

Rise, Teach, Learn - Season 1, Episode 1

Lessons From the 2020 Student and Faculty Experience

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We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU Chico stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

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Welcome to the Rise, Teach, Learn Podcast. I am Dr. Chiara Ferrari, Director of Faculty Development at Chico State, and we are happy to make this resource available to our campus community and beyond. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Jamie Linn Gunderson and she will engage in timely conversations with faculty, staff, and students and give you a taste of the Chico experience. Subscribe to our podcast and explore the many resources available on our website. Thank you for listening.

01:02

Hello, my name is Jamie Gunderson, and welcome to Rise, Teach, Learn.

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In our inaugural episode, we will explore the 2020 students and faculty experience and discuss tools and tips that will help us rise to the virtual challenges we continue to face teach with technology that supports community and connection and learn how to best support our students attention. I hope you enjoy our first episode.

01:28

All right, so I'm here with Kate McCarthy, the Dean of Undergraduate Education, and she has graciously accepted my invitation to come on and talk a little bit about some of the focus group and survey research that Chico State has done regarding the 2020 faculty and student experience. It's okay 2020 was wild as the faculty and I'm sure the students feel the same. Can you tell me a little bit about the purpose and the implementation of that particular research? Sure, yeah, it was a really great process. So one of my campus roles is to co-chair the Graduation Initiative advisory team, which is just really trying every possible way to advance student success. And in that group, of course, we were very concerned about what the impact of virtual learning, sudden Virtual Learning is going to be on our students this fall semester. So we deployed a workgroup, we organized our work into

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subcommittees who work on particular issues. So we formed a working group around the priority of doing real time analysis of that student experienced this fall, and developing some recommendations to make sure we were intervening as quickly as possible on whatever problems emerge. So we took advantage

of some student researchers in the first year experience program and the Adelante postbaccalaureate pipeline program. And we gave them all the data we could find. So we did a massive survey that had almost 3000 students.

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There was a faculty survey of over 300 faculty, most of whom had come out of that Go Virtual Learning Institute.

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And then a bunch of focus groups. So we just dumped all this data, if a faculty member had done a focus group, we said send it to us, we gave it all to the student researchers. And they spent several weeks poring through it, coding it, analyzing it, and they made a beautiful presentation back to the graduation team. And we out of that developed some recommendations to President Hutchinson after cabinet for what we thought might help make spring 21 a little bit sooner than fall 40. So it was a great process learning experience for the students, and really useful information for the campus. That's really awesome. I'm so glad that the students had a piece of that and kind of explore the data and learn more, can you tell me what are some of the biggest theme that came out of that particular research?

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So on the student side, there are half a dozen or more things that I would highlight. Mental health is a huge concern for our students, and not necessarily clinical mental health issues. But a great deal of anxiety,

04:21 lack of motivation, trouble concentrating, our students reported increased rates of depression. Not quite sure the purpose of this work isn't going to advance me to my degree. So just a lot of sort of mental emotional insecurity and, and difficulty this past fall. There were specific issues surfaced around online learning not unexpectedly, struggles between synchronous and asynchronous patterns and not knowing exactly the best way to navigate those and it wasn't always clear that the instructors who were you know, making this pivots

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Quickly, we're we're communicating in the most effective ways for students. There was a problem that some students expressed that they weren't sure they were getting all the content knowledge they needed to advance to the next level in their program. So, you know, you can kind of say, well, this semester was tricky, but, and my teacher was flexible with grades, that's awesome. But I still have to have this knowledge to go on to the next level. So that was a concern that both faculty and students expressed that the struggle to get as much learning happening in the in the semester, there was also a concern about their learning environments at home, not everybody has a great space to set up a high-powered computer with great internet connectivity.

