

Clark College- Disability Supp. | Penguin Pathways - Entry Services with Vanessa Watkins

Good morning, Penguin Nation. Welcome to Penguin Pathways Podcast, where we talk about all things Guided Pathways. Excited today, we've got Vanessa Watkins from Entry Services in the building, and we're going to hear all about our student onboarding and entry services and how that impacts our students' success, so we'll get started shortly.

All right. Welcome to the studio, Vanessa.

Thank you.

It's great to have you today. So as I said, we've got Vanessa Watkins. She is the director of Entry Services at Clark College, and she's been with the college for quite a while, I would say, one of the old school folks here at the college. So let's go ahead and get started, Vanessa.

Yeah.

Can you tell us a little bit about entry services and the role that it plays in a student's journey at Clark College?

Yeah, thanks for having me on today. Entry Services does everything from recruitment and outreach- so getting students just to think about coming to school in general and then thinking about coming to Clark and the opportunities we have all the way through the onboarding and orientation process. So all of the things within there that fall in there helping students apply, making sure they complete the application, getting all their accounts set up, making sure if they need to fill out the FAFSA or apply for scholarships, referrals to other departments on campus. So all of those kind of onboarding, how do you get started at Clark, our office is the first place for students to go. And we can help them throughout that onboarding process as kind of a first point of contact so they don't have to get pinged in too many different places.

We also do our student orientation to help students get familiar with those first things that they need to know in order to start at Clark. And then we do campus tours. We have our student ambassador program which is a student leadership program. But the student ambassadors are great resources for new students because those students have gone through the process themselves. and so peer to peer assistance.

And then, one of the things I think we'll probably talk about later, we also have in our office is our enrollment navigators. They're really those people that can sit with a student and walk them through every single piece of the process and give them detailed information to help them see what they need to do. Every experience for each student is different based on what they bring with them, if they're right out of high school, Running Start, maybe a transfer student, adult student, so that experience is different for each student. And the navigators can sit down with them and walk them through their unique steps to enrollment.

Awesome. Yeah, there are some wonderful staff up there. As a matter of fact, I saw Maddie as I was coming down, one of our student ambassadors, just bubbly and full of life. And if I were a new student, I would love to see him as I walked through the front door.

Very welcoming.

Yes, very welcoming. So it seems sort of self-evident, but what do you think is really important about that for a student's ability to kind of get on a good start at Clark?

Important about our office?

Mm-hmm.

Yeah, I just think there's so many unknowns when you're starting something new, particularly college, and it can be a really scary, apprehensive, nervous, anxious time for lots of students and families that come with these students. And so, having a hopefully one place to go to get all of your questions answered, make an appointment, and we might not have all of the answers that that student have or family has, but we have the connections across campus to find out those answers for a student instead of them having to go to four or five different offices. We can help facilitate that and get that information to them. So I think it just helps for those students that really need someone to talk to you. They want clear, concise steps. They want to have a point of contact and know, hey, that's my person while I'm getting started. It's really been beneficial and helpful for those students.

Yeah, absolutely. And that's such a big aspect of Guided Pathways. People often ask, "What is Guided Pathways? What does that mean?" And it's all aspects of a student's journey. But this one in particular is really a formal part of the Guided Pathways model, really with pillar two, which is about getting students onto a pathway. So what are some of the things you've done as far as Guided Pathways specifically in entry services?

Yeah, well, we didn't have the positions of enrollment navigators before we started Guided Pathways. We've had them for four or five years now, I can't remember. But when we first started Guided Pathways at the college, we said, "What are the pillars within Guided Pathways? What do we need to do?" And one of them is getting students on a path onboarding, and we didn't really have anyone in not just our office but student affairs that was helping- their whole role as to help students get started. We had lots of great people in lots of great areas that are willing to do that but not the one place the student can go. So we have to position, two enrollment navigator positions in my office now.

And that whole position, like I said, came about because of Guided Pathways. And so, they have really been helpful, as I've expressed what they did before, in really helping students navigate the college, the courses, helping them choose what program they want to go into, and just really navigating all the different pieces.

And then some of the things we've done with Guided Pathways is we've been able to implement a couple new programs. So last year in collaboration with our Office of Diversity Equity, and Inclusion, we held an Admitted Students Day. So another step in the process of, "OK, you've applied, but maybe you're still thinking about where you want to go?" Come to our Admitted Students Day. See if Clark's the right place for you. And so, we held that, like I said, in collaboration with our ODEI office. We'll plan to do that again this spring. And then, now that we're able to have more events back on campus, we also brought back our Penguin Welcome Days this fall. We have our orientation, which is all online, and that's great because students can access it at any point in time that they want. They don't have to come a specific day and time.

But particularly, for our fall starting students, there can be a long time between when they do their orientation, when they register for classes, and then when classes start. Sometimes that process can be from February/March, and then they don't start classes till September. So August and September we had a few Penguin Welcome Days engagement events just to help students get connected to the college before they actually start classes, come to campus, see the campus, see where their in-person classes are going to be, meet folks from different departments. And for some students that was their first time on campus. They did everything else online or virtual, which is also great, but it was nice to be able to bring that back at that event and see students and families excited and just kind of have a little bit more life on campus.

Yeah. You know, I love. This is the Penguin Welcome Days. I'm like, "Hi, hi hi," which you mentioned partnership with ODEI. And I think that it's important to have those different modalities for different students. So, how does entry services really also have that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which is such a big part of Guided Pathways and making sure everyone has the support that they need to be successful?

Yeah, I mean, one of the things that I think has actually been really good about COVID, people might not say that very often, but we had to move things virtual, right? And we had to make it quick, and we didn't do everything correctly the first time around, but we learned, and we were able to adjust and adapt. And I think that that is more equitable for everybody. You can choose to be helped. If you want to come to campus, we can help you. If you want to come in virtually, we can help you. Sometimes students come into our Zoom rooms, and they may have to ask a question that they feel a certain stigma around, and they don't have to show who they are, right? There's lots of different ways for students to be able to get assistance and not necessarily feel like they're having to put themselves out there in whatever capacity they feel like that is. So that's been a nice way to help and support other students.

We also have really great partnerships with all of our offices but also with DSS office. So if a student discloses that that is maybe services they've used at another school or maybe in their K-12 journey, we have great partnerships with that office and can do warm referrals there, also with our veteran students. So it's really important for our office to have connections and partnerships with all the other offices on campus because we welcome all students. We're happy to help any student, but we might not have the best tools for each student depending on their needs. There may be another office that can assist them on certain things better than we can. And so, being able to have those referrals and say, "Hey, this student needs to meet with so-and-so in DSS, and we can send you down there and make that warm referral.

Wonderful. Well, that's a great example of our caring campus initiative, which we haven't necessarily gotten into as much with the Penguin Pathways Podcast, but it's essentially a series of behavioral commitments that we use to help students navigate systems and feel more comfortable. So listen, Vanessa, we could talk for a lot longer about all of the wonderful things happening in Entry Services, and it's such an important part of the Guided Pathways model at Clark, so I want to appreciate your time and thank you for being here today and sharing with us.

Of course, thanks for having me.