**Dr. Cynthia Mosqueda**Learn about a highly successful comprehensive First Year Experience (FYE) program.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a pleasure to have Dr. Cynthia Mosqueda. She is the faculty coordinator for the first year experience program at El Camino College in Torrance, California. El Camino College's FYE program has received accolades for exemplary program status through the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges and through the California Community College Chancellor's Office for Outstanding Contributions toward Students Success, Transfer and Retention. In 2012, Dr. Mosqueda received the first year Advocate Award from the National Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition from the University of South Carolina for her work in helping first year students transition into college life. Dr. Mosqueda holds a degree in counseling and earned a doctorate in educational leadership from UCLA. She has been a strong advocate for community college issues and serves on the Board of Communities and School Los Angeles and her 20 plus years in the community college system. Cynthia has spearheaded numerous programs and campus wide initiatives to close equity gaps for students of color. Welcome to the Student Success podcast, Cynthia.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:01:01] Thank you. Thanks. Thank you so much for inviting me.

**AS** [00:01:04] So I'd like to start the podcast by asking about a hobby or talent. So if you wouldn't mind sharing. Cynthia?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:01:12] Yeah. So I would probably say that my number one hobby is is definitely traveling. I love to travel, but I don't just travel to travel. I travel really in search of really good food and to see what I can find. And I tend to take cooking classes when I'm traveling in whichever country I'm in at the moment. So I've had the pleasure of taking cooking classes that the Cordon Bleu School in Paris for a summer, and I've also taken cooking classes in Portugal, and all over Mexico because that's something I enjoy. Food, I grew up in. In the restaurant business, I worked in restaurants and so food is ingrained in me.

**AS** [00:01:59] So I wanted to focus on the first year experience, what that is. But you know what, I'm going to change this podcast. It's going to be all about your travels and food now the entire time on what you just said. Oh my gosh. Let me ask. So tell me, what are your top two or three places that you travel to where you learn about cooking? What were your favorites, places and what did you cook?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:02:24] You know, it's interesting because one of my favorite places ended up being Portugal of all places. I really love stews like soups and what have you and my mom is a really great cook. But when I was in Portugal, the kinds of ovens that they have like clay ovens, I mean, you just get some amazing stews that come out of that. And so I have to say, like Portugal was a top food destination and it was a pleasant surprise. I didn't expect that I was going to love the cuisine so much in Portugal. And then, of course, pastries in Paris, you can't beat the butter. France has definitely some of the best butter you will ever have.

**AS** [00:03:09] So tell me, you said you grew up in a restaurant business. One of my first jobs back in the day, I I was actually in high school. I was working a lot. Iworking like 40 hours a week and I was a waiter and I always remember that experience. It's not easy working in the restaurant business. It's hard, actually hard work. Tell us a little bit about that experience.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:03:29] Yeah. So I said I actually started waitressing at a very young age about 15 and a lot of local, I grew up here in the South Bay. I grew up in Redondo Beach, and so I worked at pizza places, Mexican restaurants, and then I worked in catering. And then I worked for more as restaurants really started to get away from mom and pops and started to be owned more by corporations. I started work in corporate and corporate restaurants, and so I became more of a trainer, supervisor, kind of manager. And I worked in the restaurant business really through my entire undergraduate experience and got a lot of experience. And believe it or not, a lot of that experience has paid off by working in higher education because you have to be able to multitask when you work in a restaurant, you have like tight deadlines. And then when I got more into a management kind of a position, being able to work with a variety of different personalities and we all work as a team in a restaurant, right? So it's like from the cooks to the chefs, to the people who are serving the meals to the hostess. I mean, it is a team effort. And so I learned a lot about people skills, about coordination, about working with conflict, you name it. It was really, really great. You know, I take all of that with me into higher education, for sure.

**AS** [00:04:54] Yeah, I have a friend of mine he works at, and he's been a long time faculty member. Then all of a sudden, he found himself in a role as a coordinator for guided pathways of all things, and he said that in order to do that job well, the management part, he had to go back to his experience working at a restaurant

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:05:15] Wow. I believe that.

**AS** [00:05:17] As a faculty, he kind of knew a little bit of the institutional knowledge, but it helped, did not help him at all. It was experience working at a restaurant that really helped him. How do you work with so many different people, with different opinions, and how do you move them all toward one task when they're doing so many different things at the same time? I'm going to jump a little bit because, gosh, travel and food, right? So I want to ask you ,because you traveled a lot, do you have any tips for effective traveling practices? What are some? Do you have any tips?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:05:52] Well, definitely, travel light. I mean, which is easier said than done. A lot of people over pack. For their travel, they end up taking way more clothes than they actually need. Believe it or not, I have. I might travel with two or three pants, you know, a jacket that I can wear at night. A couple of shirts. So I try to travel light because also when you travel, you're picking up different things that you like, but you might want to purchase and you're not going to have room in your suitcase if you end up over packing. I think the other thing too is try to immerse yourself in the culture as much as possible. That's one of the reasons I loved taking cooking classes at the different countries that I visited, because a lot of the people that I've met working at the cooking schools had grown up in the area that I was visiting, and I learned a lot about just the communities that I was visiting and got to to really partake in their rich culture. So whether it's try to learn the language there or get involved in one way or another, it'll pay off in the long run.

