**Pascal Charlot Interview**

Learn about the next evolution of community colleges, how to serve high academic achieving disproportionately impacted students, and the importance of kindness, dignity, and love.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a privilege to have President Pascale Charlot of Miami Dade College's Kendall campus. She previously served as dean of the Honors College, where she improve the quality of the program by developing an innovative equity pathway for first generation college students from historically underrepresented communities that integrates both academic affairs and student services. She was selected by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program to join the Aspen Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence, a leadership program aimed at preparing the next generation of community college presidents to transform institutions to achieve higher and more equitable levels of student success. She attained her BA in sociology and economics with a certificate in women's studies from Duke University as a transfer student. She later earned her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Michigan. She has held Assistant Dean positions at New York University's School of Law and at Rutgers, where she built student-centered learning communities to help students achieve their goals. Welcome to the Student Success podcast, Pascale.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:01:05] Good to see you. It's an absolute pleasure.

**AS** [00:01:08] Well, we met a couple of years ago, I think it was March of 2019. We're at a conference/training and it's just been so nice to stay in touch. You were a dean at the time and now you are president, so congratulations.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:01:25] Thank you.

**AS** [00:01:26] Along the way, I've learned that you are a Brooklyn and Queens girl. I grew up in New York City's Queens and our friend Michael Baston over at Rockland Community College, he's a Queens boy. So tell me a little bit about being a Brooklyn, Queens girl.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:01:44] Even though we moved to Queens when I was in high school, I'm BK all the way all day. I'm never going to give up my Brooklyn credibility. And, you know, and I say that very fondly, I grew up in Bushwick in the 70s and the 80s. It wasn't pretty gentrified Brooklyn. And it was a working class neighborhood, a community of immigrants, largely Caribbean, and also from Latin America and primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican. And we didn't know any differences. We were family and it was a combination of living in an outer borough. And that since it's not Manhattan, the whole world that you live in, really centering on about a four to five block radius. And I just remember fondly the days of running up and down the street, playing Skelley, jumping hopscotch, and that proximity created a sense of intimacy. And I'm so grateful to have had a childhood where I interacted with the same people for an extensive amount of time. We're still in touch. And there was real love inside of a community where everyone cared about each other. You know, it sounds very idyllic. And we don't think about urban centers as places where love is nurtured. But it really, really was. And, you know, I think about the narratives that we see in the press, and it was very similar back in the 70s and 80s for some of these working class neighborhoods of people of color. And very often the narrative is around neglect or some other negative frame. It's not usually based in asset framing or any kind of growth mindset, that type of language that we use, it's usually people you write off. And I remember very fondly, you know, when I started to have some degree of awareness, the disconnect between what I read about the community I came from and the people that I knew, it was not the same at all. And and there's also another dimension to it where people are not their circumstances. You know, when you think about immigrants who come to this country very often, especially in a place like New York, you can have someone who was an engineer in their home country driving a taxicab or someone who was a doctor who, because of language, is not able to pass a credentialing exam. So you never know who you're with. And even people who are uneducated, who are the wisest in the room because they have other forms of wisdom in other ways of knowing. So I feel very fortunate to have grown up at a time when we interacted as human beings and not just did the technology thing, but also for an extended amount of time building, building connections. I had the pleasure of coming back to Brooklyn after all of my education and life experience, to be an assistant district attorney at the Brooklyn DA's office. And that was a source of tremendous pride to be able to serve in that capacity. Having said all of that, you know, Queens is OK, I got to throw you a bone. But I spent my sort of my high school years and my first couple of years in college in Queens. And it's a different vibe. It's just a different vibe, I think, about going to, I went to a Catholic high school in Astoria and I would ride the train to the last stop and we would get our bagels and sort of feel like we were growing up. But I also remember when we moved to Queens, it was sort of the cocoon that I had lived in in Brooklyn, where, you know, we had sort of a certain mix of ethnic groups and we were all on the same page. Queens is a little bit different, as you know. And I was thinking about a moment when I was in college. I attended St. John's University for two years before transferring to Duke, as you mentioned. And I remember being with my first boyfriend. Don't tell my mom, though. I still haven't told her the details of this story. And we drove to pick up a buddy and we drove into a neighborhood that was not very friendly to black people. And they were a crowd of young men. And when we drove into that crowd, they were not very happy. And this boyfriend told me when we got to our destination run inside the house because we had gone there to pick up a friend. And I did exactly that. And when I turned to look around, this gentleman had a baseball bat and he was swinging that bat for his life. A mob was heading towards attacking him and he hurt a few people with that baseball bat. Of course, the cops were called. He was the only one arrested and spent days in jail. And by Monday, he was back on campus. And I think about that because we were both traumatized by that experience. And yet we went back to class and really didn't have a place to process that trauma. And I think about that often when we look at our students experiences, what they're either experiencing firsthand or seeing their loved ones experience or watching play out in the news. You know, we all recognize there's trauma there. And as we think about the role of the community college in not only providing an education, but educating the whole human being, you know, presents a new opportunity for us to go past the statements of equity, diversity and inclusion and saying the right things about social justice. But when we think about the people underneath all of that rhetoric, there's pain. And so I think there's also an interesting opportunity for us as we start getting into this conversation to explore what could it look like for us to not shy away from that pain and think about what are the partnerships and possibilities to help students find their sense of place with it in order to transcend it and to not be defined by.

