

Clark College- Disability Supp. | Penguin Pathways - English Department with Liz Donley

Good morning, good morning Penguin Nation. Welcome to Penguin Pathways Podcast where we talk about all things guided pathways at Clark College. All the things that we're doing to help our students be successful and go to their next step in their career pathway. I'm really excited today. We've got Liz Donley with us, English division chair, and we're going to have a great conversation.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

All right welcome to the studio Liz. It's great to have you here today.

Thank you. Great to be here fantastic.

So as I mentioned, Liz Donley is the English division chair and we're going to be talking today about our English department, and our writing classes, and all of the different things that go on to help our students be successful. As you can imagine for those of you who have attended college, the term paper is a dreaded word in some people's vocabulary but obviously a skill that's very important for students to be successful in college.

That college level writing is absolutely imperative for them to be able to complete some of their classes. And we've done a lot of work to improve our outcomes in English here at Clark. We have seen that our English in year one completion rates have increased over the last 10 years significantly. We have some improved outcomes in that area as well as just overall English completion, which again is so important for students to be able to complete the rest of their classes.

So let's go ahead and get started, Liz, and let's talk about what are some of the challenges that students do face in English.

Yeah that's a great question. So many challenges. Some of those challenges are what all students are facing now, the isolation from COVID, the lack of schooling that a lot of students had during COVID. I was just talking to a colleague recently who mentioned that one of her students just told her that this was her first English class since seventh grade. So we're dealing with a lot of stuff that other departments are dealing with as well.

But of course, English has a special place in many students' heart, and a lot of that has to do with past trauma around English in schooling. Getting a term paper, that word you used earlier, a word that we're trying to move away from with red just bleeding all over it. And we don't want students to think that writing is all about grammar. We have to reteach and students have to unlearn things that they learned in old school English.

The English of the past is not the English we're doing now. And so there is a lot of new that's coming our way, faculty's way, and English and students' way that has to really be taught, relearned. And it's a hurdle, it's a challenge. Because we are a big department also with over 70% adjuncts so we have another challenge there with a workforce that is really you know miss balanced and we really need to get that a little bit better, so a lot better actually.

70% adjuncts or over 70% adjuncts is not the way to you know to conduct a department and so we want our faculty who are engaged with the college, with the school, and who are here as much as possible for their students and that comes from more full time faculty positions.

Awesome. I like what you're saying about unlearning some of those past traumatic experiences and I know that there are a lot of equity gaps in relation to that. So we can talk a little bit more about that further on. So guided pathways is really about the structures and systems that we put in place. So when you speak about the department composition, that's really part of it.

What are some of the guided pathways initiatives that have been taking place to help the students be more successful in their courses?

Yeah. So to start we did a complete composition redesign restructuring our entire composition program. And we launched that I think, at this point, it's been three years. We launched it at scale in 2020, fall 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic or right in the middle of the pandemic. But we had been working on it for a while. And what that did was it removed all free standing pre-college courses and replaced them with co requisite instruction.

That's a fancy sounding word that isn't that fancy. And it's in its core it's about supporting students and getting them to college level classes more quickly. So students can enter English 101 right away, most students can enter English 101 right away by taking a co requisite course called English 101 plus 099.

The 099 component has a hands on help session. Essentially it's about helping students to be successful in English 101, getting students more quickly they're even those who might not be quite ready for it. But the 099 component is going to help ensure that they get through it. And so it's sort of this I don't want to say radical but kind of radical idea in the area of composition that is showing a lot of success so far.

We're just getting data. And of course, data during this time is all pandemic skewed so you know we have to look at it and not necessarily make huge conclusions. But it's showing some really great promise. In addition to that, we've also done placement reform, English placement reform, whereas we used to use a standardized test for placement as most schools did.

And we shifted to multiple measures quite a few years ago with a reliance on high school GPA which research shows us is the most effective placement measure. And so more students using high school GPA are placing into one on one in English one on one plus 099. And again we're getting students into college level classes more quickly. We're eliminating barriers so we don't lose students along the track. And again, you know initial data is promising it's looking good.

