we had Judge Duran, who graduated from Santa Barbara College of Law, and she is a superior court judge. And she, in her presentation, offered students a special zoom link to watch her in court, you know, as an incredible opportunity. And we had a public defender and judges and attorneys and the assistant director for admissions at UCLA School of Law. Just, it was an incredible series. And another example of what this happened out of this data inquiry and action team because of the need that was seen.

**AS** [00:29:43] And that's just the beginning. It's six step process where really the heart of this is an action plan. The teams have to come up with the the one or two or three strategies they're going to implement. They have to actually unpack the actions. Who's responsible for what timelines, anticipate challenges and how are we going to support one another? So each action plan is different per CAP. And I want to transition now to to the discipline-alike one because that one's a little different. You still have you still want to look at the data. You still want to know who your students are. But we focus on instruction as the action plan, if you will. There is is actually a lesson plan. So we did one for English. And if you can take us through their journey to collaborate. To be at what I like to call that intersection of instructional analysis and data analysis.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:30:46] When we started out with our Arts team, I talked about how this was a really critical time with the pandemic, and we thought if anybody could benefit from this kind of exploring of a new process, it would be Arts. Well, similarly, the same thing was going on with our English college level English class, English 110. This was post AB705. This was right at the very beginning of now not having all those developmental remedial courses. And this is that was my department, by the way, I was the English Skills Department chair. This is where I had taught for 15 years, 20 years. And our campus was English skills, all this developmental remedial classes. That was my life. And now that's gone. I'm going to tell my story here, which I've told you before. It's a little bit off topic, but why I came to the guided pathways work. I talk about how I really love my favorite day is commencement. When after the ceremony, all the faculty line up and the students marched through this corridor of faculty high fiving and pulling students into a hug. And you're just so happy seeing them, so happy and having got their degree and certificate and how I would go every year and scan all those students walking through, scan every face, trying to find my students and how I wouldn't see my student faces. There are students I knew were from theater, you know, where they worked in the cafeteria. I knew them from other places, but. But not my students very rarely. And that really hit me. It's very powerful because we we really love to see all those students be successful on that big stage. And we just aren't seeing all the students who don't make it to that stage. And I'm very cognizant of that. The reality is, even though students are being successful, say, in my course or in our courses, just having to start that far behind and work their way up just made it before they could even get to the college level course. Right. You could just see it. They just couldn't get to that finish line. That's when I wanted to when Guided Pathways was happening, I thought, well, if I can bring that perspective of of all these years and English skills and understanding what the students are going through and bring that into this, that's how I came to to do the work. So taking that now into English 110, this was a course that needed some serious rethinking and thinking and consideration and time and effort in this process for us to figure out what we were going to do. And thankfully, we had a really wonderful department chair at that time and our new department chair also who really also wanted to us to unpack this. We see very clearly English 110 is a gatekeeping class, right? Most people who take English 110 are not English majors, right? They're there because English is required for just about every degree and certificate you need at a community college. So it behooves us to really rethink what are we teaching and why. And I really appreciate the backward designed concept of where are they going, what do they need to be able to do. So this team came together because we as a department realized we were needing to change. We went through your six step process, but this time, instead of implementing different strategies, we implemented a lesson plan. And Al, in all of my 25 plus years of teaching, I have never once done what we did, which is imagine all these English teachers together in one room, all creating the same lesson plan. Every single detail of this lesson plan was the same. We wrote it together, the intro, the video. It was going to be based on the graphic design organizer, the questions. They all have it from soup to nuts, everything we wrote together as a team, and I've never done that in all my years of teaching ever. We all do our own thing, you know, typically we'll do our workshop together, we'll do our roundtable, we'll agree on something we'll do. But then we if we do it our own way, we do it. We do our own thing. This was like nothing else by having this team work together and it was difficult. It took us weeks, hours and hours of hashing out every detail. Do you like this video? Do you like this video? How about this? I mean, but what happened out of those very rich, wonderful conversations that team gelled and really came to lean on each other and trust each other and feel safe together. Sharing fears, taking risks. Being very open about questions or problems that they're facing in their classrooms. Those of us in the team who had been from the English Skills Department were offering up our suggestions, too. So we would say things like, well, you know, this is a very difficult video. So I probably let students know that ahead of time. And I'd probably mention you want to watch this more than once and the first time, watch it this way. And the point is, everybody was bringing their own strategies to the table. We were able to learn and grow with each other. And everybody had so much to offer. And this included people who would self report themselves as being a new faculty member or a young faculty member who may feel in a larger department that they have to, you know, just kind of pay their dues and be quiet and just learn from everyone else. When in this team, we were excited to see what this person was doing and what they were bringing to the table. Does that make sense? So it just gave us all an opportunity to share and learn and grow together that we had never had before. And the result was we all taught the same lesson plan at the same time and then debriefed it together, wrote these incredible documents that you've guided us through. Well, with the obstacles, the barriers, what happened? What did we do that may have led to the successes in the lesson? We looked at the data, and I did mention what this was all about. We had determined it would be about analysis. So what we were doing, our data, we looked at the success data, but that didn't tell the whole story. So we brought in examples of student work and we talked about that. And we all determined that one of the issues students were facing was analysis when they're writing essays. And in fact, we couldn't even agree on a definition of analysis as a team of educators. So we thought, well, that's the first thing is let's have students talk about what is analysis. And that was the basis of this lesson. And then what we did was in their first essay, we then looked at those essays and said, now how was their understanding of analysis in this essay? Did what we do in this lesson lead to what we wanted it to do? And then we disaggregated that. And then that team just kept growing and learning. And what we learned was a lot of students were dropping out after the first essay, you know, would hit or midway, and when they started getting feedback on their essays and we realized that, you know, a lot of the communication that we give to students can be discouraging to them or their experience discouraging. We see it as a writing process. Right. We know that the first draft of the first papers and things are just going to get better and better the more you work with them. And students may not come with that understanding or they may just feel so overwhelmed or bring with them. Also, such past traumas from English classes. English and math, both. Both have this where students come in saying, I'm just not a writing person, I'm not a reading person. I'm, I can't do this. So we started reading the book Ungrading by Susan Blum and some people on the group started playing with some ungrading practices, and then that kept growing and then the whole team read also grading for equity. Joe Feldman. And now this team just keeps evolving. And the second time we did the same lesson, but we rewrote the whole lesson based on the ungrading practices that we had read here and then. Now this new team is here, the next version of it, right? It just keeps getting new iterations and we are now building in a whole canvas course for our department that we're going to be sharing with them on equity and grading and a whole other way of looking at the English 110 class. And we are all hard at work right now filling this module with all this information and examples of assignments and work and everything. We need to take that to our department to make some really significant changes to the way we teach English to our students. But all that came from that initial group. You have to start somewhere. We couldn't start saying we're going to do ungrading. This is all but a very natural evolution that has occurred from this team, which just made it very intentionally to know we've got to do something differently for our students. It's not working the way we're doing it. We have to keep trying something new because what we're doing isn't working, can't keep doing the same thing.

