

Rise, Teach, Learn - Season 2, Episode 8

Contributions and Experiences in Graduate Education

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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.

00:59

Hello, and welcome to Rise, Teach, Learn. I am your host, Jamie Gunderson. In this episode, we explore the contributions of graduate students and we also hear from faculty who will share their experiences in supporting graduate students as they pursue their educational research and professional goals.

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I am here with Sharon Barrios, the Dean of Graduate Studies and a few fellow professors on campus I have Jennifer Malkowski. She's an associate professor in Communication Studies. I have Frieda Fichtner Assistant Professor of German and second language acquisition, and Matt Thomas, a professor in political science and criminal justice. All three of these folks serve as graduate coordinators within their respective departments. So Sharon, I kind of want to start with you in preparation for this podcast episode. We sat together for quite some time and I learned so much about graduate education on campus start us off by explaining you know, just some of the impacts and influences that graduate education has on the larger university and our community.

02:05

Thanks, Jamie. I really appreciate this opportunity to talk about graduate education or graduate students in our graduate programs. I'll start on a positive note by saying that I think that one of the most important changes in the last decade regarding grad education is a better understanding that investing in our graduate programs is an investment in the long term viability of our university and the lifelong success of our students. However, more does need to be done to deepen the understanding of these critical contributions, particularly in shoring up our overall student enrollments, maintaining the quality of undergrad education, the success of our faculty, the reputation of our university and our commitment to the north state economy, particularly in education and social services. In our Office of Graduate

Studies, we talked about our campus and what it would be like without graduate students and without our graduate faculty and our graduate programs, and this actually helps us to identify the important contributions that our students and our grad faculty are making to the university but also to our region and the state of California.

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So you asked about what some of those contributions are. And I think I'll start with, first the contribution that Grad education makes in supporting undergrad education on our campus. Each year, hundreds of our graduate students serve as teaching assistants, instructional assistants, lab and research assistants. They frequently serve in our large courses, particularly those prone to bottlenecks and those with high DFW rates. So in addition to supporting faculty in the classrooms, they also serve as role models, mentors and tutors in our most important high impact programs and services and events. So for example, it's the list is huge, but some of the examples are the Student Learning Center, the ESL Resource Center, EOP Summer Bridge, the Career Center, Student Success Center, First Year Experience, Reach the Adelante program, and of course as specialized tutors in colleges and departments. And then some of our most important events that we really do highlight as high impact practices and that we promote to the greater community both beyond campus and in a lot of our materials about what makes Chico State special. Our graduate students are critical to supporting programs like town hall that serves 1000s of undergraduates every year, great debate, Model UN, the sustainability conference, English symposium, student research competition, BSS symposium, and on and on and on. So graduate students are helping to support undergrad education in myriad ways, including serving as representatives of first gen students and other students of color.

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So we have talked about for example, that the diversity of our faculty and of our staff is very low compared to the diversity of our undergrad population. But our graduate student population, while not as diverse as our undergrad population is much closer and therefore having our graduate students of color or first gen or from lower socio economic backgrounds in the classrooms are in these mentoring experiences with our students really serves as a critical component of that representation that we think is so important for student success. The students, also grad students, also serve I think such a critical role with faculty success in supplementing the mentor role that faculty provide to students particularly in the undergrad research, projects and programs. So without graduate students, it would be really hard for a lot of our faculty to serve as many undergrads in their labs and on these other research projects that they actually do. And then one of the things that I think we often don't think about is the important role that our graduate students and our graduate programs actually play in helping to attract and retain ambitious active teacher scholars who have a really strong desire to make important scholarly contributions in their field, and in the interest of the public and in the development of expertise and currency in the classroom. Our graduate students really do help our faculty to achieve some of their most important goals.

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Another important role that our grad education plays is in providing viable careers and professional, a professional workforce, to support our north state economy. So over 50% of our graduate students come from a region and stay here after graduation. So that's significantly different than our undergrad

population. So our 25 masters degree programs and 15 or so options, prepare graduate students for viable professional careers. So to ask people in the North State to pursue higher education and then stay here if that's what they desire, or if they prefer go off somewhere else, but it does give people this educational option that they might not go anywhere else to pursue and then of course, they give back, once they graduate so our graduate alumni comprises significant portion of the region's social service agency staff. And, for example, in social work alone, we graduate over 50 MSWs each year and the vast majority of those students fill positions in this region. Our masters alumni also populate our region's educational institutions as teachers and administrators at all levels, from community colleges, universities and down of course to the primary and secondary schools. And then they serve in our government and not for profit organizations across the region, and also serve as managers and analysts and other roles in our private sector. So our graduate students go on to take some of the most important and critical professional roles in the region.

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As I noted, grad education does provide professional workforce, not just for the north state region, but for our university. Almost 400 of our master's alumni are employed at our university in every division and almost all units on campus as staff. They also are, of course, tenure tenure track faculty, their administrators like me, I'm an alumni, and especially in student services, and then when you look at our lecturer pool, you see the university depends heavily on graduate alumni to serve as lecturers, the majority of our departments employ our graduates as lecturers and majority of our lecturers are former graduate students. And then I think probably the last thing that I'll focus on is that in that contribution that our graduate alumni made to the region when they take these professional jobs, in addition to that is what they actually do as graduate students when they are training for and being educated for and serving in apprenticeships and internships and practicums for their degrees. So the, these experiences that our students are mostly required to pursue, bring hundreds of our graduate students into the community every year where they make significant contributions to the health and welfare of our local region.