**AS** [00:07:33] So you ask you are a Brooklyn girl. That's where, that's where your heart is. I get it. You did high school in Queens. You know what's interesting? When I left New York, I decided to enlist in the Marine Corps. So I spent a hot, humid summer with the sand fleas and mosquitoes of Parris Island, South Carolina. And when I arrived there, I did know as the northern guy, with a Latino background, that the South was still mad about the civil war and these people that I met from the South. Oh my gosh, put stuff on their helmets like the south shall rise again. And then we get into the fleet. That's what they call when you when you're done with basic training and you got all the Confederate flags and you're like, wow, the racism is alive. But what's interesting, it's not just alive in the south. As you mentioned, there are pockets. I remember there were pockets in Queens and in Brooklyn. I mean, there was in Brooklyn in the 80s. You recall there was a huge issue. What part of Brooklyn? But at any rate.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:08:42] Bensonhurst.

**AS** [00:08:43] Bensonhurst. That's right. That's right. I think that was eighty five. Eighty six. And it's alive and well in the north. It's just often hidden. Fortunately for me, my neighborhood was very diverse and we, we didn't have those issues. So Astoria, that's where a lot of the Greeks hung out. And then you go to Jackson Heights and you got all the Colombians, and then where I grew up, Flushing, was just a mixed bag. But then you had this huge influx of people from Asia, incredible diversity. Look back at it fondly. Not always so much in terms of growing up in the 70s and 80s. It wasn't exactly safe. At any rate, it's nice that you had that experience. And thank you for sharing. Let's touch on that in a little bit, before we get into some of the questions I wanted, I always ask guests if there is a particular hobby or, I don't know, a superpower you might have something that you would like to share beyond your work experience.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:09:45] I'm a runner. I run half marathons. I didn't start running races until my mid to late forties. I talked a little bit about growing up in Brooklyn and that's all we did, was run up and down the street all day, every day. So I've been very lucky to have sports in my life throughout. I just never took up a particular sport for an extended amount of time. But I've fallen in love with running. What's really interesting about being a long distance runner is you typically don't find voluptuous women, especially women of color, going for the 13 miler. You know, that can bring its own baggage psychologically to think about your sport as your outlet. But it also becomes yet another place where you are the only one. And and overcoming. What does it mean to be successful? And it's a personal thing, right? I mean, I'm not breaking anybody's records. I'm not going to be standing on any blocks. All right. But it's really, it's really for personal reasons. And what I've come to love about the sport is that each and every time I take a run, whether it's on the weekends or preparing for to participate in a race, there's always doubt. You know, I'm never sure how I'm going to finish. I'm always committed to finishing. But the how is always a bit tricky. And what I've come to appreciate is that it requires a degree of humility to just face my limitations each and every time. And they are real physical ones. And there's also psychological ones. And there's what comes with experience. And doing it more and more often. But what I've come to appreciate is the level of humility it brings to me every weekend and how I'm able to be mindful of that when I think about people on our campus who are taking on challenges for the first time. And I also love the feeling of completion, no matter if I'm crawl into that finish line. I did that. And it's important to me that I do whatever I can in my roles at the college to ensure that our students can feel that sense of I did that, whether it's by completing an assignment or a class or getting a certification, you know, you learn the power of one step at a time when you're dealing with running for two or three hours, because if you think about three hours is too daunting, but one step at a time is akin to one class or even one assignment if a class is too much to to absorb. And so that sensibility is is something I value as a result of participating in and running

