**Dr. Davis Jenkins Podcast Interview Transcript**

**Guided Pathways & Student Success**

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a distinct pleasure and privilege to have Dr. Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at Columbia University's Community College Research Center and coauthor of Redesigning America's Community Colleges. Thank you so much for participating in the Student Success podcast.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:00:18] You kidding? Thanks. Great to be here. Well, I always say it's easy to, you know, yapper about these ideas, make them sound easy. But the work you do and I love your new coaching guide to help colleges implement it, which is not easy, is you know, I really respect that. So happy to be here.

**AS** [00:00:38] Oh, thank you so much. That that means a lot. Before we get started, I was wondering if you have anything you can share with the audience beyond your scholarly work and experience. Are you some kind of secret chef, a marathoner, an avid gardener? Give us the scoop.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:00:56] I love to ballroom dance. I grew up a preppy. I know you're shocked with a name like Davis Jenkins, a guy like me. It could be a preppy. But, you know, we went to when you were in New York doing whatever you're doing, you know, having fun as a kid. We went to cotillion and learned basically how to be upper middle class alcoholics. But basically, we you know, we went to dancing school. I loved it. And when we first started the girls, we were about 11 or 12. The girls are like twice as tall as us. So you'd be right there at their midriff, you know, but I kept it up. But most of the boys said they hated it. I loved it. And I just that's that's how I met my my wife and summer dance in Chicago. One of the best things in Chicago, which is just every ray saw people coming out dancing to different types of music.

**AS** [00:01:53] Do you still dance?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:01:56] You know, during the pandemic, it's been difficult. But yeah, my wife and I do a lot of Lindy hop dancing, swing dancing, some Latin and some ballroom as well.

**AS** [00:02:08] So given all your scholarly work around what it amounts to institutional change to improve student success and equity, there must be a metaphor for dancing and institutional change. What do you think?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:02:24] I'm sure there is. You know, dancing evolves and it really is about community and learning as a social activity. And I'm sure I don't know. I haven't not as poetic as you haven't explored the metaphor too much, but I'm sure we can make it work. I mean, that, you know, I know you're into martial arts. The thing about dancing is you have to stay centered. You have to stay centered in in your humanity. And you have a lot more experience teaching than I do. But I think, you know, being centered as a partner, learning as a sort of a dance is a process of creation. It's not a process of, you know, me, you know, leading you around. The best dancers are dancing from their core and, you know, dancing in a in a partnership in a community, you know, really learning as they go, improvising.

**AS** [00:03:33] That's a great point. I have this guilty pleasure of watching Dancing with the Stars years ago. I actually haven't seen it in a very long time. But one of the things I appreciated, the two or three seasons I saw of it is the the hard work that goes into this outcome, the outcome being this performance, this dance, all the hard work that went into the practice practice learning is about practice.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:04:07] Active learning.

**AS** [00:04:09] That's right, the chemistry between them, the ability to, as you said, learn in order to produce this is performance and campuses as they transform. In a way, it is a dance.

**AS** [00:04:26] It's a clonky dance, with chemistry needed all at the campus.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:04:34] But this willingness to dance that it's aligned adds that a crazy wedding, you know, an Indian Catholic wedding. I don't know something crazy in your work and guided pathways.

**AS** [00:04:48] You wrote you coauthored Redesigning America's Community Colleges in 2015. Could you give us your definition? What what exactly is kind of pathways A and B since writing in 2015? What research have you done so we can learn more about this dance, if you will?