**AS** [00:07:03] Thank you for those tips. So let's get started on the first year experience because you've been working with that for 20 years. I've known you for a long time. I remember when this was from a Title five grant. Unfortunately like, what happens with so many title five grants, they're not institutionalized, but this was something that was institutionalized at El Camino. What is FYE?What is First Year Experience, Cynthia. And I ask that because depending on the campus that I go, I get different definitions. They tell me what they do and I go, That's not really a first year experience. So can you give us clarity of what is a first year experience, A. And B, can you unpack how you do that at your college?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:07:48] Sure. That's a really good question, because I think that you're right, depending on which campus you're talking to, depending on what part of the state you're asking that question, or if you're, you know, maybe in another state too, might be, it might mean something completely different. And I think also, this it's also important if you're asking that question to community colleges versus a four year versus a public, because I do think that there are differences and I can tell you, when I was originally hired for this position, I went around the entire state of California trying to see if there was a model for first year experience in the community college, and I couldn't find one. I couldn't find anybody in the state that was doing first year experience. The only places that I was finding first year experience programs was actually at the university. We at El Camino have had to really develop this like from scratch. There wasn't really a blueprint specifically to the California Community College System. So in terms of what we see and how we define first year experience program, it's a lot of things. Number one, it's assisting students with their transition coming to college for the very first time. Many of our students are students who who have no college units whatsoever, so they really meet the definition of first year students. Second, we are providing them with comprehensive wraparound services, everything from advising enrollment, outreach, educational planning, transfer services, graduation services are just to kind of name a few of the things that we provide our program at El Camino College. We just celebrated 20 years this week, actually, so because I love that we're meeting this week to talk about first year experience because we just had our celebration on Tuesday to commemorate those 20 years. But our program, specifically at El Camino, we used a couple of different components. So we do use a cohort model. When we originally kicked off this program 20 years ago, it had maybe 100 students. Today, it has about 2500 students that participate in first year experience. So we have about 50 to learning communities that we offer that are structured for first year students, but they're also aligned with guided pathways. And so that's a change that's been made over the years. And then in addition to that, students, we work with them all the way from beginning to end. So we're not just working with them within the first year of college. We are working with them all the way until graduation or transfer. So our program is very comprehensive. It's not just one class, it's a lot of things that are attributed to their success at the campus.

**AS** [00:10:43] How many cohorts do you have that you support at any given time?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:10:49] Anywhere between forty two to fifty two cohorts. We're expanding for fall of twenty twenty two. We're expanding into areas stem. We have about. A really high number of STEM students that come to El Camino College. We have a great math engineering science achievement MESA program that's run by Arturo Hernandez, who just does an amazing job, as you know, we are down the street from Space X, so we're surrounded by engineering companies. So we're expanding to include more STEM cohorts to really meet the demands of that student population. And then we're also expanding dual enrollment. We have a lot of students now who are participating in dual enrollment, and they need a better pathway to go from dual enrollment directly into the first year experience program so that they can graduate and transfer within a year. So a lot of students who are doing dual enrollment coming into the campus with anywhere between 18 to 21 units. And so really, all they need is one additional year at the college to be able to earn their associates and then eventually transfer. So we're building a pathway for that student population

**AS** [00:12:02] 40 plus cohorts. Can you explain that a little bit because typically when we talk about cohorts, let's say when you were starting this program and you decided to do a cohort model, you have an incoming class, let's say, it was 2007. So that's a cohort. And then 2008, you have a new cohort, but then you have that existing cohort from 2007 and it kind of builds upon. But how do you, how do you manage 40 plus cohorts?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:12:33] It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work, but I don't do it alone. We have a full time team, so every new cohort is enrolled in in a series of cohort, it's based on their meta major. So for example, if you're coming to El Camino for the first time and you're a STEM major, we're going to place you into one of our STEM cohorts. And so that might mean that you're going to be taking math 180, pre-calculus, is one of your first courses, and that course might be linked with an intro to engineering course as your second course. These are two classes that you need for graduation. There are two classes that you need for transfer, so that would be part of your cohort. At least 50 percent of your classes as an incoming first year student would be taught by professors who know that you're in your first year in college. They are FYE faculty. In many cases, our students will get to know those students a little bit better than maybe the other students that they are working with and some of the other classes that are not first year experience courses. There is a lot more mentoring, a lot more intrusive counseling. There's a lot more partnerships between the faculty member and the counselor as well, because there's presentations that go on through the academic year. An incoming first year student is going to take a minimum within their first year, at least 50 percent of their courses, are going to be taught by FYE professors. It's going to be based on whatever their meta-major is, and so for some students, it's going to be some for some of them is going to be social sciences. For some of them, it's going to be humanities. So it really just depends on where the student falls in in terms of their major goals and some of their career aspirations when they're coming to the college.