**AS** [00:40:24] Thank you for sharing that I often hear, oh yeah, we do that. We have FIGs, faculty inquiry groups. And when I ask them, well, tell me exactly what you do? No, they don't do this. They don't. So here's the key. Because I don't want people to feel like, well, this can only happen at some campuses and it's got to be Al's process. No, get the coalition of the willing. Make sure you establish your settings. A setting is nothing more than a time and place for educators to get important work done. Don't spend a lot of time on the data. Your first two meetings and your prep meetings are critical because you want to go in already with a lot of the equity information and then you move forward with action. So use whatever process you want that's out there. There's plan, do check, act. There's just so many. But use a process because if you don't, your meetings end up being about, it just kind of go into complaining mode or they go into, let's talk more data. And then when you talk more data, you're trying to guess why students are doing this or why they're not doing that. And that's just it's not productive. So get that team, get a process and make sure you have one of them as a designated facilitator who has the power to say, hey, we're going off topic. Let's come back to, let's go back on topic. So I just want to make sure everybody knows this is not something that could only happen at some of these campuses that I work with.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:42:05] 100% You have to have a process that goes beyond what you currently do. So workshops are great, roundtables are great. And you need something like this that's very deliberate if you're going to make this kind of level of changes. And I will also say that you need people who are willing to try things and not be afraid of knowing if it's going to work. You just got to go out. We don't know if it's going to work or not. We're going to try something because that something is better than what we're doing now, which may be nothing. So I'm going to say another thing we did was we wanted to see what is happening to our students who are not being successful in this English 110 class. It was like a survivorship bias, which I learned about from my daughter who was telling me about, they'd study the planes that would come back from World War Two, that came back with bullet holes, and they would reinforce the planes in the places where there were no bullet holes because those were the planes that didn't make it back. The planes that made it back with those bullet holes in those places made it back. But the ones didn't. Right. Does that make sense? So the idea is like we keep studying the students who are here and we don't find out what's going on with our students who are not here. So this summer, from this data inquiry and action team, they led a team of student tutors for this class to call and reach out to 400 students who did not pass or who left English 110 last year to find out what happened, what was their experience, to learn from them. And then that drove us to this part about the grading for equity and the things that we're learning now. But that, again, came out of this team meeting together and just having that time in that setting and these ideas. So you do need to have people who are willing to be uncomfortable with things not being set and determined and to be open to trying. Something like this team is just being so open with ungrading, which is such a scary principle for a lot of people because it just turns a lot of our most cherished beliefs on its head. And you have to be open to new research and new methodology and new pedagogy and be open to listening and learning from your colleagues and to really examine our current practices in a very critical way.