[00:05:11] So Redesigning America's Community Colleges was looking at why, despite, you know, several decades, especially since the early 2000s of work reform across the country on the student success initiative, you know, the student completion agenda, it was often called that we really hadn't seen much movement in the needle and we still saw big gaps in research. We and others had done found, you know, that much of the reforms were relatively small scale early on. And few of them really got to you know, we talked about to the program, to the structure of programs and the content of programs, and hardly anything was looking at teaching and learning.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:05:56] So we step back and we argued that, well, community colleges were designed to do what we as a society asked colleges to do in the 60s and 70s, which was when the United States really unrivaled or was the pioneer in expanding broad access to a higher education. Community colleges were probably these central actor in that, and they evolved over time in a way that really emphasized access. They're designed for access. But that design over time and given changes in demographics, politics, the economy there weren't designed well for success. So community colleges essentially are guided.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:06:38] Pathways is an essentially an effort to redesign the community college for today's students, today's economy, today's politics and the there are really four essential pieces of it. Break it down. And we've learned a lot. And our thinking we can talk about our thinking as well. But the four are the programs have to have high opportunity or high value. Every program either has to lead to a good job or transfer with junior standing in a major I mean, community colleges, especially outside California, have gotten expensive. But even in California, you know, their costs to go, even if your tuition and fees are waived. So every program has to lead either to a good job or transferring a major second. Secondly, and we're seeing a lot of effort to help students explore academic and career interest from the start.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:07:37] And the best of these efforts, really, it's not just an advising thing. It's it's in their first couple terms of coursework, but helping every student have a full program plan by the end of their first term. And again, our students are relying on us so much to help them get a proper path. And when we talk to students, how far along you have to go, it's shocking how often they have no idea. And again, many of them are in these associate of arts programs, for example, that don't leave the transferring to major. The third is and this has really evolved since we talked about these metal majors in the book about this idea about structuring students choice, that there were too many choices. We moved away from that idea that actually we think there are too few coherent choice choices. But just having a plan is important. But the way to get the plan, the way that's going to and this may be gets back to the tension that you're going to get through is through these academic and career communities. So engaging students coming into the college with other students, faculty, especially other people who are interested them. And then the third area. And there's been more and more research, not from CCRC, but to show that active and experiential learning is really critical, especially in the first term. You've got to light the fire. For students learning in the first term, you know, back then and unfortunately now, there's still too much focus on redesigning prerequisite Dávid or remediation to make them college ready in math and English. And we're saying, no, you've got to teach students to be confident learners across, not just in math and English and hopefully the right math, not algebra, but across the foundation courses, anatomy and physiology, accounting 101, American civilization one or one. Philosophy one or one. These are important. But you know, the STEM early STEM courses are very critical. Students are going to learn by doing just like you do and dance. They're going to learn by practice. It's challenging. They aren't used to it. Sure as hell didn't get it, especially from the typical public schools.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:10:01] But this is the thing more than these other things. You know, the path and the maps and the plans are all important. But if the student can gain confidence as a learner and connect with people who are like minded and have interests and passions, there are no way.

**AS** [00:10:22] You make a really good point. Because when you've got a pathway that so many campuses is rolled out and it became almost robotic, program mapping, we got our maps right checkmark, meta-majors, created, check. And when I asked a question, well, how does that actually change the student experience? Yeah, they have a tough time answering back that question.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:10:53] I mean, we're academics and again, we're not practitioners. That's why I admire the work you do as an implementation coach in the work the colleges do. You know, we emphasize that it is true the path to student and goals are clear. And so we talked a lot about mapping and we showed examples of early adopters and how their websites were organized by many major and they had maps and information about transfer and and that's important. But we've come to realize that, you know, that's important. But to change student behavior, you have to have connections with people in fields or areas of interest, you know, the the theater people, the anyhow. And you have to have good teaching from the start. And when you look at the experience of students coming on, they have they don't get connected early on to people in a field of interest. They're forced to take dev ed and general ed stuff and things that don't really matter. They're not connected from orientation. And the when you look at the first term learning experience, it's just like, oh, my God, it's soul crushing, the typical first time. And we look at this all the time. And actually we've done over the last couple of years, we've really tried to focus people because kind of pathways is very complicated, as you know, as well as anyone, to really try to focus on two two things. What program are students and how do we engage them in that program through connections, especially from early on? And what courses are they taking early on? And are they really well taught or are they just crushing students? Take a look at you know, I was actually talking to a college and.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:12:52] So rural college in the state and the faculty were saying, as we hear a lot, you're trying to kill the humanities, this is corporate ties. And I'm. OK, let's look at your first term courses, dev ed. Algebra, English comp, maybe. Student success course. And in California's gym, we did this recently, gym and fitness, which is probably the most useful course of those all or computers or maybe intro to psych as where the where the humanities courses in humanities courses, the kind of courses light students fire if they're well thought now, you know, if they're just sort of like recitation and, you know, multiple choice or just spewing back, you know, they're going to students are going to say this looks just like high school and I didn't do well in high school. The sad part is they're going to blame themselves when they go away from you. They drop out of school. But, you know, they're musicians, they're poets, they're doing rap. They're you know, they're doing books for their families, restaurants and other people have skills and, you know, and talents. And we're we're just like, oh, I'm sorry, you're not smart enough.