**AS** [00:12:17] A half marathon is no joke. That is amazing. Students' journey in many ways is like a marathon. And unfortunately, the data tells us that out of every ten runners we're lucky to have, depending on the campus, two or three actually complete. As someone who's a forward thinker, how do you see the role of community colleges post-covid where you seem to finally see some light at the end of the tunnel? What's your thoughts on the evolution of community colleges to help more students complete that marathon?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:12:54] I appreciate the analogy. And I think, you know, what covid has invited us to do is to put a pause on everything. Gone are the days of doing, performing our daily lives in an automatic way. And it's inviting us to be mindful and to bring a degree of awareness. So the statistic that you described, we have come to accept that it is the norm. For different reasons. And it's no one's fault. I mean, we're all working with limited resources. We're trying to deal with learning loss. We recognize the complexity of our students lives. And yet, and yet there's too significant a number that don't get to reach the finish line. And at what point is that just not OK? What's powerful about this moment of reset is it gives us an opportunity to say what will it take to come up with a new vision for who we are inside of the higher education ecosystem, which in many ways is like a system, a caste system. You know, we often think about the four year institution. Really at being at the center and like the whole world revolves around the four year in many circles, especially when you start looking at funding sources and then legislative decision making, and with the Biden administration, we're seeing a shift right in looking at what is the actual value added we provide. I worry that if that shift does not occur with a comparable shift in mindset that we are not in service to the four year schools, but that we are wholly incomplete in and of ourselves. And it's it's a subtle shift, but it invites different questions. And if we think about ourselves as whole and complete, the question becomes, what is the student development pathway look like from soup to nuts in this environment, which is easy if you're looking at a full time student for two years, it gets a little more complicated when you start thinking about three years, four years, five years, six years, and students stopping in and stopping out. But because it's complicated doesn't mean it's not possible. And so when we think about that, you think, what is the role of PLA if people stop out and they're working and they come back to school, what is prior learning assessment look like to ensure that when they return we take their life experience and we translate it into value? What does it look like if we start to really become aggressive with our four year partners and say, do you really need another 20 million dollar gift? What does it look like for us to say we're in this together? Like you won't have students if you don't invest in us in a different kind of way or when the legislature is thinking about cutbacks that will severely hamstring our work? Why are we the only ones fighting for those resources, and so if we start to really value ,and when I say we, I know we do, those of us listening to this podcast, but sort of the larger society has to really make a conscious decision, because what we know historically in this country is there is a a tendency to collapse value with price tag. And when we start talking free, there's the potential for the credential to be undermined because it's within reach financially. And that's going to defeat the whole purpose of providing people the gateway to an education if the value of the credential is diminished. And so how do we engage those outside of our sector to begin to invest in a different kind of way? And we're starting to see that. But there is a very conscious effort that has to be made to reframe our role inside of the system. Otherwise, we're just going to see a shifting of the previous mindset into this new normal where we have more people getting a credential that still is not going to translate into value and changing their lives.

**AS** [00:16:57] Very interesting because there's such a push for transfer to earn a four-year degree and the data is out there suggests that, yeah, if you have a four-year degree, you have a better chance in the long term than if you don't have one. But what you're saying is it should be enough with community colleges, not a transition place. It could be the completion place. How do you think you do that over time? How do you change that mindset where you can come here, learn some core skills, core knowledge and be marketable enough so employers go, oh, yeah, this student came out of Miami Dade. I don't need an extra 60 units. This these 60 or 70 are good enough for me. They can come to our workforce. What are your thoughts on that?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:17:46] You know, I think it depends on the pathway. I don't think it's a one size fits all. But this which is interesting, right? Because it's almost like thinking about equity from the lens of the system. And when we talk about that leveling the playing field, you know, I think that there is a need to be almost surgical in some ways with how who actually needs that stackable credential where the bachelor's is a stackable credential as opposed to thinking about the two year school as a pass through. Right. Because when for the transfer, the focus is on getting to transfer it. It devalues the actual time you're experiencing in the two year pathway because it makes it seem like you're just waiting to get through those credits to really get to the real education. Really know the value added is if we're meeting students where they are and they're coming into our institutions where we're doing a lot of work, there is good work happening at the community college in terms of college readiness and even transfer readiness. And that work becomes diminished when it's only when it's only value is in preparation for something else. So that's that's one piece of it. The other piece is less and less people don't want to pay for a four year degree. We're seeing more and more that the four year institutions are making a business case for students to enroll for four years. People are not thinking about time in the way they used to. And so I think we also do our students a disservice if what they can afford to invest in is a two year pathway. And we're talking primarily for the full time right now. If that's where they can land because they have to take care of their families or based on what's going on in their own lives, they may have kids and other reasons why they can't go for more than the four year. Why don't, we honor that investment in a way that allows them to really feel like they are on the road and they not doing they don't have to do something else for two years in order to go back. You know, one of the best times of the year at a community college is graduation. I've been to many over the last 10 years or so, and it's a different ballgame than a four year institution. I mean, people are strutting their stuff when they cross the stage. And often you can feel the sacrifice families made for them to come here. You recognize students have had two or three jobs or they've commuted for several hours. This is a big deal. And so there's a disconnect when the student knows what they invested to earn the credential. But out in the world and in the higher education system, the value varies. Right, and doesn't necessarily align with that effort. Now, we also know that people are in different places. So when they earn their credential, the question of whether they are ready, what they are ready for, what's being measured like all of that is up for negotiation, I think, rather than a blanket reflection of the two year degree, as always, being transitional.

