**Amparo Medina**Learn why classified professionals play a critical role in student success and college operations.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast. It's a pleasure to have Amparo Medina. Amparo been in higher education and Classified Senate since 2015, when she started her career at Oxnard College, California. At her current roles as student activity specialist and classified Senate president, she advocates for both the needs of students and classified professionals. She has also established and coordinated several mentoring programs that provide mentorship to Oxnard students through peer mentorship, employee to student mentoring and career mentorship, Amparo has worked to elevate the classified voice and inclusion and decision making at the college. She has successfully advocated for tri-chairs at both the college level and the district level, where she has served as chair of the Professional Development Committee, the District Council on Human Resources, the District Council on Accreditation and Planning and the Anti-Racism Work Group, and also serves as at the statewide level, as an area representative for the California Community College's classified Senate. Amparo earned her master's in educational counseling and a B.A. from UC Berkeley. Welcome to the Student Success Podcast Amparo.

**Amparo Medina** [00:01:10] Thank you and thank you for having me.

**AS** [00:01:12] So I'd like to start the podcast by asking guests if they wouldn't mind sharing a story or a perhaps a hobby that they have or a special talent.

**Amparo Medina** [00:01:24] Sure. So I think one thing that is really critical to who I am and I don't, I'm not necessarily quiet about because I think it's important when it comes to representation is, you know, I, I received my Berkeley, as you mentioned, I mean, my my bachelor's, as you mentioned from Berkeley. And after I left UC Berkeley, I kind of went off the beaten path, you know, found myself or for a few years, lost in addiction. Most people, when they get to know me, would say I'm not the face of addiction, right? I'm not the face of what many people associate with addiction. And for me, you know, I'm very grateful in that my life changed. I found my way out of it. And here I am. I've been in recovery. I'm going on nine years this summer. And, you know, it's something that, again, I think it's important to know because there's such a stigma out there when it comes to addiction. There's such a stigma of what people view. And sometimes, you know, you'll see videos posted on social media, you know, this addict or, you know, somebody who was lost in addiction. And there's so much more to it than just making a meme out of it. Right? It's the person and the mental health and everything else that goes along with it. And so that's an important aspect of my life being part of a 12 step program and continuously striving to be a better person than what I wasn't before. I'm always looking to learn. And again, it is for me about putting a face to the to the disease and to the stigma. And, you know, we have students, we have students. I have colleagues, who have family members who are are working through this. And if I can just be that that person, that when they have questions, they feel like they can come to ask and not have that look, you know, like, oh, really? And, you know, and that connection, I think that's important and it's powerful and it's about showing our students that even though my life went off a certain route or their life goes off, it's turned around. Doesn't mean that things can't change, you know, that their their experiences today and their hardships are going to make them the person that they they become and the person that they are. So I think that's critical and it's important.

**AS** [00:03:42] Well, thank you for sharing that. That's something very vulnerable and courageous to share. And thank you for that. There's been so many focus groups with students, and one of the things that they talk about is how important that they feel connected to college personnel. And one of the ways to feel that connection is to know their stories. When faculty, college professionals know, it doesn't mean they when, I'm not saying now tell your whole personal story to the world, but there are times when sharing your story will resonate so much with what students and they would feel that connection and that their need for belonging is somewhat satisfied because they go, Oh, I belong here because someone else that works here is struggling with what I've been struggling with. So thank you for sharing that. Amparo, are there any services that colleges that students should be mindful of if they are dealing with addiction? Or is it mostly county level, city level and private health care? Is there, what can a college do to help students when they're dealing with this?

**Amparo Medina** [00:05:04] You know, I think in general colleges, it's about making sure that students are aware of the resources. So, for example, one thing that I've learned is I used to work at the Educational Assistance Center, which is supporting students with disabilities, which is another stigma in its own right. But one of the things that can qualify a student for services through the DSP office is being in recovery, you know, being an addict. There are things that go along with that that was new to me. You know, I had no idea and I only learned that because I worked out of the office. So sharing stuff like that, making your campus open to 12 step meetings. Right. Our campus right now does not have any 12 step meetings. I know that there are college campuses that do offer 12 step meetings, something like that, you know, being open to that. Unfortunately, the reality is out there, there's one even when you look into the county level, the city level. Services are, in a sense, buried. Right. You have to find them. You have to to look out for them. So I think the more that a college campus does to bring this out in the open and show that there's a space, a safe space for students to go to and ask for help, you know, even having information at the mental, at the health center about critical services that are available to individuals that are battling addiction. Because it's not just about addiction. It isn't just about the disease itself. I can't stop using drugs or I can't stop drinking. It's all the other components that go with it, right? The mental health services, working on the characteristics of you say that come with with being an addict and learning to change all of that. So there's a lot of components. But I think, you know, starting the first thing to be, having a community college, making their location available for 12 step meetings or for people to come in and work with students and connect with them.