**AS** [00:14:20] How many meta-majors do you have?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:14:22] So El Camino, right now we have close to about eight or nine meter majors.

**AS** [00:14:27] And then so entering cohort comes and you're keeping track of them per meta major and then you have multiple cohorts over time for each matter major. So that's how it's organized?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:14:40] Yes. So we have. So the student, when the student comes to El Camino College and they're interested in the first year experience program, they're going to rank their meta-major, like this is what I want to come to El Camino to study for. And then what we do is we make every effort to make sure that student is placed into their meta-major so that from the beginning, they are taking the necessary classes that they need to graduate and to transfer, in addition to taking English and math and any other courses that they might need for for their program of study.

**AS** [00:15:11] And when you say FYI faculty, does that mean that's the faculty where you have these 52 learning communities? Is that what you consider FYE?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:15:19] Correct. So we work with all the academic deans to identify faculty that might want to teach within the first year experience program. So that could be anywhere between an English professor, history professor, a math professor. So we work with pretty much all of the academic divisions at El Camino,

**AS** [00:15:39] By the way. Is Jason Suarez still there?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:15:41] Jason Suarez is still there, yes. He's also very involved in guided pathways. He's right now. I believe he's pretty much working with the Guided Pathways initiative at the college. Yeah.

**AS** [00:15:53] I love Jason. He really cares about teaching. He's always kind of working on how, how do I continually improve my craft? And anyway, I always, always appreciated him.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:16:04] Original professor. 20 years ago in FYE.

**AS** [00:16:08] Yeah, yeah. So thank you for unpacking this because I think it's very easy for people to go, Oh, well, El Camino is doing cohorts and I put them into meta-majors, and let's go ahead and just carbon copy that. I just did it myself, and it took me years to get to this point, to evolve, to have the infrastructure, to have even learning communities. I have actually a lot of experience with this. If the faculty don't gel, it's not going to work. And so you have to you have fifty two learning communities and you have to ensure that when the faculty form these learning communities that they're talking, they're collaborating and that they gel. And then what the meta-majors, which is relatively recent, I'm sure you probably formed them, what like three or four years ago, but before that they weren't in place so that's relatively new. And then you have this dual enrollment component. So it truly is a robust kind of wrap around support services through the student journey. As someone who's listening to this and going, Oh, wow, I want to do that, What's kind of the good, the bad and the ugly Cynthia? What are some key challenges, potential pitfalls? Mine fields that that people need to be aware of if they're going to do a similar model.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:17:30] Yes. Well, OK, I you know, we've helped, the El Camino FYE program, we can't even keep count of how many campuses we've helped in our 20 years to start their own first year experience program, right? We get this question all the time. One of the things I always tell campuses is that if you want to have the kind of success that we've had at El Camino, if you want to get as large as we have at El Camino, we've only been able to do that because we have a full time team. If it's one person who's overseeing the entire first year experience program, it's not going to work right. It can't be an individual that has 50 percent release time, and it's just that one person. You can't scale something up like that. You have to have the support. So the El Camino team, one of the reasons we've been around 20 years. One of the reasons we have this success that we have is because we have a full time team. You know, I oversee this program full time. I have a co-coordinator who oversees the instructional component, full time, who's helping with recruitment of the faculty, professional development for the faculty overseeing our faculty development meetings. I oversee the student services side of the component. But even on the student services side, we have full time faculty. We have anywhere between 12 to 15 adjunct counselors that work in the program. We have a full time secretary. We have about two full time advisors and three additional success coaches on top of that. So we're talking about this is a team of people, right? And it's in we're 100 percent funded through district funds, so we're also not funded through soft money. As you know, when the grant ended, the college did have to make a commitment to institutionalize this, and they did thank God. But part of the reason it was institutionalized is because it was able to prove that students who were participating in first year experience were outperforming first year students who were coming to the college, who were not participating in this program. And so we were able to really, really show that through the data. It didn't hurt us that within our institutional title five grant, we had a full time researcher in those five years, right? So that was definitely helpful. But that's one of the things I would say to campuses is that to replicate this, to offer the, you know, the kinds of services and get the kinds of outcomes we have, it does take a team of people. So it can't just be one, just to answer that part of your question first. I think the second part of your question is what are the pitfalls, right? I think that you have to be willing to change. The model we have today is not the model we had in 2005 or 2010 or 2015. We have changed as the needs of our students have evolved over the years. And so the cohort structure has changed over the years, right? When guided pathways came out, you can't be a program. You know, when something new comes out that you don't want to participate or you don't want to partner up. We knew early on that we had to change the structure of some of the services of the first year experience to really align with guided pathways. And so we were involved in that from the early stages of it. And we wanted to make sure that our cohorts were aligned with a lot of the meta-majors that came out. And so I do think it's important that for programs who have been around 20 years, there's some programs in the. state that have been around 30, some even longer than that, 40, right? And they are not always willing to adjust to the changes. We try to align our program with the vision for for success that the chancellor's office has set forth. That's always something we're trying to do as well. So I do think that you have to evolve if you're not evolving, if you're not changing as you go along, then you can be potentially left behind. And so for us, it's always been important to talk to our students, get feedback, look at our evaluations and see what else are we missing? How can we make this a better experience for students? How can we better close equity gaps for the students who are participating in this program? So those are constant conversations that we're currently having, that we're always having that they're ongoing.