**AS** [00:21:05] Yes, community colleges could serve as that completion institution or that's all students need to go out into the workplace. As you know, community colleges, so if we look at the data, we know that we have a lot of improvement still to go. And I'm thinking about that experience that you had with your boyfriend, that we won't tell your mom about. You experience trauma, you're students, and then you go to school the next day. There's this trauma that I think we need to prepare for. I think there's going to be a mental health crisis after covid where many people are really struggling mentally. They've had trauma through covid and then obviously people of color, they've been disproportionately impacted by it. So how do you think we can do a better job to serve students who are going to be coming in with so much trauma while knowing that there are limited resources, and there's only so much that community colleges can shoulder. They shoulder so much already. What are your thoughts on that?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:22:13] It's a really important question, and I would say they, and I want to think out loud with you because I certainly don't have all the answers. But, you know, I think what we are here to do primarily is education. We're not mental health organizations. Many of us have food banks. And we're trying to close gaps because of the impact on learning. But at the end of the day, we're an education institution. And the question that I would ask in response to your invitation is what's the nexus between that trauma and education? What's the nexus between the learning gains from last year because of this experience that we can turn into value for our students? One of the things that we did at Miami Dade College a few years ago is we became an Ashoka U. Changemaker campus. And this meant we joined a network of forty five schools that made a commitment to introduce a change making mindset and the skill set. And Ashoka is an organization that's really committed to social entrepreneurship and social innovation. And by becoming a change maker campus, what we wanted to do inside of the two year system, and we were the first two year institution to join the network, is to build an infrastructure that would allow people to find their agency. Because we know the students that come to our community, our campuses come from communities where there is trauma, right? Maybe not to the degree that we saw over the course of the last year, but certainly they are not immune to all the isms we talk about and other challenges that communities that are marginalized and disenfranchized tend to face. So we made a conscious decision to think about what does it mean to help people find their agency inside of their life circumstances. And that agency involved their ability to find solutions to the problems in their neighborhoods. So what was interesting about this network is that we joined the likes of of Duke and Brigham Young and Cornell, where these kids would go into other neighborhoods to study problems that they wanted to introduce the solutions for. And we said, hey, we don't have to go very far. Our students are living it. And what does it look like for us to give them the tools to take those situations and turn them into opportunities where they can bring their firsthand knowledge and experience to help transform that situation? And you have a different kind of problem solver. And what we know is when people can find the ability to impact a circumstance outside, something happens to them inside. That sense of I matter starts to take on a different impact in their lives. And there's a sense also that I exist right. When we put something out in the world that is changing something for somebody else, you actually are physically here and you start to find a sense of place inside of your community and inside of the classroom. And what we found is those kinds of efforts are a little bit unconventional. We tend to think about service learning. That's one dimension of it. This is the personal transformation that comes through the act of service. And I see that as an opportunity and work that we're going to deepen in order to continue to introduce the mindset and the skill set to face uncertainty, because that's really what happened during the course of the last year. The other bit of it that we're seeing here is, is the notion that we haven't done the greatest job in meeting our students, where they intersect and where those intersectionality are shaping how they see the world. So, for example, we all celebrate African Heritage Month in February, Women's History Month in March. Pride in April, etc.. But we don't really look at how do all of those affinity groups provide programing throughout the year and how do we develop some type of student development continuum if a student participates in all of these programs in the course of the year? What's different about them? That would not have been possible before. And so when we talk about processing the trauma really is what you're describing in an educational context. You know, what I see is the connection to agency finding the value through the reflection on that particular experience, honoring the resilience and the ability to see it through, recognizing the kind of empathy that can come out of that experience, which is very helpful to process inside of a Hispanic serving institution and also a majority minority institution where the people who work here look like the students. So empathy is like our social currency, and it gives us a different way to engage with the students. And I think that's going to be really important for us to translate those experiences into value. When we talk about transfer readiness and workforce readiness in the community college, we also have to think about equity readiness and how are we helping our students to understand their relationship to that conversation and what's the value added they bring and what do they expect in exchange. And so some of that processing, I think takes place in student life. It takes place when they're interacting with the administrative services offices and student services. It takes place in curricular programing and it takes place in the classroom. But the classroom isn't the only place, nor is it the places that are focusing solely on healing the trauma, but is sort of everything in between. And what we've also found by being part of this change making network is it does take a village to your point. So we have cross-functional teams where you've got faculty working with staff and administrators from different departments, really looking at the student experience more holistically. And I think that's an opportunity we have. And again, there's an agility in community colleges. Going back to your earlier question, where we're not tied to tradition in ways that traditional institutions or, you know, the typical four year institution has a long legacy of X, we can pivot on a dime. And so when we think about this post-covid space and what our students are now bringing into the conversation based on the fact that they were talking with their feet, when you look at the number of young people marching. Over and over and over and over again, you cannot tell me these are apathetic young people, you can't tell me these are people who don't care about the democratic ideals of this country. I don't accept that. And so our opportunity is to take that energy right and to take that passion and connect it to their educational experience to help them figure out where do they want to go, what impact do they want to have and how does this connect with their their professional and career journeys.