Within the structure of our courses there are also changes to how we're approaching teaching, we're using something called writing for transfer as our pedagogical approach. And what that means is that everything they're learning in the class is relevant outside of English. It's not about writing a term paper and being successful in English. It's about writing in multiple genres, genres that they can see the relevance to in science class, in math class, in nursing.

They can transfer those skills outside of English into their personal lives, into their jobs. And those skills will stay with them and transfer. Writing for transfer at the name. So that's the key right there.

Awesome. And yeah as I mentioned earlier when I looked at the data that state board for community and technical colleges provides for us, it showed that Clark is actually doing considerably well in comparison to some other colleges in the system. So some of those efforts are clearly having an impact on student success.

And quick plug, there was a great article in the Foundation News Paper recently that was talking about guided pathways reforms and some of the different efforts. And it specifically mentioned a student story who went into a co requisite English class and that was effective for her. So yeah.

Yeah the English department. You'll have to check that article out.

I have not seen it.

I'm very excited. It's recent. Just recently, came out like last week. So what are some of the really specific things. You've mentioned some of them already that you think have contributed to some of these successes. As we mentioned earlier as well one of the sort of milestone success markers of guided pathways is completing college level math and English in the first year. That tends to help students be more successful.

So there are some other things you think that are really contributing to that?

Yeah. I think there well so once we when we launched the redesign, we also launched a training for faculty a required training for faculty. So I think that's been huge and that we have this guided training in this new curriculum. Because it's not just for Clark College, it's new kind of across the nation. You know there are other schools doing it but we're the minority. It's not like this is the majority curriculum in English.

So we have a very structured curriculum for people to teach these classes and they can't teach them unless they've gone through the curriculum. And I think that's been a really important piece. We've also been holding faculty learning communities over the last few years, focused on equity, anti-racist teaching pedagogies.

For example, last year we had two one focused on equity and grading and one focused on the pedagogy of critical language awareness. And we're continuing to move forward with that. We have three faculty, all of whom are adjunct faculty who are taking part in the statewide SBCTC, always get that wrong, SBCTC anti-racist curriculum initiative which is focused on anti-racist teaching pedagogy, and more specifically labor based grading.

So we have people who are really engaged in professional development and continued professional development and I think it's really making a difference.

Now that's fantastic. And I know that we're going to have a future session with the teaching and learning center, and I know that revitalizing that space is going to contribute. It feels like all of the things are sort of converging to improve student outcomes. And I really appreciate how you mentioned equity gaps. Because we do see some equity gaps in terms of students who complete and white students tend to complete at higher rates than historically underserved students of color.

So do you have any other things you want to mention about what we're trying to do in regards to that?

Yeah, well I mean the equity gaps are why we did we did the redesign. I mean that was what prompted us to begin with several years ago from placement to the requisites. And so what we're doing moving forward is we're actually redoing our training because of course in English. We can't just sit down and you know just go with the flow. We have to keep making it better.

And so we're redoing our training. It will launch in winter quarter, this coming winter quarter. We're calling it the redesign 2.0. And it's going to be less philosophical and more practical with sort of like some really guided here's things you can do in your classroom. And it's also going to more clearly infuse some of these equity approaches which writing for transfer is equity based in itself.

But we're actually going to bring in some equity and in grading approaches that we covered in the FLC last year. This is really great stuff that I think will make a huge difference. We have some people already doing it but we're going to make this more widespread. We're also going to bring in the pedagogy of critical language awareness into the training.

And you know these I think are going to make a difference and I think we're going to really see those equity gaps close or I hope.

Well that's fantastic. Well I really appreciate you being here today Liz, and having this conversation. I'm really excited about the work that's continuing to happen for English and guided pathways. And appreciate your time so much today.

Yeah this was great. Thank you, awesome.