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And so a lot of students had to adapt to that the lack of access to campus study spaces and resources was a big challenge for many students. So there were a lot of equity issues that emerged very clearly in this survey and focus groups. And then financial concerns a lot of students lost income, a lot of

students needed to step up and help families support themselves through the pandemic. So just everything got a lot harder for most of our students. And then finally, a maybe one of the most important they expressed a real sense of loss of connection and community, to each other, to the campus,

06:24 to their faculty. And faculty said similar things, students aren't dropping in at my office hours, I missed the casual connection students would have before and after class and in the hallway. And then we think of our incoming first-time freshmen and transfer students this past fall, who never had that Chico experience, right. So there's a great loss of sort of that

06:49 hard to quantify interpersonal experience that we think of as so much a part of, of what Chico State is. I know, we've kind of talked about the themes, but are there any recommendations that came about this work that we're putting in place at Chico State to make sure that we're establishing these connections with students and supporting them in their learning? Yeah, some of them are in the in the class, and some of them are extracurricular co-curricular, I'll just speak to a couple of things. One recommendation for faculty that has emerged is that you really set some intentional class time around building community and faculty development has lots of great resources on how to do that. What I'm focused on is an issue that emerged really clearly in these focus groups and surveys, students would report that they didn't,

07:39 a resource they needed that they didn't, that they couldn't get to, I need to see a counsellor I need to see an advisor. And they believe that those resources were not available to them. But it turned out it was a navigational problem. They didn't know how to find these resources, they didn't know how to avail themselves of what was possible for them or learn an alternative to what they thought they needed. Right. So a major initiative that I'm just getting launched right now with a team is a what we're calling a, we're going to call it something much more interesting than this. But we're

08:15 right now calling it a one stop Student Help center, we want to have one click on the university homepage, in Blackboard in the Student Centre, where students can get an easily navigable list of resources presented to them so that they can then click on mental health and see exactly what's available. And in very plain student friendly language, I think, you know, we're a huge institution. And sometimes we get caught up in bureaucratic kinds of language about our different campus units. It's not always transparent to students what those programs are. So we've got students involved in this team helping us label these things in the right way. So that not only is it really visible, but it will be intelligible at first glance, that's where I click if I need a tutor, that's where I click if I'm hungry, and there's no money in my account right now.

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So I think that will be huge. It seems small, because we're not adding a new resource. But making all of the great resources that we have truly accessible to students, I think will be a leap forward. And we're hoping to have that out this semester, sometime this semester. That's really great to hear. And I love the idea that it's going to be embedded in Blackboard. So again, it's just one stop shop. They're already familiar with Blackboard to access their courses. So this is just yet another resource that's quick and easy for them. That's great. And I want to highlight to that faculty, you mentioned that it seems like it's

not a lot because it's just kind of more of an organization of resources. Right. And I think that's really great because faculty development is trying to take on similar initiatives.

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To support faculty, and it's not that we don't have these resources out there and that they're available, but it's just this like culmination of like one stop, here's where you go to find everything you need out of click in a, in a language that speaks to you and that you can kind of go forth and do. And so it's really neat that we're kind of in parallel initiatives, yours focusing on students and mind focusing our faculty development focusing on faculty, obviously. But it's really great that we are using 2020 and, and all of the trials and tribulations to learn about how we can improve rise to teach. So I'm really excited about that. If there was one, or maybe two tips that you could share for faculty to help support you in this work, what could we do? on our end? That's a great question. Thank you for asking, um, become aware of the resources that are available to students so that you can refer them to them. Teachers are not equipped to be mental health experts. But all the faculty are aware and so sensitive to what students are undergoing. In fact, one of the things I was most struck by in the faculty feedback was, their number one concern wasn't their own workload, it wasn't I have to learn all these darn new tech tools. It was I'm worried about my students. So the best way faculty can support students is to have this, you know, quick, Handy link, a set of resources that you can direct students to to the experts who can help them in these various areas. So that's one thing. The other i think is, and this is just good pedagogy is to focus on learning outcomes, rather than all the content I've always covered in this class, is it really critical that we cover every single thing we always use to cover because this is not a normal semester? These are not normal conditions. I think there's a distinction between,

11:58 you know, sacrificing the major learning in your course, which of course, we don't want to do, and prioritizing purposeful activities that will get us to those learning outcomes. And it may be that that one video that you're always show, or that one writing assignment that you always give, maybe it's not directly serving those outcomes, maybe there could be one less thing on everybody's plate to sort of streamline the activities of the semester, I keep hearing that from a lot of faculty who feel very successful in this environment, that that's what they've done focus on learning outcomes.

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Well, I love everything that you've shared with us today, and I appreciate you taking the time. Do you have any last parting words for our faculty? Well, I just want to express incredible gratitude to them. I mean, all the things we talked about students being affected by so are the faculty, everybody's taking it. And I am really, truly moved by what I've seen our faculty rise to, I'm grateful and even more grateful when they take that extra step of going to the faculty development website and looking at those top tips for online teaching. And, you know, taking that extra step to help our students thrive. It's much appreciated and critically valuable.