**AS** [00:14:15] You've done more research on guided pathways for those colleges that move beyond the checklist, which I think you're right. And in all fairness, it is important to do those things. But then they are actually operationalized. And for those that have operationalized them from there is concern at colleges because of budgets, sustainability, etc.. What what I saw that you did some research around the cost analysis of implementing guide pathways. Well, can can you elaborate on that?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:14:48] So we did case studies of six colleges nationally, very different parts of the country. Four of them were unionized because we hear a lot. You can't do this in a union environment. I disagree. In fact, if you bring the union and the faculty and everyone else from the start, I mean, that's the only way to do it. If you don't do this, if you ram it down the union or the faculty or the advisors, they're not going to do it. Well, that's true in any organization.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:15:15] The main costs, the largest cut when we looked at implementation costs and then recurring costs, you know, there were costs in terms of of engaging people because you really got to engage people as you know everyone, and not just faculty and staff, but the the facilities people, the librarians have really been involved in really great ways and guided pathways, efforts, department chairs or departmental secretaries who know more typically about programs and do the chairs cannot knock in the chairs, but get them really involved and say, look, our students aren't succeeding. And it's not because of our students, it's because we're just not.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:16:06] We're putting up all these barriers. The the statistic that always gets them is take a look. And I did this with this small college last week. Take a look at the number of credits your associate degree graduates taken. And on average in this college, you know, it was like in the 90s. So they're getting for 60 semester our credit degree. They're taking 90 credits on average. That's true. In California. It's actually higher than ninety, I think, in Texas. So, you know, and then, you know, and then, you know, tell me what program they're in. They don't know they don't know a path. And, you know, look at your first home anyhow. So there's this recognition. But the key thing is, you know, you've got and you've talked about this, I think, in your in your guides, in your work, you've got to get beyond the blame game. So, you know, that takes a lot of leadership. You can't be blaming the faculty. Can't blame those those people in the advisory center. I we how many times have we heard that from the advisers, say all those faculty, they give our students bad information, just finger pointing. And the fact is the system is designed like we said in the book, the system was designed to do what it was supposed to do, which was get in students cheaply. Now we have to get students through with something of value affordably. So bringing together people have some cost. The biggest startup and ongoing costs, the largest one by far, is colleges tend to hire new advisors or counselors. However, they before they do that, the. And this is very important and this is really central. They dramatically organize, reorganize, advising and in fact, everything around the what we call it in the book, metamaterials. But what I like to call these academic and career communities, because those those are the communities students are going to get engaged and those are the folks who are going to help students or transfer and workforce, you know, get to their end goals. Those are the folks who have control over what is taught in, you know, at the beginning. So that's a cost. And also, there are some costs in upgrading computer systems to allow to have and software to allow students to have plans. That said, I mean, we've seen so much money wasted on computer systems and on these consultants that offer analytics and the like, not useful. And in fact, some of the early adopters have guided pathways, use spreadsheets, Miami-Dade use spreadsheets because they were in a five year process of upgrading their ERP, a massive institution. One hundred fifty thousand students, they couldn't just do this. So they use spreadsheets to start. But the key was they were helping students develop a full program plan toward getting a good job directly or transferring junior standing. And once the computer systems caught up, you know, then everyone understood, wow, this is great. So we estimated that it's for the technical you know, we came up with these estimates. It's about those major costs.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:19:35] Also, faculty release time for faculty and staff release, time to do the mapping. And finding the time to do the work is is expensive.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:19:46] But we estimated at about three percent of operating costs, three percentage points of operating costs. That is you know, this is an idealized college, about 4000 FTE, sixty thousand sixty million dollars operating budget, which is sort of the average community college nationally. But the key thing is, is that when you looked at how colleges fund this, many colleges did raise some local grants or Title three or Title five grants, which are really good uses for this to do this initial onboarding, but an engagement. But by and large, they they paid for this mainly especially the advising and the computing stuff by reallocating resources, reorganizing, you know, deans and others more efficiently around megamergers and creating efficiencies, using using, you know, computer technology. So that was encouraging. I mean, three percent. But, you know, when we talk to colleges, is this leaders? Is this worth it? And they're like, we we're going to have to do this to attract students anymore, but we have to operate on value.