**AS** [00:21:47] I think it is important to note that it's been a 20 year evolution. I'm always, I don't know if you heard me say this, I I'm not very fond of the term best practice. What may be a best practice at one campus may not translate into a best practice at another campus because there are nuances, right? Some of the campuses is kind of built in over time in the culture, and as you know, culture change in higher ed is it's just so difficult to change culture. And the devil's in the details, forever will be in the details of how you implement something like this. So for a campus, Cynthia, that's going, Oh my gosh, there's no way I can get the college to invest in this entire team. Enrollments are down and what would be something incremental? Where can they start and build on incrementally over time to get to a point where they have a model that connects dual enrollment with the onboarding process for FYE to a meta-major? What's something that they can maybe a quick win, if you will, Cynthia, that they can build upon over time because most campuses are not going to just in a matter of, Oh, I heard this podcast and that's next spring, we're going to just fully implement this, right?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:23:07] So, you know, I would say, well, I don't know that there's a quick win. I don't know that there's a quick win. But I get the gist of your question. I would say partnerships. I think that one of the reasons that we've been successful at El Camino has been the partnerships that we have developed in the 20 years. And what I mean by that is I have a strong partnership with our outreach, school relations and office of recruitment right there out at the high schools there. You know, they already have the established partnerships with our district high schools because of that partnership. That is one of the reasons that first year experience has flourished at our institution, why we have so many students who want to be a part of it. Obviously, yes, the quality is another reason students want to be a part of it. I do think that there's a lot of room for partnerships, and I don't think we always take advantage of that. I think that there are a lot of times duplication of services. And so, you know, FYE is not out in the community recruiting. We don't do that. We don't have to do that because we have this amazing outreach department, right? So A.B. 19 Promise programs, they are a great opportunity for colleges who are working with first year students to create partnerships at El Camino. Almost every student who is part of the Promise program is a student that's admitted into the first year experience program. That is a partnership that we've developed with our promise program. And so a lot of times when I talk to colleges who are starting first year experience programs or they already have a first year experience program, in fact, I just met with the campus last week they were trying to increase enrollment into their first year experience program. And one of the questions I said to them is What is your relationship with your promise program? What is your partnership with your promise program? Because if you two are not talking to one another, then that's a missed opportunity. You could be partnering up and working together because those students are first year students. They need support, they need wraparound services. And so the first year experience program is a great transition for them, right? And so I would say, if you're asking for a quick win for those, for programs that either have an established FYE program or they're just getting started, I think they need to be having conversations with not just promise programs, but also with dual enrollment programs, because those those are two great transitions, they should be working with one another.

**AS** [00:25:43] Relationships, relationships, relationships, this is all relational. For those outside of California, Cynthia, can you tell them what a Promise program is?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:25:52] Sure. The promise program here in California, if a student attends a community on a full time basis, so full time is about 12 units, they can have the first year of enrollment fees waived, and so it's going to vary by campus to campus. But the majority is they get the first year waived at my campus. Students not only get the first year waived, but they also get the second year waived and some of that money is raised through our foundation office. So there are campuses that also are raising funds privately through their foundation to pay for that second year. Great for students so that any student, if they're having difficulty paying for their tuition, they're going to be in a position where they can attend to community college at no cost to them for the first year.