**AS** [00:06:51] Thank you for sharing that Amparo. And I'm so excited to have you here because I have the privilege of working with classified professionals all the time and I just I love them. I appreciate them so much. They just really get work done. The colleges just, they can not operate without them. They're so critical. And so not every campus, Amparo, has a classified senate. Can you explain what that is?

**Amparo Medina** [00:07:22] Sure. So you're right. And not all colleges have a classified Senate. We are very fortunate to have one here in our college and not just here at Oxford College, but within our two sister colleges and the district as well, the classified Senate, you know, it's separate from the union. And that's an important part, too, that we point out, is that we're not, the classified Senate, is not here to take over what the union does and representing us and collective bargaining rights. It's a very separate it has to do with the operational pieces. Right. We're classified. Senate wants to have a voice in the decision making. So, for example, academic Senate, which as part of AB 1725, it's written in the ED Code, they have their ten plus one, students have a nine plus one, classified do not have anything of that sorts here at the Ventura Community College District, we have adopted a nine plus one and within that nine plus one we're looking at, okay, so academic Senate, they need to be consulted on these ten plus one items. For example, one is curriculum, right? That is by all means part of faculty. Faculty involved in curriculum. What classified are involved in are the curriculum systems. The systems that we use to get to develop that curriculum. Another one is program review systems, right? So even with program review, we do program reviews of our operational side as well here about in our college. So there's the program review, the academics and then we do programmability and services, business services, the components that classified are involved in. So it's looking at that and identifying how can classified be involved in the decision making process. Because while A.B. 1725 places privacy with academic settings and making the decisions, it still identifies that it needs to be a collegial consultation. So you're involving the different constituents. And the different constituents involved are academics and faculty students and classified. Classified, I think are critical. Classified on the front lines. Classified are the ones speaking with students on a day to day basis, and they're going to have that information to be able to support student success as well.

**AS** [00:09:25] And in your bio, you mentioned that you are a tri chair and you've been advocating for that. Can you explain a little bit about that? And then how does that, how does that play out?

**Amparo Medina** [00:09:37] Sure. So when I first joined classified Senate and then eventually, became classified Senate president, we had a seat at the table, a couple of seats to average, maybe 2 to 4 seats depending on the committee here at in college. All of the committees were chaired by a faculty and administrator. And so we have really pushed to have classified at the chair sitting in one of the chairs as well. One of the things that we we try to have other individuals understand is that by having a classified as part of a tri chair process, it's not taking power from anybody. It's not about a power dynamics. It's about classified seeing ourselves in the agenda setting process. So when we're setting an agenda for an upcoming meeting, an individual from classified can come to me and say, Amparo, I'd like for this agenda item to be on and discussed. There is a power dynamic and sometimes, right, classified don't always feel comfortable going to administrators or classified may not always feel comfortable going to faculty. But when you have three sitting at a table, I think it opens the doors and allows other classified to see, hey, they're willing to work with us or are our voices important right there respecting our voice? So that's really been something that we pushed and we originally started with two of our committees being tri chari and now we're at four. So we have our technology committee, our Student Success Committee, our professional development, and our one other committee, and I'm totally blanking on it. But the point is, you know, once we go through this, we're adopting a new participatory governance manual. And with that, we'll have four committees that are tri chair. And I think that's powerful because again, as I originally was talking about, it's representation, having classified represent other classified at the table.

**AS** [00:11:27] And can you provide an example of where you're in this setting in one of the committees and you're your tri chair, and where your voice was really important, that if you hadn't been there, it would have caused some challenges. Can you can you provide an example challenge?