[00:21:16] I remember Mike Fleur's the chancellor, which is supported by the state as well as local taxpayers funding, said the community students didn't know what programs we offered and they didn't understand our value. And they, too, had like 90 their associate degrees. Students were graduating with ninety credits and then transferring maybe the UT San Antonio and and having to start his first term sophomores in a major. I mean, that's just crazy. That is not the student. Those students have succeeded mightily. And if they were from wealthier families, they probably would have gone directly to San Antonio or UTM or or wherever and had the kind of external support that the typical community college student doesn't have. So the bottom line is this is about reorganizing the only two states in the country that offered any kind of funding for guided pathways, California and Washington. You know, so the outside California, Washington, these colleges are not doing this to chase grants. They're doing it to survive. And we did interviews post covered with these folks. And the leaders are saying, man with students on a plan with students who have an advisor in their field of interest, it was so easy to reach out to students. Other colleges are saying, well, we don't even know who our students are. So the added value, the increased retention rates, the. The added value to students and decreasing access credits. But with the categorical funding, like in California, with any categorical funding, it's too often you focus on, you know, guided pathways. So you use that for your mapping and your letter majors and your checkbox and but you're not really changing the student experience. I know California, our community colleges are underfunded, but frankly, with all the categorical funding available, if you combine it like like Bakersfield that we include in Bakersfield, if you if you combine that money, actually, California community colleges have more money to do this kind of whole college redesign than any other institution in the country.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:23:40] But it takes and we've seen some great examples from California, but it takes leadership. And you really got to change the culture, which, you know, after all this yabbering gets to the work you're doing in the silos and overcoming those and really becoming back to what it is we're trying to do here, which is helping students get, you know, fulfill their dreams, which means get into a community, become confident as as learners, not feel stupid because, you know, they once again failed algebra and, you know, helping them with a plan and with this development, this stance that is that is learning. It changes over time. That's great. It should change. It should be a process. That's why we called it guided exploration, guided pathways, not as some folks originally wanted to call it, structured pathways. So maybe it is more like a dance. I'm just not as poetic as you are, Doctor Al.

**AS** [00:24:47] I'm always asked is how do you apply an equity lens to to guide pathways and my responses is, do the work, how long have you been asking this question now? Oh, yeah, we've been discussing this for about a year. Oh, no, no. Actually, it's been two years. And I say if you just actually implement the framework, it's a student journey framework. You have data that you can disaggregate and see what's happening with equity gaps. You are creating, in essence, a greater sense of community for the students. And and we know that disproportionally impacted students greatly benefit from the sense of community. Now you can drill down more to to an even deeper equity lens on so many different ways, equity minded teaching, etc. All that is critical. It's it's doing the work, creating these academic and career communities, creating the sense of belonging. That said, you and your team develop the tool to help address equity. Can you unpack what you created?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:26:02] So it was it's it's among the most you know, we do all these fancy longitudinal analyzes with all this kind of metrics that looks so complicated and everything. But the simplest question is what program are they currently in? Does that program lead to occur to a good job? A good job, meaning seventeen dollars an hour plus benefits or at least thirty five grand a year plus benefits or transfer with junior standing in a major not transfer with 90 credits and starting as a first term sophomore in a major that maybe you weren't that interested in, but it's the only one that you can get get into. And as it turns out, most students are not in a program there. We looked at we we used data. We did this work in Washington State. We used data for the workforce programs. Are you in a low, medium or high return workforce program for direct entry? And there are a lot of students in the low. And do you have a structured sort of pretty major pathway like the California ADTs, which are very effective, or is this generic a where students are wandering around and they're not getting good preparation for a major, especially the more remunerative and selective majors like health care system business?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:27:33] And then who's in these programs? Who's in the we distinguish between high opportunity programs, which are programs that lead either to good job or a major in junior standing. And the majority of community college students are in low opportunity. But the but underrepresented students of color, low income students, first generation students are disproportionately in the dev ed swamp, as I call it. That's the associative arts program, or in especially women of color and low wage, you know, certificate programs. So equity has many different dimensions. But a very fundamental one is, is that, you know, we're not helping our students of color, our underserved students explore, connect and get into and get a plan in a high opportunity program and. So, you know, and we're perpetuating equity inequities there. I mean, another thing we've another thing we're trying to emphasize is, is that in the book and early on, people are focusing on how well we've got to get more of these underserved students, underrepresented students, college degrees or community college degrees. And we're like, no, we really the equity issues, they have to have high opportunity credentials. And that means to do a good job. And increasingly all across the country that we're seeing declining returns to certificate's alone. It's good to have certificate's on your resume. Employers like that, but they're hiring based on degrees. So you need at least an applied associate or a bachelors with skills. And, you know, if you're going to get into a high remuneration field, a highly structured field like STEM fields or, you know, health care business, you have to start early on and take the right courses. And more and more we see in community colleges, you know, even for students who get beyond their head, which I think we should just get rid of a divided, focused on algebra, abstract algebra and basic writing and corporate support for learning into the college level courses, not just math and English.