**AS** [00:26:44] Thank you for explaining that. As I learn more about the program, it's interesting to me because correct me if I'm wrong, maybe the name doesn't give justice to what you really do. You're no longer a first year experience in that sense, if you look at the guided pathways model of helping students. Helping clarify the path for them. Helping them enter, stay in and ensure their learning. And this is what's been so difficult about with colleges to implement. The model is that it's not really prescribed. In a sense, it's almost agnostic. So here's a framework, but how you do each part of the of these four areas or four pillars will vary by campus. In essence, what you've been doing over time or you've been evolving to is actually guided pathways.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:27:31] 100 percent right out. 100 percent right? Yes. When guided pathways came out and I looked at all of the different components. That's one of the first things I said to myself is we're doing all of this already. But isn't the real question, how do we do this for all students who are who are not participating in programs like FYE, right? Because to me, a lot of the practices that we're we're already using and for your experience, you're 100 percent right that we really are more than just the first year. I mean, we're working with students all the way to graduation transfer and in many cases, beyond.

**AS** [00:28:06] Yeah. Might be time for a name change. Anyway, sometimes that's not a good thing, right? Because you already branded it, and that's anyway. But I think now with the meta-majors, it really helps to anchor the work. It just improves upon what the existing work. What I like to do is because you've mentioned some really important services for students along their journey. Let's say a student who's listening to this is wondering, OK, I want to enroll in El Camino. Can you tell me these things that I'm going to experience in this first year experience? Take me through the journey as a student. What am I going to experience?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:28:45] OK. So just to kind of give you the the steps that one of our students would follow is all of our students are invited to what's called an information session. It's an opportunity for them to learn more about the campus to learn more about first year experience program. Since we haven't been in-person and we've been pretty much virtual for the last year and a half. Many of our sessions are held via Zoom, usually in the afternoon, to make it so that we can have more students participate. And that's really their first point of contact with FYE, so they learn more. They hear from other students who have been part of the program, and they talk about some of the benefits. After that's over, a student will come back and they will meet with the counselor to develop what we would call their abbreviated plan. It's really the first step and educational planning. So it gives them an idea of what kind of classes they can take for summer and they could take for fall after that point. Many of our students, our program is pretty much based on a first come, first serve model if a student wants to be part of this program and they're committing to be in the program. We pretty much admit every single student who applies to the program, we're not really turning away any student. That's one of the, that's what I think one of the big benefits of first year experience because we we don't have any income guidelines, right? You don't necessarily have to be first gen to be part of this program. However, I will tell you that close to seventy five percent of all the students that participate in this program identify as the first to go in their families. So we are definitely serving a large population of first gen students once a student is admitted into the program. We're also inviting them back for that enrollment piece. And I think this is where I use a little bit different from a lot of experience that students have, right? Because part of guided pathways is helping them with that entry point, right? And for a lot of our students, that entry point isn't always clear for students. And so we do host a series of registration workshops that students are invited to that they participate in to make. Sure, they're completing the enrollment piece, and there's no worry about whether or not they register for classes in the summer, register for classes in the fall, especially when you're first in your family to go to college. The registration fees can be very confusing for a lot of students, just because you've met with the counselor and you created an educational plan, doesn't necessarily mean that you know how to actually process these courses, how to read units, how to have an understanding of how much time is expected of you outside of class. And I think this is especially true for a lot of our STEM students who are coming to college for the first time, right? Taking four classes that are five units and STEM is overwhelming, and it might be too much for an incoming first year students. So we help them with with that piece. Something else, it's a little bit unique to the first year experience at El Camino is our students are also invited back in the summer. They're invited back in the summer to be to attend a financial aid training session. We implemented this maybe about seven years ago. We started to notice that many of our students, they do really well in applying. They're applying for their FAFSA in their California Dream Act. But the areas that they had a gap is understanding, you know, how long they had to receive financial aid at the community college. How W's impact you. How not passing a course could also impact your financial aid. We saw that students started to get on what's called satisfactory academic progress. That's basically what a student at that point is being put on warning to potentially lose their financial aid. And so we decided we needed to do something to change this around for students. And so now we partner up with financial aid. Partnerships are key. We partner with financial aid and we partner with the scholarship office and we provide, it's about a two hour training that every student goes through in the summer. But what's really key about this training hour is that if you're a student who comes to the training and let's say you've made a mistake on your FAFSA or you've been selected for verification and you haven't submitted those those forms when you come to that training, we know that you've already have not completed your financial aid. We work closely with financial aid so that when you come to the training, we can say, Oh, we noticed that you have some outstanding paperwork. Let's try to help you complete this so that you will get your Financial Aid Award letter in time for the start of the fall semester. So we're able to really close that loop for students, right? Provide intentional financial aid support because a lot of times these students, they they're out there, they exist, but nobody's closing that loop for them unless the student follows up with financial aid directly. And so this has been a really successful partnerships. It started just for first year experience students. Now it's offered for all new students at the college. Right. And so it just kind of proves that some of the programing that we have built for first year experience students is good for all students. And so now the college has expanded the program. Last year was the first year was offered to all new students at the campus, and we had thousands of students go through it. And as a result of that, more students got awarded financial aid before the start of the fall semester. So that's something else that you would participate in as a result of the program. And then once you're admitted into our program, our students go through, they're invited to enrichment workshops throughout their academic year, and they are all required to create a comprehensive plan that is something that is important to the program. Because, you know, when a student has a comprehensive plan, they have a clear idea of how many terms it's going to take for them to graduate, how many terms it's going to take for them to transfer, what it looks like in the long term. So usually all first year students will have a comprehensive plan that gives them an idea of how many classes they need to fulfill from beginning to end. And that has been very, very helpful. In fact, our institutional research office has done some studies at El Camino that show that students who have a comprehensive educational plan on file in general will complete about twenty one units per academic year versus students who only have an abbreviated plan. They might complete anywhere between six to nine units. So we're seeing that that comprehensive plan really plays a role in the number of units as students is completing every academic year at El Camino.