**AS** [00:44:30] When you do, you learn. And so that's what these teams have been doing is action. They have been doing. When you're doing, you're learning. Now, the outcomes of this doing, of this action, there are time lags. It takes some time to know that when we implement with fidelity and then make adjustments, it just takes some time to see are we making a difference in the data. And that's something that we're in the middle of where we need to do more implementation and explore that. But I want to be really clear that I've been talking about this for a long time. It's called the in-between. We have all sorts of mandates, initiatives, etc. and then at the other end, we're looking for outcomes. But we really don't focus on that in between. That in between, it's so critical to actually achieve those outcomes is that we need to see attitudes and behaviors change. And that's what we've been doing, actually. We've been focused on that in-between. On getting faculty and others to understand, to make that shift from external attributions to internal attributions. That I don't have control over a lot of things that my students come in here with. But boy, if I if I really work hard at this, things that I have control over, I'm going to make a difference. And that's really what we've been working on this whole time, is that in between. We hope to see in the data as we implement, this making a difference. I do see it actually. I'm seeing little bits here and there, but that outcomes piece everybody needs to understand just takes time. It really does take time, but you got to work on that in between in order to make that shift.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:46:22] You know, it doesn't take time? How good you feel when you are in this work. People leave our sessions feeling so pumped up, energized and excited and happy in the midst of this work. Even though we don't have the answers yet, even though we don't have the data or showing it to go, we just feel differently when we leave that setting together than when we started. And I can't say that about any other committee or any other place as as a group of faculty, you know, or classified professionals working together. Right. But it's just being in action. Doing this work together is just such a powerful feeling, knowing that you're doing this intentionally and not just sitting around talking, not that that's what happens everywhere else, but it's often what happens is you fall into a pattern of talking, talking, talking and not doing. And it's in the doing and trying and building and creating that we feel better because we are we're actually implementing something, doing something, trying something, and that feels good.

**AS** [00:47:30] It does feel good. And what I've heard from team members is that they have internalized this process and now they use it in other settings. Right. So now they've, it's a part of them. To ask good questions about the data, about the equity, and then really moving forward with action.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:47:49] That's right. And action and asking each other, asking a colleague, asking students where again, as educators, we just it's so unfortunate that we think we have to solve everything on our own often. You know, it's up to me to go and do my own Google research and figure something out and try something in my class. No, you know what? You can ask your students. You can say, hey, I'm thinking about changing my syllabus. I got this version or this version. What do you guys like? How do you use the syllabus? Give them a little survey. Find out. Listen to them. Talk to them. Talk to your colleagues. Can I take a look at your stuff? What are you doing here? We tend to think that by asking, it's somehow showing us as being less knowledgeable than we're supposed to be or something like that. And part of this process, I think, really breaks down the walls of this that we like to put up around ourselves and to saying, let's learn from each other. We're not in this alone. You're not alone. And that's a message that we all need to see. And I think that's something we all learned in our pandemic as well, how important those connections are and teaching can be, in particular such an isolating field. Right. And we are not alone. We don't have to be alone.