**Amparo Medina** [00:11:42] I don't know that it's specifically a challenge, I guess in a way it is. So for example, I tri chair our professional development committee. I don't know that there's really any professional development out there that's dedicated towards classified. It's more faculty driven, right. What faculty needs, you know, especially with the pandemic and the changeover to online teaching and online learning, there's a critical need for professional development when it comes to faculty, but there's also a critical need when it comes to classified. There's things were classified to learn. So being a chair of the Professional Development Committee, I was really able to kind of give my feedback and support the need to bring in individuals that were not just faculty based, but they were there. Their workshops or their presentations were things that classified the takeaways as well. Right, that they could learn from what equity is across the board. There's equity in the classroom with this equity outside of the classroom.Iit's providing professional development so classified can see how they impact students. Right. The fact that students come walk under a campus and many times it's the classified individuals that they see first, not the faculty in the classroom. It's the people at financial aid. It's the people at maintance and operations. And it's, so it's providing professional development so they see their role in supporting student success. And a lot of times it's literally when students take that first step onto the campus.

**AS** [00:13:13] That's a really good example, Amparo, thank you for sharing that. And just so people know, M&O, I believe, is maintenance and operations correct? And can you provide some examples of classified professionals and what they do and why their role is so critical on bottom?

**Amparo Medina** [00:13:31] Yeah, so maintenance operations, like I said, financial aid, because they are the ones especially financial aid, you know, they're the ones that hear the stories from our students. They're the ones, you know, when we talk about emergency aid or if a student struggling, they're the ones that talk to the students, figure out what's going on. They're taking all of that in. They're the ones that work with our out-of-state students who are struggling. So I think financial aid is is a critical you know, they're critical employees of part of the classified. Again, our maintenance and operations. I remember one time we had Dr. Victor Rios come in and speak to us and he said, and this was so poignant, and that he said, you know, you may see yourself as a small college, but to a student who has never stepped foot on a college campus, you might as well be Harvard because it's all big and scary, right? It's something new to them. It's something they're uncomfortable. You know, some students never get past the parking lot because they're like, well, where do I go? Who do I talk to? And I've asked our students. I have the pleasure of leading our student government, being the advisor. And I asked them, you know, when you when you came to Oxnard College and you had questions and you weren't sure where to go, who did you ask? And several of them were like, you know, the guy out driving the lawnmower or the person out, you know, blowing the leaves like they're the ones or campus police right there walking around. And those are the ones they go to and say, hey, you know, I'm new here. I'm not really sure where to go. You know, what do I do? And it's that guidance and it's that friendly face and that smile that makes them feel like, okay, puts them a little bit at ease and creates that level of comfortability so they can go ahead and get to where they need to go. So there's a lot of people that fall under classified, but I think those are some of our critical roles.

**AS** [00:15:12] Thank you. And there's a couple that I've come to respect so much. One of them, the executive, they're often called administration assistant or executive assistants. The amount of work that they have to do to support, for example, a Dean or VP or any other administrator, or sometimes they support a department. Can you tell us a little bit more about those wonderful people?

**Amparo Medina** [00:15:43] I sure can. I actually started my role at Oxnard College as administrative assistant and I worked my way up to senior administrative assistant. When I was a senior administrative assistant, there is one point where there were one, two, three. I want to say four of us within the administrative assistant, senior administrative assistant role who at one time we all had our master's. And I think that's important to note. We are trying to understand the college community as well as learn so that we can promote administrative assistants. They have to know everything. They have to know the schedules of their administrator. They have to know where they're at at all times. They have to know, okay, they're available this time. They have to know any issues that are going on. They're the ones that our administrators turn to. And I feel like administrative assistants, their role is to make sure that the departments look well. The administrators look well because we want to make sure that they know everything they need to know. Like, hey, boss, you just received an invite for this meeting, but you already have this meeting scheduled. And they rely on us for that. And that's important. I think that administrative assistants, they definitely keep the administrative side going.

**AS** [00:17:03] Yeah, I work with them a lot when I do special summits, retreats, trainings, etc. I actually work with them a lot to handle all the logistics, the invitation, the RSVPs, setting up the room. They're just so invaluable because it's you know, it's the little things that add up and makes for an event, helps to be productive. So I really appreciate them. Another group that I, I appreciate immensely are research analyst, tends to be a classified professional. Can you talk about them a little bit?