**AS** [00:35:57] Wow. Thank you, Cynthia. A few things. When guided pathways was introduced, one of the things I tried to do is try to help campuses realize that they're already doing elements of this framework. I used to do, here are the pillars let's do an exercise where we put what you currently have and how it aligns with helping students clarify their path, enter a stay and ensure they're learning. And it was a useful exercise because really, what they got from it was, Oh my gosh, we're so disjointed. We worked in silos. We don't really have relationships. We're doing some things. And then some of these things that they're doing will benefit like 50 students here, 100 students there. And I think for some campuses like El Camino, when you when you're able to do that and see because you made the investment, you had a Title V, you had the FYE, it was easier. It was it's not easy, but it's easier to align to that model and see already the good things that you're doing to help students along along their journey. Another example is my work with campuses, that we had worked on developmental and reform, developmental and reform. A lot of people forget is actually a cornerstone of guided pathways. And because they already were doing that, that kind of work in California is called AB 705, the developmental and reform. They were just more prepared to do the work because they basically were already doing it. They just had to do some more tweaking. What I'm getting at with this is I've said that this work really, there's three buckets to it. There's onboarding and that's a beast. Campuses are trying to figure out, how do we do the onboarding? We ping pong students all over the place? And how do we make it more seamless, more supportive, more caring? The second bucket is how do we really leverage our meta-majors. How do we kind of bring them to life and help students have a sense of community and belonging? And then the third one is ensure learning, teaching and learning. That's the third bucket. How can we continually improve instruction? This is usually what I recommend is have, if you can't have a student success team per meta-major and that's a hot mess, by the way, because a lot of campuses don't know what that is exactly on how to do that at least have one like solid student success team that's going to manage all this. Anyway, it's a long way to say, is that you have that team. I mean, it would be nice to have some sort of team per meta-major, but you have this solid team that's really helping to manage these three buckets. The onboarding going into the meta-major and in the learning communities really speak to that, that ensure learning piece. And so, yeah, it's just I'm trying for listeners to remember that take stock of what you currently do. Ask yourself, do we have those relationships? Are we still so highly siloed? Tell us a little bit about outcomes. What have been some of the outcomes as a result of having this kind of model?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:39:08] Yeah. So, you know, the outcomes have been really, really, really great at El Camino. Our students are three times more likely to graduate or transfer than first year students who did not participate in the program. I know this isn't being videotaped, but if you could see my screen, I have all. I have a dashboard. We have a student success metrics dashboard that's created on campus for all the different cohort programs, plus the general population. Our success rate, our retention rates for FYE students are always 96 percent or higher for students who are retained during the first year in comparison to like sixty seven percent for first year students who are not part of the program. Our success rates are around seventy seven percent for first year students in the program. I think the other thing too is about, you know, almost the majority of all of our students have a comprehensive educational plan by the end of their first term here at the college. And in terms of the number of units they're they're completing, I mean, our FYE students are completing on average twenty one units by the end of their first year in comparison to first year students who are completing anywhere between nine to 10 units. So even the units is is really, really different. Recently, our institutional research office presented at the Student Success Conference for the RP Group, when they were also looking at metrics in terms of like how many students are completing English and math. One of the things that they found is that students who were in first year experience were three times as likely to pass their English and math class on first attempt than students who were not part of the cohort. And even when they disaggregated that by race, our students were still outperforming the general populations, and a lot of these metrics have been steady. They've kept steady for 20 years. But what again, one of the reasons that they kept steady is as we we grew as a program, we also increased support services. So that's also something to keep in mind because a lot of times when programs get bigger and they don't increase the support services or the staff or what have you, you're going to see a gap in the metrics, right? Because you just can't do the same amount of work when you get bigger if you don't have the proper support to do it. And so that's one of the things that we've always been mindful of at El Camino. As we we grew, it was important to also grow the support staff that goes along with it. You know, our metrics is something that we look at every year as a program to see, are we dipping in the area and if so, why trying to get feedback from our students and really try to adjust our services and modify wherever necessary. So those are some of the metrics, we obviously we can collect a ton of metrics for the college, but I just highlighted the ones I thought would be the most important.