**AS** [00:48:59] That's so true. And we're growing. We have more CAP teams that have come on board. We have more discipline-alike teams. I'm sure our listeners are going, well, how much does this cost? And what I would say, it varies per campus. You're looking at roughly 3 hours a month in meetings, maybe one or two outside of the meetings. You want to have a lead for each. You want to give that person a little bit more time if you have funding like equity or guided pathways, that's perfect for that. But the point here is just seed money to have people experience this. But the way you actually institutionalize this, make this part of the work, is that it becomes part of college service. I know another campus that's really looking at this, faculty have set hours that they have to complete per year for professional development. And so they're including that, including those hours in this work. If you have funding, great. But by all means, don't let the funding stop you from starting this work because they are teams that are doing this as part of college service.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:50:07] Often people will ask me, well, how do you get faculty to do this? And I think that's the wrong question. I don't think you get people to do it. That sounds like you're coercing, you know, or try to drag people into this. I think people are really wanting to do it and you're giving them the opportunity and you're supporting them to do it with this process and with this setting and with a coach like you Al and a process, some other process, you're just giving them the chance to make things better because what are we left with otherwise is again like maybe guessing, kind of throwing spaghetti at a wall, trying stuff and not having this process where, you know, here's the issue, here's the defined need, here's how we're going to solve it, here's what we're going to try to do. Here's our action plan, here's everything to implement. It's just very nice and specific. And people who are hungry to make things better are dying to make things better. They want to make things better. And your beautiful phrase that we use all the time is the coalition of the willing. And there are people who have the time and the effort and really want to make things better. And we're just giving them the chance to do that and supporting them along the way and getting this people together to do all that creative, beautiful problem solving and work together. So for instance, our automotive program is going through this process and they created the most beautiful eportfolio, Google sites, combining all their courses so that students can put together a beautiful portfolio of all their work as they go through all the certificates in the programs of their class that will help them, A. Work with their professors to show which classes they've taken and which ones they haven't and how they're doing, and help them make sure that they actually apply for that degree and certificate at the end of their journey, as well as provide them with something to take to employers to get employment when they complete their work. Then you've got like our PE program, which has been doing incredible work with their life fitness center and making incredible connections on our campus, creating something called the Brain Body Connection, which has been in partnership with our Well and putting on this wonderful event connecting physical and mental wellness. Just everybody's just been doing just incredible, wonderful work. Our entrepreneurship group, right? Our Math 137 now has a team that's been working on instructional plans as well. We find this process works in any of these settings because it's so deliberate and so intentional. And bringing people together who are willing to do it. So thank you all for bringing this process to us. And as you said, it doesn't have to be this process, but has to be a process. You do have to pick something and then do it.

**AS** [00:52:54] Right, and that coalition of the willing, they are the catalysts. They are the spark. Once they do start doing the work, other people start to pay attention. And then we bring more people on board and more and more and more. And we're never going to get 100% of everybody. That's okay. We're creating this beautiful change over time, and we're trying our best to throw that equity in there. So as we wrap up, I wanted to ask you, imagine that there is someone at a campus, a faculty who has just become the Guided Pathways faculty coordinator.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:53:42] [Laughter] Sorry. Run, run, run and hide. I'm teasing.

**AS** [00:53:51] No, no, you're so. You're so funny. What? Now, every college is different. There's different politics, culture, but there's still a lot of the same. Right. We know that colleges, any time you have a bureaucracy, you get dysfunction. We know that there's people that push against change. Right. We we know I mentioned earlier you're told to go make change, but have no authority to make it. So what would be some Margaret tips here? What advice would you give to someone who's just starting this to help them feel successful? Well, not feel but be successful or feel and be successful.