**AS** [00:29:22] A lot of my coaching work and what I write about is the importance of kindness. I think we're going to need to bring that kindness to a higher level post covid to me, actually, it's my opinion, equity really is about being kind. When you think about it. If those, I think sometimes the argument is, well, why are we why are we paying special attention to this group, we're a group too and very, very low income? I say, well, it's about kindness. If we help those who have been disproportionately impacted, we all benefit from it, are grading policies, kind, for example? A studen turns in an assignment a little bit late. Do they really need to take 10 points off? And the response I normally get, "Well, we're preparing for the real world." Well, in the real world, they actually allow some flexibility. Are are we kind in the way we help students through this marathon when they're at the registrar's office and they need information and instead of ping pong them across, we'll go see that person. And the other person says, well, go see that person. Can we actually walk them, to the extent that's possible? It's just this extra level of kindness. I think that will help tremendously with this trauma. And students have been experiencing this trauma for years that it's invisible. And I just think it's going to be elevated once everybody comes back from a year of this this covid. So just brainstorming with you.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:30:50] I agree with you, and I'll take it up a notch. I call it love. I say let's go hardcore with the L word, right. I mean, I think we often, you know, many of us who choose to be in an educational space find it to be a calling. Most of us, it's not a job. It's not. And and underneath all of that is a real deep respect for the process of of transformation that occurs when people learn, if it's even if it starts off with learning how to read and the world that opens up for you. You know, we started talking in the beginning about coming from Brooklyn. I don't believe I mentioned I'm Haitian. I finally landed in Brooklyn. We didn't land in Plymouth Rock. We landed in Bushwick, you know, and my imagination really took off by reading books. I was an avid reader, you know, super nerdy kid, but the world opened up and I wanted to see everything in it, you know, through through these books. And and it's because of that experience. I want people to have that choice. Right. People I mean, I want to create a space where people can find their version of that for themselves. And sometimes they can't get there without love. You know, they can't get there without somebody taking a minute to look at them in the eye and say, you don't look well, what's going on and figuring out how to find a moment just to connect. You know, one of the things that that we saw you mentioned earlier that I was the dean of the honors college is that when you invest in someone right after high school for those two years where they're so impressionable, it can last a lifetime. And some of that investment involves letting them know they matter and that they're worthy and that they can be a rock star and then setting up an environment where everything around them reinforces that, you know, the pinning ceremony they have, the events they're invited to, like, there's the constants. There's the constant need to balance what you're describing by creating a learning environment that expects academic excellence with the flexibility needed for the population that we're serving. And I talked a minute ago about putting the community college at the center. It doesn't mean that you replicate what happened at the four year school at the community college. It means you create the right conditions inside of the community college in the ways that you're describing that will facilitate student success on its own terms. And I just believe one of the best assets we have, it's love. It's seen people for who they are connecting with the best in them, believing in them when when they don't believe in themselves. And that's what our faculty do really well inside of teaching institutions. They don't make any assumptions. They hold the whole process. So students can learn and be successful. Administration and staff, know staff, especially with covid. They've been working twenty four hours around the clock. It comes from that. But I think when you talk about the kindness piece and I'm talking about love, we got to say it, you know, for it to be a mystery or for it to be decoded, you know, loses some of that value. And I'm not saying it needs to be shouted to the rooftops, but I think it's also appropriate for us to be willing to celebrate the fact that you can get that here. You know, I think that's one of the things that differentiates this kind of experience from other places where people don't even acknowledge your existence.