**AS** [00:42:13] Thank you. And just to clarify, did you say that this is the year where basically every student is part of FYE?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:42:19] No. What I was saying earlier had to do with financial aid training program that the financial aid training program that first year students go to, it's now open to all students.

**AS** [00:42:31] So let's say all students that came and said, I want to be a part of this. Do you have the capacity to serve every single student in this program or you at capacity that you know that we can serve? For sure, 70 percent. But if we went to 100, we would need to make some changes.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:42:48] I would say we we're not serving every needs student. We we definitely would have to make some changes to accommodate more students. El Camino has a lot of other student success programs that students could be a part of as well. So we're not the only program in town, but we're certainly the largest non categorical program at El Camino College. Without a doubt,

**AS** [00:43:13] What percentage of the student population is involved in FYE at any given time. Would you say, what's your best guess?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:43:19] For the new students, we're just looking at the new students who are coming into El Camino, I would say it's close to 60 percent of all new students are participating in a cohort, and then we have students who obviously are participating in MESA, EOPS. Jason Suarez, by the way, now runs another program very not similar to for you, but it's called My Path. So a lot of students participate in that as well. So there are a lot of ways that students can participate in a cohort type of program outside of year experience.

**AS** [00:43:53] And when you say cohort, the students experience that as a cohort or do you say cohort because that's how you track it?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:43:59] Both because the My Path program that Jason oversees, that is a cohort program very similar to the first year experience program. So we're not the only cohorted program that exists at El Camino. There are other opportunities for students to participate in this kind of structure.

**AS** [00:44:14] So it begs the question, why have another program? How are the other programs different from FYE, given that you've had the metrics over the last 20 years to show the outcomes?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:44:25] Right. So I think that the other programs are a little bit different in the sense that they're not our program as a whole academic year. So there is a one year commitment and then our program also focuses on just first year students coming directly from high school. Whereas some of the other programs that I mentioned My Path, it's really a semester type based program, and it's more based on students who are majoring in behavioral and social sciences who still want that cohort experience. But maybe that's not necessarily for a whole entire year.

**AS** [00:44:57] I see here's some room for collaboration because as you have your students in FYE and then they can experience another sense of belonging and community with a specific discipline or a meta-major. I think that's the second bucket I talked about, right is how do you bring to life these meta-majors? How do you operationalize them, if you will? And it sounds like you have the beginnings of that with that particular program.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:45:23] Yes. And actually that program, the one that Jason's overseeing My Path, it is really based on meta-majors. So you got to bring him on the podcast.

**AS** [00:45:31] Absolutely. So Cynthia, can you tell us how the program has helped students transfer, helped them to earn a certificate and associates? Because one of the data points we've learned over the years is that, and this was particularly true for our students of color, is the ones that were actually able to stay, they were earning 80, 90 or 100 units. Just excessive units wasted, financial aid wasted, time wasted. Can you tell us a little bit about how the program has helped students cross the finish line?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:46:04] I think the theme of this podcast is going to be the word partnerships, because once again I'm going to have to defer to partnerships. That's one of the things I think our program does really well is we partner up with other areas, and so we have a strong partnership with the transfer center. Our transfer center director is Rene Lozano, who does an amazing job. And early on, when this program was originally founded at El Camino, we partnered up with him from day one. We wanted to make sure that transfer was part of the conversation we wanted to share. That transfer was embedded into everything that we did, including the curriculum. By the way, we work with Rene's office to make sure that all of our students are attending transfer workshops as early as day one. Their orientation has a transfer component. In addition to that, students are participating in transfer events throughout the academic year. Early on, we used to host a transfer conference that we no longer have, but we're thinking about bringing it back. But because FYE students, they are coded, we use Colleague on campus. So we use colleague to place our students in a cohort so we know when our students are eligible to apply for a degree, whether that's an associate's from the campus or an 80, or whether they are ready to transfer. And so we do a lot of targeting messaging to our students. We do use an early. We use kind of like a text alert system to let our students know it's time for them to graduate or transfer. We also have an online degree audit that students use since they begin. Here, first year students, and they're able to track their own progress, see what courses they've completed, what courses they still have left, so I will tell you that many of our students, I'm never worried that they're going to leave El Camino with 80 or 90 units like you described. My worry is they're always going to be exactly at 60. And so I'm worried that they might accidentally drop a class and be eligible for graduation or transfer. So I think we've done a really good job, you know, in making sure that they're not taking unnecessary courses, right? And again, part of the way that we do that is through the cohort because they are taking courses that they need for graduation and transfer early on, and they're not taking courses that are going to take away from their financial aid package here at the college. Or they're unnecessary for their major, the schools that they're they're thinking about transferring. And so I think through the partnerships, we've done a really good job of increasing the number of students that are transferring from El Camino, but specifically from the first year experience program. So again, I can't stress how important it is for campuses who are thinking about establishing a first year experience program. Have a conversation with your partners, start working with them early on, you know, bring those folks in to meet your students, to be part of the presentations, to be part of the curriculum. We even designed a transfer course at the college called Navigating the Transfer Pathway. It's a one unit course that our students can take to learn more about the transfer process.