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Alright, so we learned a lot of great information from Kate McCarthy today on how students are really wanting that connection and faculty to for that matter. So I wanted to bring on Kathy Fernandes, our Academic Technology Officer so that she can share just what's happening with communication at Chico State in terms of our students, and what maybe, is coming down in the future for expanding our

connection and communication. So Kathy, thank you for being with us today. Sure. Happy to be here. Let's just dive in. Okay, so, you know, preliminarily, we have looked at some data that we had gathered. And it took us about a semester to gather all of that data to discover that we were sending about 1600 emails to students per year. Those are mostly administrative, you know, maybe it's tuition, and maybe it's financial aid, there might be other aspects of registration, etc. But 1600 emails is a lot. And of course, that's not their favorite way, usually, to communicate meaning many of us are, of course, on our smartphone. And that's, you know, where a lot of communications are happening also. And the fact that students you know, to get into Blackboard Learn or to get into a Zoom Room together, takes a lot of, you know, how do I get my study group together, and then of course, I got to get on, I got to create my Zoom Room, I got to invite people to my Zoom Room. It's a lot of clicks and a lot of labor. So, as we were looking at potential options to really based on what the students were saying, How can we help this we have for spring 2021 taken on what we're calling a pilot with pronto, pronto is a smart

14:58 app, but it's connected to Blackboard Learn. And what that pronto app does then is automatically goes to Blackboard Learn for Chico State. And for those faculty who turn it on in their Blackboard Learn course, students will be able to download the pronto app and immediately have access to their classmates, they can immediately start texting, I've seen some snapshots of faculty already with faculty introducing themselves via pronto and students saying great, can't wait to meet you on Tuesday. And then students are immediately diving in in that chat app, because they're already logged in. And they're right there on their phone. And it allows them to start connecting with each other with gifts with files with emojis, etc. And then as they log in, it's the faculty are using pronto. Students can also start texting each other, if there is a study group, if there is a project group, and the retail faculty have actually grouped students inside Blackboard allows the students to connect there. So we're actually even though it's pretty pulmonary, we're only at the end of the first week, we do have a lot of hits. And a lot of faculty are saying, Yeah, this, this is hitting a hole that we have.

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Actually, I have started using it with my students as well. And so I've used it in messaging to all and direct messaging. So it's catching on, I'm kind of excited about it. But I really want to bring it back to that number of communications, Kathy, and I'm wondering, you know, is pronto, how is that different than a standard email communication? And why would the university pursue this technology? Yeah, so you know, 1600 emails, I mean, again, for today's students, email is an old way of communicating or at least not how their standard meaning you know, when they go out and get a job, and sure email is still going to be a part of that. But the idea that, you know, you get on your phone, you see all this email, and it could be email about Wildcats Look, what we're doing, you know, as far as activities, or it could be, hey, you still need to pay your tuition. Or it could be, hey, there's faculty and students trying to connect with you. In other words, the email is just inundated. And what we're really wanting to do, which is going to take a longer strategy is really finding channels. You know, when we want to listen to country versus we want to listen to jazz, you turn the dial on the radio to what you want to hear. Now I'm really dating myself, because today.

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The other aspect of that, though, is if the university had channels where this is where you get your entertainment and Wildcat activities, this is where you get your academic information. And over here is

where you get your registration, advising tuition and financial aid, we need to strategize as a university, those different channels. So when students are ready to say I want to focus on my academic work, I know the communications and the activities happening are right here. Now, of course, Zoom and Blackboard Learn are available. But again, you got a login username and password, click on this, then click on that, then type in this. And again, most of us are using our smartphone. And because it's already logged in, it's just right there, you can turn off the notifications and pronto continues to add lots of features that we're used to like for instance, and Twitter, Twitter, with App mentions and that kind of stuff. But it's just more right there at your fingertips rather than having to go through multiple clicks. So Kathy, it sounds like pronto is a really cool communication tool that we have at our disposal this semester. But can you tell me a little bit about the future of Toronto in the US at Chico State? Yes, we explicitly were able to negotiate with the vendor that we will use pronto during spring 2021. Specifically, we're still in COVID. Of course, in the fall, we're still constructing what falls gonna look like but there will still be online this or virtual online teaching and learning as well as some face to face, depending on how all that works out with our maximum capacity via COVID. So if we want to go past the spring 2021 we are actually going to be doing a faculty survey, a student survey and looking at the data from Toronto, and then doing an analysis and measuring the impact and effectiveness and seeing what faculty and students think and then determining do we want to go forward with pronto? Or where do we go from here? informed consumer ship I like it, I like it.