**Margaret Prothero** [00:54:37] What advice I have for someone who is going to take on this role of Guided Pathways coordinator? I feel incredibly honored to have been serving our campus in this role this last couple of years. And I've learned so much. I've learned so much. I feel like I should have had two Ph.D. for this. I've learned more about our campus than I ever thought. When you teach, you tend to have your material, you know, your content, your course in your department. I couldn't tell you, I've learned so much about academic counseling and about transfer and about the way all of our committees work together and the way administrators work to support the faculty, and about our basic needs and more about what our students are going through that we don't see in the classroom because they may not necessarily come and talk to you, just all the different pieces and how they fit together. So I think the first thing you have to know is that it takes time. And to be patient, I'm definitely not a patient person. I want to get things going right away. I want to be in action. I want to see change immediately. And there's a fine line between that and the patience of things to unfold when they're going to happen, but also being aware of what the obstruction is so they don't fall into those traps, too. So it's really is a very, very big learning curve of all these pieces together, how change happens, what you need to do to facilitate that change, understanding how this whole college mechanism works, how institutional inertia happens, so how you can dismantle that and actually get to the change. When to look to outside help, Al. Like, like you. There was so much that I knew and I knew that it was beyond my knowledge and I knew to lean on other people. So for example, the RP Group was a huge help and support, right? Darla Cooper and Rogeair Purnell came in and helped us with all of our onboarding redesign work. Our Guided Pathways Regional Coordinators helped us a lot, worked with me a lot and helped me learn a lot of things. And now our new regional coordinators. You coming in as a coach, working with the help. Rob Johnstone came in and did office hours and helped talk with us as well as my counterparts at other colleges learning from them and what they were doing. Also Mandy Davis and Rogeair Purnell, who were our mentors for me, just really reaching out and getting that support and learning from outside your campus and then really learning on what's going on inside your campus. And here's the thing to know once you start fixing something, it's I use this analogy of it's like inheriting a house and you say, okay, looks like I'm going to have to update this avocado green kitchen. And you take out the cabinets and you go, Oh, there's mold damage. And then you keep going further like, oh, there's termite damage. And then you keep going further, like, oh, the roofs leaking, there's foundation problems. Holy cow. When does this problem stop? The deeper you go, the bigger the problems are. And it just takes so much to fix. But it's so right when you're doing it because there's just you have to address all the different pieces and you have to be ready for that because, you know, until like just getting our CAPs online. We're getting our maps online. Just required all this data to be cleaned up and figured out and all these systems that don't talk to each other. And things had to be hand copied and pasted and it just took so long. And then meanwhile, you got people going, How come we don't see anything happening here yet? How come we don't see anything? What's going on? I think something you've said in the past, which really helped me a lot out here, is that there is no ribbon cutting ceremony for guided pathways. People are going, when does it start? Guess what? We've started. We're doing the work. When does it end? Where is that finish line? Guess what? There's no ribbon cutting ceremony and there's no finish line. When are we going to be finished making things better for students? Well, should we ever finish? When should we stop asking ourselves, How can we make things better? How can we fix things? How can we bring more equity intentionality to our work? I'm never going to be finished asking that question, and nobody should. And the deeper you go in fixing things, the more problems you're going to see. But you're just going to be patient. You're just going to keep working at it. You're going to build relationships. I think that's the biggest thing, is really building relationships, finding people who want to get work done. And here's the biggest one of all. Talking to students. So many times we do something and then turn around and ask students, so what do you think? Instead of bringing them into the room, really talking with them, asking them, what do you think? How should we build this together? And another day we'll talk about our Guides program that we started by having students in the room who have led us through that discussion and helped us figure out, what do you need? Students really have to be with us and we really have to be talking with them because they will tell you what they need and what's going on.

**AS** [01:00:15] Beautiful. Margaret, thank you for participating in the Student Success Podcast.

**Margaret Prothero** [01:00:20] I'm a big fan of the podcast, Al, and I'm just beyond honored that a podcast that would have people like Darla Cooper and Michael Baston and Diego Navarro would also include me. I'm nowhere near these giants that I lean on and listen to and learn from, so it's a very big honor to be here, Al. And I just really appreciate you and all that you do for education and to support educators. Thank you so much.

**AS** [01:00:46] Oh, thank you. You're very kind. But hey, listen, people want to learn from those who are down in the trenches, so to speak, doing the work. I've had other faculty here as well, researchers, you name it. So you just add so much to the conversation and I'm sure everyone learn from you, Margaret. So thank you for all the hard work that you're doing at your campus. Again, thank you for participating in the podcast.