**Amparo Medina** [00:17:36] Sure. So data, right. We're all about making data informed decisions and our institutional research analysts, they are the ones that provide all information. They create our tableau, they create our dashboards. They help us to have an understanding. I had to meet with one yesterday and trying to identify what are some of the surveys, what are some of the data that I want to capture as some of the programs that I've been involved in and me still learning about data? I'm not as quick to like, oh, let me look at this and they will break it down. And in a way that looks like, oh, that makes complete sense. Yes. That's the kind of information that I need. Right. I want to get to point C, I need to go through point A and B, and they're the ones who will help me identify what those points are in order for me to get my ultimate outcome, in order to support and make the data informed decisions that are needed. So, yes, our research analysts are critical. They have an understanding with data that it's like it's mind blowing sometimes. Like, I don't understand what you're seeing and they'll explain it and it'll make complete sense. And I'm very much grateful for the work and the time that they help provide us and creating surveys. Sometimes you put on an event are we like we have we have a mentoring program that employees mentor students. We want to know like how much did students benefit from this? Did employees benefit from benefit from it? And our research analysts put together a survey that went out to allow us to learn just the the the impact and the magnitude that the mentoring program had, not just on students, but it actually had on employees and employees feeling better connected with the colleges overall.

**AS** [00:19:16] Yes. Thank you for sharing that. And as you mentioned, they are classified professionals with MAs, with masters, and many of them want to move up in the organizational chart, if you will, the hierarchy like yourself. You're very interested in being an administrator. One day, a dean or vice president, who knows may be president one day. One of the things that strikes me is that so many colleges still have, and when they fly the position, they have doctorate, required or preferred. That is, in my view, a barrier, because essentially what you're asking is to apply for this position, we want you to be anywhere from $50,000 to $80,000 in debt. And in my experience, you know, I got to tell you, I'd rather work with someone with a B.A. who has a certificate in project management than a Ph.D. who primarily pontificates and just talks and talks and plans to plan and talks and talks and plan to plan. And so while some doctorates, you know, what you study may be helpful, it may inform, it doesn't necessarily by itself make you a better leader. Can you speak to that aspect? I mean, I think it's an equity issue when you have that amount of cost when especially because we need more females of color in leadership roles, and many of them are having to support their families, and now they have to do a doctorate. All the time and effort that goes into it and then all the debt. But your thoughts?

**Amparo Medina** [00:21:16] So this is something that is actually on my mind on a daily basis. I was just accepted into CSU Fresno's online Educational Leadership doctorate program, and I'm terrified. I am terrified the idea of taking on this debt. I am a single parent. I am raising three boys. And, you know, one of the things that happens is as you move up in your career, financial aid wise, right. The expected family contribution is no longer zero. So even though I'm doing better, I have children that are going to be going into college and I am now going to have to financially support them. And in addition to that, taking on a doctorate program, taking on the financial component has been it's definitely been something that has definitely worries me know. But I also look at it as being a Latina and being a female. Being a Latina. I don't want to say that those go against me, but at times, right. That they do, and it's like I'm trying to make up for that. I love learning. I do love learning. Am I excited about entering the doctor program? I'm absolutely excited. I'm excited about what I'm going to learn. But if I was, for example, a white male, do I feel like I would have to make the same decision? Not necessarily. I don't know that I would. Right. But when I look at the women around me and the women and administrator roles, they have doctorates. I talk to them, and it is encouraged. Go pursue your doctorate. But yeah, it is definitely an equity thing. It is definitely I think creates a barrier because do I think that I need my doctorate to do the job as an administrator? No, I don't. Do I think I can learn something? Yes, I'm going to learn something in general, but I don't think that I need it. I currently have my masters. I have a master's in education counseling. Do I think that I needed that in order to even do the job that I'm doing now? No, I don't. I was fortunate to sit on our E, which is Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee. And when I first started working at Oxnard College and I first started sitting on hiring committees, I was like, Oh yes, like they need to have California community college experience or they need to have experience with the with classified center. They need to have a doctorate. I very much changed my outlook now because I realized that by putting those things in place, I'm creating unneeded barriers for individuals. Right. When you look at the number of Latinos or Latinos that have a master's program, it's like 3%, right? So by putting a master's required in place, I have very much or we have very much small. And that means that pool is a much smaller that we're going to be able to choose from. So yeah, it is definitely something that I'm thinking about. It is, you know, I still encourage other peopl to go for their doctorate to pursue education, especially working in education. And I think, you know, going back to our original conversation of me being an addict recovery. It's important. Important for me, like, I can do this. You know, we can do this. Even if we're in recovery, we're addicts. We can still do this. This is still something that we can accomplish. Being a single mom, I want to set an example for my my children that, like, I can do this right. And again, this is not a decision to pursue my doctorate that I took lightly. It is something that I talked with my children about before I entered, that I talked to my boss about like, hey, this is what I'm thinking. What do I do? You know, I want to be able to have the support. But yeah, it's definitely scary. It's unfortunate. It is because I still have a debt from my masters and I'm going to take on a debt for my with a doctorate. And I think to myself like, am I going to be around long enough to pay it off? What happens if I have that left over to my my kids taking on? You know, there's a lot of questions about that because I think there is a lot of things that we learn through just experience that will allow us to be the kind of leader that others look to.