**AS** [00:34:24] That's so true. Kind. Love. My friend Diego Navarro, I did a podcast with them. I love his analogy. He talks about how we need to create gravity in our classrooms because there are centrifugal forces that are pulling students away. So how do we create that gravity? And he uses the word dignity, creating a culture of dignity. I think we're all saying the same thing.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:34:49] Beautiful.

**AS** [00:34:50] And I think as community colleges continue to transform, there's guided pathways, there's a lot of equity work going on, we also need to remember that this kindness, this love, this culture of dignity also needs to happen among the college personnel, because when you go through, change, trying to do change, it's difficult enough when we're not being kind or have this culture of dignity or love. That said, as as a president, someone who's continually working on how can we improve? I was wondering actually about your training as an attorney. I was wondering because you're trained, in essence, to gather information and to make a case, to make an argument. And so I'm wondering, what have been some of the advantages of having that training and, if any, what might have been some disadvantages?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:35:49] It's a great question. So, I mean, a couple of thoughts. The power of a legal education is it allows you to bring order to chaos. If you think about when people go to a lawyer, it's usually when something is it the way they expect it or there was something, an accident or there's something they're trying to understand. And so you tend to bring sort of a situation to this person who who listens and tries to figure out how to bring some order, always with the intention of some form of resolution. It's a sensibility that I have. I'm very issues fighting oriented. You know, I listen to see where there are opportunities, where might there be a problem that might be intervening with the ultimate outcome that we want. I recognize that my tendency is to listen and to come from that place. I also will say, you know, I believe in the democratic ideals of this country. I know people have said the American dream is dead or as we transition into a multiracial democracy, that there are some things we're going to have to lose and all of that I'm all in for for fighting for it. You know, as I mentioned, growing up in a working class neighborhood, I saw what it could do to a family's trajectory to find that they could change their lives by getting an education, starting a business, people believe. And they came from countries where that wasn't possible. Know my family left Haiti in the sixties during the Duvalier regime. Some things were just not possible. And so I think it's critical that we fight for that dream. And a lot of that comes from my sensibilities as a lawyer. You know, I'm always ready for a good knock down throw down. I am from Brooklyn. Right. Having said that, I also was raised inside of the Catholic Church for most of my life, where service is paramount and seeing God everywhere is also a pillar in the Catholic tradition where I was raised. And so, you know, I've had to try to reconcile, you know, the social justice person in me, the one who wants to figure out how to make the world a better place, and also doing it with a degree of compassion and with understanding. And that's the perspective that I bring into the academic space. I think we're in the fight for our lives. There's a lot at stake right now as this country makes this very interesting transition. And the pathway we provide here, in my mind, is at the center of all of it, because if we are not enabling people from the communities we care about to access the opportunities that are coming, we're going to see a bifurcated culture where you start to think about a permanent underclass serving those who have access to those opportunities. And I think we have to keep fighting for a sense of place that's the appropriate place for us to occupy where the middle class would have occupied it in the past. And whether or not that looks the same, the work we do is still that bridge in order for people to access the American dream in whatever iteration it looks like. But yeah, you're right. I mean, I'm not a traditional academic. I didn't go through the traditional ranks. And at times I struggle a bit to understand the culture, even though I've been in it for 10 years. I feel a sense of urgency and I'm impatient. You know, I want everybody to win and I want them to win. Now, I don't think anybody else should have to suffer. And I recognize that inside of the shared governance process and the fact that it is an institution, I mean, where all that institutions that have its own levers and different stakeholders, there is a time element to how things happen. And I think that's the thing I struggle the most with. And I'm not sure how much of that is being a lawyer or just being from New York. You know, we move. So, yeah. And I will also say that I think the like what we're seeing in lots of industries, having people who come from very professional backgrounds to start to be inserted into spaces that haven't had that diversity of experience. It's a good thing, you know, the kinds of questions that I ask, what I see I see from a different lens than I think the traditional academic. It's a good thing. It's a good thing. So I'm making a pitch for more lawyers to come into. I know people listening are like, Ahhh!