19:28

I am here with Karen Schrader and Karen is a lecturer in the School of Education. She has just come out with a really cool piece of research that I think is super timely in our conversation today on connection and attention. So Karen, can you tell us a little bit about who you are and how this research came to be?

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Yes, thanks, Jamie. I'm Karen Schrader with the School of Education. So I'm in my last year of my doctoral work through the University of Oregon.

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And I had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. Joe Smith, who's currently in Auckland, New Zealand, on some research about Zoom and attention. So we came together and

20:14 used Zoom metrics, kind of as the basis of our research. So the metrics provided by zoom, give information about the amount of time that each student spends on the zoom screen. So from that, we determined that approximately 30 minutes is the length of time that each person can maintain on that screen without switching away. And so to dig a little deeper, we did some focus groups with the students. And we asked them, you know, a little bit a few more questions about what maybe would make their attention last longer than 30 minutes, and why they would navigate away from the screen. So things that we found were that, obviously, the lecture was kind of going on and on, and they didn't really see an opportunity for a break. And so they just needed to take a little break. So they navigate away from the screen,

21:17 things that maintain their attention, you know, we're obviously really interesting to me as an educator, that the ability to maybe participate in a small group, and or a breakout group or have a discussion, they maintained for the 30 minutes. And then once that break happened, then they could continue listening again. So

21:41 that was that's kind of the basis of the information that that we retrieved from those focus group conversations in these participants are higher education students, yes, their doctoral students, so they are highly motivated. And it was really interesting to me that highly motivated doctoral students, you know, most students have a degree of motivation to participate in, you know, in education, that they're, that the limit of their attention could be 30 minutes on Zoom, that was a little bit surprising to me. And we also talked about strategies that they tried to use to keep themselves motivated, which was, you know, to put their phone away to really focus on the screen. But, you know, I haven't done much research into this, I'm not sure how that really

22:31 builds into engagement and absorption of materials. So those are, you know, those are other pieces that we want to consider when we're looking at that 30-minute time period is how much are we absorbing and then contributing to the class. I like that idea of thinking about the degree of motivation, because one could argue that the degree of motivation would be much higher in a post-secondary or post graduate program, like a doctoral program versus like, maybe your average freshmen coming out of high school and transitioning into college, especially in a virtual setting. So I wonder, and I'm assuming that that degree of motivation is quite the variable in the amount of time we have to engage in and kind of attend, make sure our students are attending. Right, I completely agree. And I was reflecting on that, before we had our conversation of, you know, I think of my own my own children in high school and early college years of their degree of motivation to engage. And I think you know, that 20 to 30 minutes, that might sometimes even be a maximum of time before they need an activity,

23:42 to keep them engaged in thinking about that. I've changed how I structure my classes, and I really make sure I'm upfront with my students and let them know, you know, what I you know, I did this research and from after learning about it, I'm, I make a really strong effort of the 20 to 30 minutes of me talking, and that's it and make sure that they're aware that there's breaks and there's breakout rooms, and there's time for them to share with me, and be noticed by me and by each other, so that they can maintain that attention.

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I love that you just said be noticed because earlier in the episode, we discussed connection, and our students really want that connection. They want to be noticed in these classes. They want to interact and engage with their peers and their instructors. So it's really, it's really great that you've already embedded practices based off the research that you did in your own teaching. If you want to check out Karen's work, you can go to our faculty development teaching guide website and select the Zoom Breakout Room teaching guide. And there you have it, folks. Today we learned that students and faculty are craving connection, and I encourage you to check out pronto, be sure to reach out to me

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If you have any questions, and finally, consider learning outcomes and student intention when planning lectures and activities. I'd like to thank Kate McCarthy, Kathy Fernandes and Karen Schrader for contributing to this episode. And a special thank you to Quinn Winchell for our podcast music and to the vocal stylings of Dr. Browning Neddeau for the land acknowledgment.

25:21

Join us next week for a fireside chat on how to foster resilience in teaching and learning. Until then, we got this Wildcat.