[00:30:14] But then students take the 101 courses, and too often those aren't the right courses, you know, students will take a bio 101 course and think that, well, I'll be able to transfer to to CSU and bio. I'm really into bio bio sciences. And there's California. There's several high tech bio economies now, I'm sure. And you guys are getting more every day. Great jobs. You need bachelor's degrees. But no, for a biology degree, you need the advanced bio. So there's yet another level of and you would know that in a university if you're interested in bio. But the student, you know, in the community college, there's yet another level almost of remediation. And we seriously question this idea that, well, you need to run through a whole sequence again. Obviously, students need to practice and students need to start where. But but we tend to underestimate what students do. And because, you know, we're all have prejudices, you know, I mean, maybe you said this. I don't know. But, you know, dev ed is you know, we don't we don't believe our students can learn. We say, oh, you're you're a young black man. You went to cruddy high school. You know, we're going to put you in there. That that's the soft bigotry of low expectations. I know you didn't say that that was. George W. Bush, but we've got to we've got to believe students can learn and then are for them really good teaching, especially in those first term courses.

**AS** [00:31:55] In this dance, I find that it's the president who's more often than not the linchpin in producing this this dance, if you will. I interviewed my inaugural podcast with back Michael Bastion, the president over at community college.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:32:18] A superstar. I've been in higher ed business since 1982 and he's one of the true visionary leaders. Not only is articulate, but man, that guy knows the business. I've learned so much from Michael.