**AS** [00:25:27] It's tough, right, Amparo. On the one hand. You want to learn. Learning is good. And you know what, you're going to do great Amparo. You're such a hard worker. You're amazing. You're going to do just fine. Is it going to be difficult? Absolutely. Like you mentioned, single mom, three boys. And it is going to be a challenge. On the other hand. They've just become really expensive checkboxes. And it's just not fair, especially for people of color that this is now not only a preferred, but I seen I've been looking at there's so many job postings and it says requirement for the doctorate. And we have so many examples of people that are amazing leaders in this community college system that don't have doctorates. The California community college chancellor who was a president. Right. He doesn't have a doctorate. But I do wish you the best. I know you're going to do really, really well. You know what? What's what's your Venmo? Let's let's give it to everybody.

**Amparo Medina** [00:26:32] That would be great.

**AS** [00:26:38] So they can give you some donations for a special scholarship for you Amparo. So I wanted to bring you here because, I'm so fortunate, I've been doing this podcast now for a couple of years and many friends said you should really try one. It took me years and finally I did it. And I just really enjoy talking to educators and I've talked to researchers, administrators, faculty, and I wanted to make sure to include the classified professional voice. And I'm so glad you agreed to do this because I hope this podcast just serves as a reminder. I know many people already know this, but I think it's a good reminder that classified professionals play a critical role. In fact, if a campus has a classified professional day, that may be a sign. That they're not really appreciated all the time if you have to have a day for them. Reminds me of Teacher Appreciation Day, right? I'm not suggesting to get rid of it. All I'm saying is just being really cognizant about the critical role that they play. Being cognizant if you don't have a classified Senate to consider having one and having their voice at the table. And do you want to as we wrap up, any other thing you'd like to add about classified professionals that the field should know about?

**Amparo Medina** [00:28:07] Yeah, I think, again, you know, we talk about classified Senate. It's important to understand that it's not about a power struggle. That's some of the things I hear from other colleges and working with other colleges that they're trying to establish a classified Senate. It's not even going up against the faculty sometimes. It's going up against their own classified and their unions. Right. Because the unions come in and they feel, well, we're the decision makers. We're the ones that have our voice. And, you know, we're doing a disservice to classified. Right. This is about how do we collectively support students. That is our end goal. It's student success and retention. The more individuals you have involved in supporting students, the greater the outcome is going to be. Right. So, yes, our unions do a great job at supporting our health and welfare and making sure that they're at the table when it comes to pay and salary and all of that great stuff. Right. But then there's the other components about how to support student success and retention. How do we make sure that the financial aid office, who is critical in hearing these stories from our students about what their need, how do we then turn that and make sure that's at the table because the unions are involved in that, right. It's just a classified professionals in their day to day operations that are going to hear that information. And then we in turn, you know, you take that to a committee. Same with faculty and management. It's about having that conversation. We went up against that when we were trying to have more seats at the table, are going to a try to process, you know, faculty sometimes I get it they have a bad taste in the mouth because the reason why AB 1725 exists was because decisions are being made that affected them and they weren't being consulted. So it's having, sometimes having that one on one direct conversation saying, hey, look like I'm not trying to take the power from you. I'm not trying to say faculty should not be consulted. We're just asking that we be consulted as well. Right. We're not saying that our recommendations are or what we're asking for is the end all, be all. We just want to make sure that our voice is included. And I think that's an important thing because at the end of the day, our goal is student success. And at the end of the day, I really believe that when you have students at the table, you have classified professionak atn the table, you have the unions at the table, you have faculty administrators at the table. How can you not end up supporting success because you're having all the different components of how we work with students brought back in the decision making process.

**AS** [00:30:37] That's beautiful Amparo. Thank you so much for sharing that, and thank you for participating in the Student Success Podcast.

**Amparo Medina** [00:30:46] Yeah, this has been great. Thank you.