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I work a lot with graduate students just in the past year I am the coordinator of the computational literacy across secondary settings program. I really enjoy the intellectual collaboration but it does take a pretty fair amount of my time. So I want to throw it to graduate council folks to give us a little bit more insight on what it's like to be a faculty on campus who is serving graduate students.

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But I'd say that there are multiple rewarding components to working with graduate students. So the three of us are coordinators, which means that we engage in regularly meeting with and advising graduate students and there's so much that you can learn in a session talking to a student about the direction that they'd like to go in within their program. There's also teaching graduate seminars. When we're teaching a graduate seminar, it means that we have to be on our toes that we have to have the absolute most up to date research at our fingertips, because if we don't have it, the students in our classrooms will have it. And then beyond that there's working with graduate students on their culminating projects, whether that be a thesis, a project, a professional paper, or comprehensive exams or any other culminating activity to finish the program. So I think all of those different facets are

something that we as coordinators get to experience. And many faculty across campus get to experience at least some of those aspects. One of the reasons why we're able to get the exceptional faculty that we're able to recruit to come to this campus is because we have graduate programs so in those departments where they can say, you're going to get to engage with graduate students. That in and of itself is an incentive for many people that we're trying to get to come here. I think it's disingenuous, not to mention that there is a certain element that is a labor of love in graduate education, that it is additional work. When you are tasked with chairing a thesis, when you are advising students and the line remains out your door and you can't really have an advising conversation with a master's student in shorter than 30 minutes. So these are things that take a ton of time. But they also bring intrinsic rewards in that aha moment that graduate students go through in that moment when we get to sit in Lax and watch them walk across the stage, being the first in their family to get a master's degree after in many instances, being the first in their family to get an undergraduate degree. those intangibles are immeasurable. And they are one of the huge benefits of being a part of graduate education on our campus.

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I do find it really rewarding to work with the grad students here because the the student body in general is more diverse, and they're often not aware of how much potential they have, because they are often first generation, first time college students that is, in a way a particular challenge, but also really exciting to help them see themselves as young and promising scholars.

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I love that Frieda and I was thinking that for me, it's starting to feel like, and I'm new, this is my first year or first semester as a graduate coordinator. But I've been at the University now for six plus years. And I am starting to think about, CSU graduate education as the next essential Act in terms of delivering on the mission of the CSU. What makes us unique is that we prioritize quality instruction. In no small part is to deliberately and effectively address equity issues right and help students get up to speed and start to discover it in themselves Frieda to as you say, their potential. And then that can start to value curiosity and start to navigate curiosity starts to manage uncertainty, with a sense of humor and a sense of possibility rather than frustration and dead ends. And so this is where at the undergraduate level, it feels like we are doing work to really open eyes and open possibilities. The CSU graduate experience then is that venue or outlet where top performing students or just really interested curious students can take the next step. And so they're ready and primed to do the hard work of now, not only asking questions, but also starting to navigate the way in terms of answering those questions. And so, with that regard I really do see value significant value to the overall CSU system. And like I'm saying, kind of honoring its mission in providing a venue for students that we say, you know, this is what education looks like, this is what it can do. The Graduate experiences we're saying, you know, now you're getting the apprentice experience where you're going to be considered a peer. And what does that feel like? What does it feel like to have access getting in here practice, sitting at the table, hearing your own voice carving your own perspective, or, you know, authoring your own perspective, and that's a value on so many levels.

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I think it's important to note that many times in the course of my time at Chico State, I have approached

students and talk to them about the possibility of applying to graduate school and been met with the response, I didn't know I could do that. And that's part of what we're able to do when we have those relationships with undergrads who come here for the reasons that Jen mentioned. And so that ability to encourage and bring students in and let them see these possibilities is an incredibly exciting part of what we get to do here.

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I want to piggyback on that because I actually have experienced this as the class Program Coordinator. We go in and we start recruiting in undergrad programs specific to people who are interested in teaching and then we get them out into rural environments. We get them their master's degree, we get them a credential. We support them on that journey. And they're actually some of the top notch educators in their field. And what we're finding is that they're coming back to mentor future cohorts that are coming through those types of programs, which is really, really fun to see. And I know that as an advisor myself, there is a lot of work that goes into producing these experienced creative, curious thinkers, but the rewards that you feel as you're doing that work and then the rewards that you see in the community as those students graduate and go on to do that work. That's the real bread and butter I think of why we do this.

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Yeah. And that, that departing and then coming back phenomenon, right. Like this is a question that's really central to a lot of rural communities, inner city communities, right? This, this notion that you got out you went to education, right, and then what entices you back. Chico State, all of these folks, these 400 plus alums that are here. I know this is anecdotally but many have gone elsewhere and then chosen to come back to serve this community. That is significant. I've taught at a bunch of different places. I've lived in a bunch of different states and that's not always the case. That's unique. And it says something about not only the qualities of this community, but also opportunities for, to actually move forward with your curiosities in ways that feel like you can make a difference or impact.

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Being in graduate education kind of connects these two worlds or these two communities on campus and our, our teacher identities basically and how we interact with grad students there, but then there's also the larger research community. And I think what's so exciting and inspiring and motivating is the merging of the two when we work with graduate students and it's not just a spark for the graduate students, but also for us as faculty.

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Today, we explored the many contributions of our graduate students and we heard from faculty about the rewards of serving in graduate education. I'd like to thank our guests Dr. Barrios, Thomas Malkowski, and Fichtner for their contributions to this episode, and more importantly for their work in supporting graduate education on campus. A big thank you to you for listening and until next time, we got this Wildcats!