**AS** [00:32:32] He's he's amazing. The heart and intent is there and the the leadership, and the and the project, the nuts and bolts, project management skills. And what I appreciate on, among other things, is that actually continues to teach our time, obviously, as an adjunct that is, at his own college when when he's able to when they're able to give them a course. That said, what I wanted to ask you is there are, for a variety of reasons, it could be that a president is just too busy putting out fires. As you know, there's HR issues all the time, lawsuits. There's negotiations. There's so much that any presidents just don't find a time to to put in the work for this dance. They're too busy with this other crazy dance. And so, what I try to tell people who are leading from the middle, if you will, is that they still have an opportunity to make change, don't feel don't feel like you can't because morale often goes down when they don't feel like they got the support from at the top of the organization. Do you find the same because you've actually, you've been around more nationally than I have. Do you find that colleges can change through these middle managers? And, by the way, I also include faculty who have leadership roles in guided pathways. So although the president is the linchpin often and for whatever reason, he or she can't actually be involved and engaged, that they can actually still create this beautiful dance.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:34:15] We see this a lot, and it's both encouraging, but also somewhat discouraging. We see real efforts within colleges, especially at the dean and faculty level and the counselor advisor level to really create these communities. Ultimately, though, you need the leadership, the president and then the you know, the VPs. If you're going to if you're going to redesign advising and embedded counselors or advisers in of which is very critical if you're going to make investments and you know, the professional development that's needed to create these communities and to improve teaching in them, you're going to need top level support. But I've been in so many colleges where, you know, there's there's is leadership from the middle. One thing that we've seen is that we know there's a lot of turnover among presidential leadership and vice presidents. Ultimately, I think I'm just thinking of all the colleges I've talked to that are like this just last year, you know, frustrated that their top leadership isn't buying in. And I'm saying keep it going and keep it going because you're going to get new new leadership.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:35:41] Part of this is, is that the magnitude of change. You know, again, we talked about redesigning the community college. It's it's difficult to do in such a highly under-resourced institution that's under such pressures. And now covid and of course, community college students hit the worst because they're students and their families are tend to be from working class, you know, type families and jobs. And those those are the people who got hurt the most. You know, they're just hanging on. And so it's extremely challenging for the colleges as well as for their students, for their faculty and staff as well. But we're I love community colleges, but they're going to have to change. And and they do a lot that isn't in their best business interests, like use standardized tests that our researchers question is as valid, like put people in beavered algebra. And, you know, when we show that doesn't necessarily help students like not having every student have a plan because the competition from regional public universities, from these online degrees, which, you know, sound good, not so easy to graduate, is going to become intense. Michael Baston. And again, again, I'm an old guy. I'm a baby boomer.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:37:17] You know, one thing we're seeing is the emergence of new leaders like like Michael, like yourself, younger people who aren't baby boomers. And again, I honor the work that my baby boomer colleagues did in community colleges. I think we screwed up the rest of the world. But the business is in fairness to those folks, you know, were my lifelong friends. And, you know, the business has changed. The world has changed. So Michael Bastin and Gen X folks, coming up, these new leaders, Tonja Williams at at St. Petersburg College, Sonya Christian in Bakersfield, you know, Ed Bush at Consumnes River. I mean, you know, all these people. And and the faculty, Gen-X, younger generation of faculty, I hate to make this an attack on baby boomers, but in other words and you know, we do see some older, but you've got the business has changed. Part of this is that there's this fear of the faculty, the fear that if you ask the faculty to do something, you know, they're going to rebel. And especially in unionized shops, for people, it's the same in nonunion shops. There's this fear, I think, when you when you really lay it out to faculty and and this gets to things I've learned from you, give them the time and the time in a college. You've told me that, you know, in colleges you work with, they're just like two months where you can get any work done because of all the other stuff that's going on. And that was a revelation to me. I'm like, holy cow. But so the leadership these are the leading from the middle has to do this sort of on their own as an organization, but ideally with support to find the time to build these academic and career communities and to do that work across silos, within academics, but also with student services. That's that's what it takes. And that's that's tough. When faculty are teaching five courses, when, you know, counselors have, you know, 800 students to one, although we find that when colleges redesign, they can get the the the advisor to student ratio down to about one to 350. And you're you're mainly advising students in your field. So you're working with other faculty and students. More and more colleges are bringing other students in these mediators to help be there at orientation, you know, to tell students what's what and you know, what faculty are you ought to go to. And, you know, we're formed. You've got to form a study group for anatomy and physiology, et cetera, et cetera, you know, to form a sort of a cohort, a community.

**AS** [00:40:26] So I've been reading up the last few years on longevity. And researchers have found four or five places on earth that they called the blue zones. I also saw a show recently. These are people in these blue zones that they live to be over 90. They found that the diet has a lot to do with it, mostly plant based, one of them in the Mediterranean, Mediterranean. They continue to have meat, but very it's very limited. They'll maybe eat it twice a month, very small, but it's mostly plant based. That's number one.