**AS** [00:49:27] Yes, I think for colleges that are interested in borrowing some or all of what you've been doing is having a meeting with all of these key people and almost doing a crosswalk of, OK, what does your program do, let's bullet point everything, and what does this program do, less bullet point everything, and you kind of visually see across then opportunities for better communication and collaboration. As we wrap up. I was wondering, you've been doing this too in the middle of a pandemic. What have been some of the changes that you've had to make considering that this this pandemic is not exactly over. We don't know how long things are going to last. Might there be another variant? Still, a lot of people, sad to say, they're not really taking this seriously. What are some lessons learned about how to do this well, in a remote environment.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:50:14] I think for us, something that we noticed early on is how much our students wanted to have life events via Zoom. They didn't want to see recordings, right? They they wanted people that they can talk to. They can be able to ask questions and get their questions answered as quickly as possible. So when the pandemic hit, we tried to provide a lot of spaces for our students to connect not just with us, but really with one another. We set up study sessions because we found out that our students, they just wanted to be in a room with other first year students where they can socialize and get to know each other. So there was a lot of virtual networking and socializing that took place during the beginning of the pandemic and still, believe it or not, to this day. El Camino is going to have about 70 percent of their classes back in person for spring of 2022. We're helping with that transition because it's also going to be a huge transition. Some of our students have not even stepped foot on campus the last two years. And so that's going to be a big shift for them. So we are in the process of them working we us, we have a student advisory who's kind of advising us in terms of what kinds of programing they want to see back in person. I will tell you that a lot of our students have told us, especially our first year students, that they want to be in-person. Many of them, especially the new students who are part of the class of 2020, too many of them are already in person. They've been in-person at their high schools. And so a lot of them have expressed to us that we don't want to go back online anymore. We want to visit the campus. We want to take classes on campus. But they also want some opportunities to meet new students to socialize with students. And so one of the things we're working on right now is what that calendar is going to look like. What kind of opportunities they are looking for. And so we're going to really spend a lot of time making sure that we're planning events that are intentional, obviously, that they're going to be safe, but that they're not all going to be virtual. I think a lot of our students are really in need of connecting, not just with each other, but with faculty, with some of our administrators, with some of our staff in person.

**AS** [00:52:34] You've created this delicious and nutritious FYE stew. And I think it's important for other campuses to know that their stews are going to have a little bit different flavors, and that's OK. Some of the stews are not going to be as big. Some of them are, they're going to start with a small portion and grow from there. But the key in this is too, especially if you have a lot of cooks in the kitchen, is to partner with them, to communicate, collaborate, to ensure that this stew is again, you know, it just continues to be delicious and nutritious for students. So any last word?

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:53:18] Yeah, I think the last thing I'll say is you're free to reach out. You know, I think that as I mentioned, we're celebrating 20 years of First-Year Experience. And when I started this 20 years ago, there wasn't really anybody I could call in the state. I believe it or not, I went out of state. I talked to the folks at LaGuardia Community College because they had an established first year experience, and so I had to leave the state. But I always tell campuses, you know, feel free to reach out. We're happy to share anything that we've created with you. You don't always have to reinvent the wheel. You might need to tweak it for your campus, right, to make sure it meets your needs. But we're here to help and we're here also to partner in any way that we can and just be a support for other campuses who want to get involved in this work. And then thank you so much for having me today. I really appreciate you being a great voice for higher education, community colleges across the nation.

**AS** [00:54:17] Well, thank you, Cynthia. I have given your name to a lot of people, actually, and we'll include your contact info in the show notes. You're so kind to be willing to take time from your precious time to meet with others. So thank you so much for that and thank you for participating in the Student Success podcast, Cynthia.

**Cynthia Mosqueda** [00:54:37] Thank you so much.