**AS** [00:40:39] Well, if they have your passion and your optimism by all means. I want to get down to some nuts and bolts information about, I've heard you call it a place for nerds who are disproportionately impacted students. The Honors College. Can you explain what that is exactly?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:41:01] Sure. So Miami Dade College has eight campuses and each campus is strategically located inside of a community that makes getting an education really accessible. As you know, transportation is a bit of a challenge down here. And so having these eight locations minimizes the disruption that would be required for people to get an education. And so the honors college is embedded inside of the existing campuses and there are four locations soon to be five. And at these five locations, there is a director who is assigned to be the point person. For each person in the cohort that is within the honors college, and while the college has an open access admissions policy, the honors college has some requirements in order for a cohort to be curated of like-minded students, and there students can either be admitted because they need a GPA requirement with college ready test scores, or they've scored pretty high on a standardized exam and their grades are sort of lukewarm. But there's evidence that there's something there and the student is interested in putting in the work. And what we found inside of creating an environment cohort based with a dedicated administrator is that something special happens. There's a phenomenon of high achieving students from our communities that they under select when they're thinking about where to enroll in college after high school. And that under selection comes from lots of reasons, insecurity, lack of information. Sometimes their parents don't want them to go away, and sometimes they have some educational gaps, not major, that can be tweaked in a very short period of time. And what we found by introducing this honors college pathway, which is designed for two years, first time in college, direct entry primarily, but not exclusively, is that if in those two years we invest in them and we love them, I mean, we hug there and it's, we know the parents. It's a real intimate community. We found by pouring into those students in those two years and having a leadership development pathway that tracks them each semester, that they become unrecognizable to themselves after two years and as a result of the infrastructure we created and of course, the faculty involved in it as well, these students have graduated making Miami-Dade College the institution owning the most Jack Kent Cooke scholars than any other institution by far. One year we got seven. We typically get three to four, and the scholarship students can earn up to thirty or forty thousand plus for their transfer readiness. We have sent students to every institution in US News World Report top 50, and we have a number of repeaters, MIT, Virginia Tech, etc., and so why it's an important opportunity to consider is that when we talk about equity, we're usually talking about closing gaps. But it's also when we think about equity and success is making opportunity available to meet people where they are. And very often when we look at our population, especially in South Florida, which is a high immigrant population, we have brilliant young people who can't reach their potential because they don't know how to navigate the system. And so by creating this environment and it is wholly incomplete in and of itself, you know, students have a full student development pathway. They have a complete educational experience that prepares them for whatever is next. And we've found by now the students, their doctors, their lawyers, their architects, engineers, they're great moms, you know, they're good human beings. And service, of course, is a big component of this work, but it validates the need to invest resources in the right way to meet our students where they are and to close the needed gaps. And to your earlier point, you can't close every gap, but if you become surgical and precise regarding the gaps, you can close for different target populations. The returns are just extraordinary