**AS** [00:41:09] Number two, they found that they were extremely happy. There are very happy people. And when they research more or more, why are they so happy and they're happy because they have such a strong sense of belonging in their community, and it makes so much sense to me that when you have a good diet and you're a happy person, that you'll live longer. It's not rocket science. And what I wanted as we wind down and ask you is to if you could unpack more and are you're so passionate about these academic and career communities? I am as well. The light the fire course or all these things that you mentioned, or can you unpack that a little bit more? Because, again, I think what we're doing is, is creating this deeper sense of community, of belonging for students. So could you elaborate more on these academic and career communities?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:42:16] So we've come to see them as fundamental and we should have maybe, you know, as researchers because, you know, the the the most one of the most key findings from research on student success in college. You know, Vince Tinto, Syracuse was a pioneer and this is about engagement. But, you know, was looking at folks at students at Syracuse, likely be from our privileged families who have, you know, connections outside school and, you know, on a residential campus, there's all kinds of ways to engage for community college. You're going to engage in a field of interests and most of that engagement is going to be in the classroom. And so we have only we have seen value pathways.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:43:14] We've only seen at work, frankly, and we've seen it work very powerfully, where leaders maybe, as you say, catalyzed the changes, but really allow these academic and career communities to develop a life of their own, because the health care people, you know, we know them. We see them in their uniforms. You know, we respect them. We know who they are, you know, the theater people, the arts people. But, you know, in a community college, the idea of this is to really play that up more, that sense of community, especially for the transfer fields. We see it most easily in the city areas and the career technical. And they you know, they benefit from that. But this is also how students are going to find jobs. There's the most researchers. It's it's not what you know, it's how you know, it's who you know. But the good diet is the active teaching and learning. The other fundamental finding from on student success, especially underserved students, is next to a community engagement in a community of people who will support you or help you get ahead to show you what's what, who really, you know, can be your guides is is helping students get confidence as learners in the field and the research from K-12, as you know, I haven't done some of that work. And higher ed is it's August. Back to active learning. The most important research on the Pathways, I think, is a book that was published just last, unfortunately, during the pandemic by Xueli Wang. It's called On My Arm, in which you looked at students who starting at a community college trying to transfer in STEM, which is extremely difficult to do. And she's especially looking at students of color, first generation students, women, other groups, students from other groups underrepresented. And she you know, it's a really reinforces the ideas about the needs for clear paths for students having a plan, because it's really not clear. There are really not in most community colleges, pretty major programs in STEM, which is problematic because, again, not everyone has to be a STEM. But, you know, but the the the two things where the sense of community, the two most important things, the sense of community and then most important, having confidence as a learner, and that came from getting active learning experience in the first term. She found actually that students who who started community college transfer and get a bachelor's in STEM. It's extremely rare. We've looked at this. We're more likely to take the STEM course first and then take math.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:46:19] Because they get this interest and they probably connect with people, but she also found that the factor and she was so good about her research, is that more than we've done it at CCRC. She really did very serious surveying of students to understand their experience in the classroom. There are social capital there, networks. So she was really looking very in-depth in an extremely rigorous way at the student experience, which you talked about. And she found that mainly the the main areas are courses that students got active learning were CTE courses. And that's great. And I'm not knocking the CTE. The problem is if they're trying to transfer and stem those CTE courses, don't transfer. So they're, quote, academic courses were not lighting their fire for learning. We're not giving them. And by the way, the same there's there's even more research showing the key to success in improving learning outcomes, completion by underserved students. All these equity is is good teaching, active teaching and learning. Hank Levin. And that accelerated schools. And he said don't remediate, accelerate. And by acceleration, he didn't mean take your remediation and co requisite with your college level course.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:47:49] He meant give students from low income families, students of color, who really not don't have the kind of support, really rigorous but well taught courses. We've all had them. They've changed our lives. I remember you told me a story about how a faculty member changed your life. Actually, it sounded like in two ways, great teaching, challenging, but good made you think. But also he or she helped connect you. So good teaching and community. That's what this is about. And, you know, I am thinking about community colleges and as businesses, and I'm very worried about them because state support's been cut, which is not a good thing. And we're going to see big cuts, I'm afraid, you know, in the future. I'm glad to see the outlook for California is not as bad this year. I'm concerned about next year. But nevertheless, the competitive advantage that community colleges have are these two things, good teaching and the sense of community around academic and career fields of interest to students. And that's also, by the way, what the research suggests is needed, among other things, like you mentioned, to to really achieve more equitable outcomes.

**AS** [00:49:12] A lot a lot of my work is just based on my experience as a community college student. I was in the military left, came back, and fortunately, I was mature and had some experience with planning. And as a planner, I wanted to know what do I need to do? So I went to the college, spoke to someone at the community college. They said, well, you're going to have to take these tests to get into math and English. I was particularly concerned about math because I hadn't done it in years yet. But I I had the opportunity, the resources that a lot of students didn't don't have, which is I had a little bit of money, got myself a tutor who, by the way, didn't really teach me a lot about math, was more about these tricks to do well on the test.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:50:02] It's all a big game. What do you think rich people do when they send their kids to Princeton Review? I mean, it's not they're not becoming smarter or, you know, Kaplan, they're teaching them the tricks of these these tests. That's right. Well, I think we have to do away with the test because they're not. But anyhow, that's another topic. You had the wherewithal to plan and to get yourself a tutor.

[00:50:32] And I got into, fortunately, transferable math, and so I wasn't in the dev ed wilderness like a lot of my peers were, and I saw them dropping like flies because they were so discouraged that they had to redo their their high school math and English curriculum. The second thing that was or was I was able to succeed is because I had a few faculty who actually cared about their teaching, who cared about the students.. Again, as a planner and a lot of students don't know how to do this. I actually shopped around different classes. And what I was doing really at the time, I was looking for faculty who cared.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:51:15] Good teaching. Yeah. And as a matter, the subject matter is the same way my daugher, she, but she comes. Yeah, yeah. She shops and it doesn't matter if she's interested in the subject, if it's a bad teacher she'll just drop it. But it takes a lot of wherewithal. So yeah, you most students don't notice too that they don't have the confidence.

**AS** [00:51:38] And so as a faculty member began to see my you know, my writing and my performance in class, he encouraged me and he said, Hey, Al, I'm an adviser for this club. Why don't you join it? I said, Sure. And then he says, Well, you know what? Beyond that, why don't you take a leadership role within the club? I said, OK, that sounds cool. Hey, do you know that every semester because I know you do a little volunteering, you go to student services, you turn in the sheet for volunteer hours, that that actually goes on your record. I said I didn't know that. And what he was doing over time, helping me build my transfer application. And what the other thing that had a significant impact on me is that he said, are you going to transfer to UCLA or Berkeley? And I had not thought of those institutions. I thought, I'll just go to the local university, which is fine. But Davis, I had the mindset given how I grew up in a single parent, very, very low income situation, is that that's not for me. That's it's only for the rich people and a certain kind of people. But he really opened my eyes to a I believe in, you know, let's see what we can do. You Al you grew up in New York. You know, why don't you apply to these schools? And I did. I applied to Cornell, which at the time and they continue to do this. If you're a transfer student, they give you the option of of taking the SAT or not. And said great. I don't want to take this stupid test. And I ended up transferring there. They're the only Ivy that actually embraces, I believe at the time, community college students.

**AS** [00:53:36] So my point is, I've never forgotten the role of faculty. And that's why a lot of my work with faculty and and I have my criticisms of some of them, what they do. But it comes from a good place in my heart because I want them to continually improve.

**AS** [00:53:54] As we wind down. Davis, So we discussed beyond the checkboxes how got it. Pathway's has, in your mind, evolved since you wrote your coauthored the book. We discussed the research that you did on the return on investment and guided pathways. We also delved a little bit into the equity tool that you created. Discussed the president's as a linchpin, but the leaders from the from the middle can can make this happen, and these academic and career communities. Any last words of wisdom that you would like to impart?

**Davis Jenkins** [00:54:38] You know, I mean, colleges want to know where to start. I mean, if you're ideally it would be good if you could start with presidential leadership to get this conversation going. And many have and actually, you know, many have done the math majors and the mapping. And actually that's that's a good place to start.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:54:58] I mean it. It is important to have those, but the next thing, the next question and what we've been really encouraging colleges to do is two things, and that as matter majors and I know you've really helped colleges develop new success teams, which again, we think are critical. Number one, figure out how, you know, you're going to really start to engage students who are coming in to the college and who are already there. In your field of study, how are you going to find the al-Salam, those who are interested in and this in my field and how are we going to recruit them? It's not a bureaucratic thing. It's got to be personal how we're going to involve our our our students in that, number one. And number two, we really got to take a look at our foundation courses and not just math and English, but, you know, and put our best teachers and support our teachers because this is hard. Your most your students haven't had good teaching and they're going to be challenging and they're not going to like it because learning is hard. Real learning like dancing is very hard and they're going to look bad and feel bad. But, you know, one of the key things from research on learning is productive persistence. Yes, math is hard, but you've got to learn from your mistakes. You don't give up, which comes ultimately from believing in students. And I think the more that as communities at whatever scale that especially faculty and counselor and advisors and and other students can start proving that it will grow and it will be sustained much more than if it were an edict from on high with a kind of five grand or whatever, which can help. But any event, I agree with you, although it's difficult, this is we've heard from faculty and others involved in this. This is the most rewarding professional development experience. And with humility, we're saying in redesigning America's college, we're saying this is necessary to remake what is, you know, one of our most important democratic institutions. Health care is the great stabilizer. Education is the is the is the upward escalator, bad metaphor. And community colleges are education for people who don't have the resources, the social connections that get you into more selective elite institutions. But in your case and many others, they can they can be that path.

**AS** [00:57:59] Wonderful. Davis, thank you so much for participating in the Student Success podcast.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:58:06] Always a pleasure to work with you, Dr. Al.

**AS** [00:58:08] Happy dancing, Davis. Take care.

**Davis Jenkins** [00:58:10] Thanks, man.