**AS** [00:45:28] For someone listening and says, I want to develop this at our district or at our campus, what advice would you give them? How would you start a program like this?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:45:38] It's a great question. I think the first step is to ensure that the leadership at your institution is willing to make the necessary investment to get it started. The National Collegiate Honors Council has different models of what it takes to be an honors college program as distinct from an honors college. And that's a really good place to start to understand the kind of resources that are available. I think, secondly, is really understanding your student population. Where is there a problem that you can solve inside of your K through 12 system regarding potentially high achieving students who aren't necessarily reaching their full potential and thinking about how can you plug into those spaces to customize a pathway so we do, I say we because it's still a strong part of my heart, but the program does very targeted recruiting and works with specific programs and has developed relationships with kids. Is in ways that we all do in very similar programs, but the question becomes being regarded as a solutions provider inside of those institutions, I think that's a role that has to be developed and cultivated. Now, the tricky part is getting your faculty to want to take on these courses inside of their course load, recognizing that these students take additional resources. And what we found is plugging into faculty who actually enjoy playing that role. And that helps significantly because there are no amount of test points that can compensate for having students in your office for hours just because they want to learn. And so it takes a village to your earlier point as well. But it also will require a form of investment for the leadership that's more than dollars. One of the things that Dr. Padron used to do when the program first started, he always made it a point to invite the kids from the honors college to very specific experiences because he wanted to reinforce this sense in them that we are investing in you and he would be allocated funds. We would take the kids to Salzburg, Austria, for a global citizenship seminar. They would also go to Washington, D.C. for another seminar. And some would argue it's unfair that a so small subset of students are getting this experience. And what we learned is that by investing in this small subset and positioning them for success, their transfer impact at those institutions opened the door for the rest of the institution. And so you not only have graduates of the honors college enrolling at Emory and Georgia Tech, et cetera, and the small liberal arts colleges as well. But they started to become more interested in Miami-Dade College students in general. And so it can become part of a larger strategy of showcasing the kind of talent that's worthy of investment in your neighborhood. But I would say a good start would be the National Collegiate Honors Council, and I certainly am available if anybody is interested in having a conversation. I'm also delighted to connect people to the new dean of the honors college, who can certainly be a resource as well.

**AS** [00:48:58] That's so kind of you. Thank you. As we wrap up, one of the questions I wanted to ask is, given your background, you mentioned a lot about immigrating, about immigrants in general, the struggles having grown up in New York City. Then you have this path to a president. What advice do you have for people who want to take a leadership role like you did with as as a dean of a major program and college, vice president, and president? What advice would you give them?

**Pascale Charlot** [00:49:34] I would say the moment is now. Don't wait. You know, we are we're in a movement. We're in a movement to ensure that our students have a seat at the table and that table can be the neighborhood. They want to live in, the job they want to have, the life they want to create for themselves and their families. And we are in a knock down, throw down Brooklyn style brawl to ensure with with vigilance that seat is protected and preserved, but also provided with love and dignity and kindness. And it takes an army of people with shared values to have the courage to raise their hand and say, pick me. You know, I'm in this. I think this is important enough for me to dedicate my life to and to something that really matters. And so very often when when one thinks about taking on another step in leadership, you think about the costs, potentially the costs in terms of time. You think about the impact in your well-being. I mean, there's some very real considerations. And what I would invite you to think about is what's your purpose? And how can you answer some of these other questions that are important, but within the context of your purpose? Because if you drive with your purpose, you'll figure it all out and it's not perfect. I'm still figuring it out, but there's something about standing in what's important with a degree of clarity. That not only gives value to your life experience up until this point, you know, you'll start to see yourself a little bit differently when you can see how much you have to contribute, but also the lives that will be changed because of you, not because of Al or because of Pascale, but because of you. You have a unique imprint that you can bring to this conversation and don't sell yourself short. The time now is too important. And so my my invitation and my request is to join us, step up, you know, put on your big girl pants and your big boy jeans and let's do this. But more importantly, think about the lives you can touch because of what you have to offer. That won't come from anywhere else.

**AS** [00:52:03] That's beautiful. Thank you. So, we discuss how the student journey is like a marathon. And to help students in that marathon, we discussed the next evolution of community colleges and that they should not just be these places of transition only. And I think it's important to recognize, actually, that a lot of mental health specialists, they recommend people who have experienced trauma to get some exercise to perhaps get into running. And so we have people running, these students who are in this marathon, who are running with this baggage, with this trauma, just the very recognition, knowing that exists can help us create a culture of kindness, dignity and love, and then I appreciate you unpacking the honors college, and then your last parting words of wisdom were beautiful. I want to thank you so much for participating in the Student Success podcast.

**Pascale Charlot** [00:53:02] It's my pleasure. And I just want to thank you. I listen to your podcast and you bring an open heart every to every conversation and your modeling exactly what you're asking us to do. Sometimes we don't get the words of appreciation and encouragement. But, you know, you're kind of like, who's the town crier who's going and knocking down the doors with the lamp and just letting us know. Keep the lamp on. Let's keep going. Let's keep going. And you're going from institution to institution and leader to leader. And we so appreciate you. So thank you for keeping the light on this issue and know that you have a community that's with you every step of the way.

**AS** [00:53:43] Oh, thank you so much for that. That means so much. Thank you.