Katy Oliveira (00:07):

Welcome to Next Practices Data Informed Strategies to Shape the Future of Higher Ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institutions. I'm your host, Katy Oliveira.

Penny Kelly (00:28):

We've really focused initially on really the academic and the support that we can provide that student, and now we're classifying kind of more so, okay, is it a high or low warning? What intervention and would that require? And that's something that's very new to us. So we're, we're really just starting to get in on that. But it's really made us, I think more than anything really rethink that specific communication with the student and what really will help that student and support that student. And I think it helped our faculty actually to connect a little bit better with the students in general, but also recognizing what that entire support team is able to do for a student.

Katy Oliveira (01:17):

Today I'm talking with Dr. Penny Kelly, Vice President of Academic Affairs at SUNY Broom Community College. We discussed transitioning to a caseload based academic advising model, implementing guided pathways, and using data and technology to rethink student success, to tailor it to the needs of today's students.

Katy Oliveira (01:40):

Welcome to Next Practices. Penny, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to share your wisdom and experience with us.

Penny Kelly (01:48):

Thank you. I'm really excited to be here today.

Katy Oliveira (01:51):

So I'd like to start just so that our audience can get to know you a little bit better. I know who we're talking to. If you'll take a minute to tell us a little bit about yourself and your role and experience in higher ed and student success.

Penny Kelly (02:03):

Sure. Um, I'm Penny Kelly. I'm the currently the Vice President for Academic Affairs at SUNY Broom Community College in Binghamton, New York. And I've been here for about three and a half years. Prior to that, I served, um, at another community college for about 11 and half years as the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and provost at that college, um, <laugh> and at a community college prior to that. And I actually began my career in higher ed as an accounting instructor, actually at a small proprietary college. And I, I taught accounting for about 10 years. Um, so I, I've worked with a variety of students and oftentimes students that had a lot of needs maybe were, came from disadvantaged backgrounds. So I've really enjoyed that. And after I worked for about five to 10 years at, at the first institution I was at, you know, I was interested in how to better meet the students needs and concerns and that really prompted me into my doctoral program and organizational leadership and management and higher education and really focusing on adult education and social justice. And so that really kinda has propelled my career to being concerned about students and providing support while serving primarily in the academic role. And so for three and a half years I've been here at Suny Broome, which interestingly enough is actually where I graduated from many, many years ago and came back after a long time away. So happy to be here.

Katy Oliveira (03:45):

It's really magical to have an opportunity to go back to where you started.

Penny Kelly (03:49):

It is, it's really interesting. And you know, I, I thought about it for a long time. I mean, I was gone for 30 years, I think, you know, and I had no idea what it would be like to come back, but it's really been great. And I know that community college really propelled my career and, and I, I really am impressed with what it can do for students. So I'm really happy to be back here.

Katy Oliveira (04:10):

Yeah, it's wonderful to be able to, to be a living, living proof of the power of your community college. That's great. Well, I know that institutions across the board have many strategic priorities and, and community colleges have their own mix of challenges and things that they're working towards. So I'd like to talk a little about what strategic priorities and challenges have led your institution to take a data informed approach to student success?

Penny Kelly (04:39):

Well, you know, I was thinking about that and it's kind of interesting and sometimes it doesn't sound that exciting, but the reality is we really need to remain sustainable. And covid really like everyone really through us, a curve ball. And, you know, students are different and enrollments have declined and we've really had to rethink what we're all about. And as you know, in higher ed, that's not easy. And sometimes that's a bit of a challenge to think differently. And so we have kinda a couple of really strong initiatives that we're looking at right now. One is building a better transfer pathway. We work really closely with a four year institution, a pretty selective institution in the same community that we're in. And we have some very good partnerships with them, including some where their students actually come here for a year and then automatically go back to that institution.

(05:41):

So that's a really nice pipeline for us, but we're trying to do more for all of our students in order to make sure that we've got clear pathways to those transfer institutions. But at the same time, <laugh>. So, so there's a couple of initiatives. You know, we're really, the community itself is building on a lot of new technology and potentially a new battery, battery plan. And trying to get some of the more students who never thought maybe that they would be able to come to college to get them into a pipeline of some sort, whether that's short term credentials or one year certificates or two year degree programs, and really trying to get them back. And one of those initiatives has really kind of focused on how do we even let those students know that their college material, a lot of them really don't feel that way.

(06:34):

And we have a very unique arrangement as well. I mean, I know a lot of colleges are doing this now, but in our particular area, we were one of the first colleges that started some relationships with high schools where we accepted their entire high school class into the college. And so this year we just added a new one, right in the, we live in a small city, but right in the city and we've just accepted their entire class. So a lot of the initiatives we're working on as well are how to really get into those schools, continue that support while they're in high school to make sure that they are in fact college ready. So in terms of the initiatives that we're really working on, we're, we're working through processes to try to track those students to, to figure out what interventions they need once they do in fact get here. And so, so that's kind of really focusing on retention. What can we do better to keep students here? How can we reach out to them to be more instead of reactive, more intrusive and, and provide them the support that they need. So there, there's some of the things that we've really been working on right now.

Katy Oliveira (07:45):

Yeah. Yeah. And I know that with, I mean this was true prior to the pandemic, but I think it's become even more critical post pandemic is having ways to identify students who need support, having ways to guide them through the experience and more important than ever before to make sure that not only do they enter the experience, but that they're successful within the experience. And that we know that especially at community college, students are much more than students and they have much more going

on in their lives and that they aren't always clear on if their college material or what the path forward is. What combination of approaches and strategies and initiatives are you finding are making a real difference for your students or really helping your students to manage everything they they have and to find success while they're at your institution?

Penny Kelly ([08:46](#)):

So there's a few things that, you know, we're, we're focusing very much worked off on Pathways. We were a little probably slow I think to getting into that. But we've really been trying to first off clarify our programs, not quite so many options and, and selection for the students, but more so a very defined starting point endpoint. And then the other thing that we did a lot of work on in the last few years was really revising our advising model. And, and I think that's been one of the most impactful, and that's where we really started using some of the, the software and Civitas to, to provide some interventions. But I'll start first with the advising model. We had an advising model that was really a combination of both faculty and professional staff advising. And while they all did a good job, it was very inconsistent.

([09:42](#)):

The way students were advised was different who may or may not advise the student was very different and oftentimes very confusing for the students. So we really were in the process of revising that model and talking about what it might look like prior to Covid and if there's anything positive about covid, it did kinda push us to really move quick in that arena. So, you know, when all had been sent home and it was the first summer of 2020 and we're trying to figure out how to get those students back to knowledge, how do we reconnect with them? And really, we were kinda left with, in the summer the academic advisors went here and it sort of just happened that we to assign them students, specific students that they could reach out to. And we saw some success with that, although it's hard to measure any real success during Covid.

([10:40](#)):

So, you know, measuring that against enormous will certainly be helpful. But we did see some success there. And so as the fall semester came back, we, we really started to think about what that really could look like and put some work groups together. And, and after a year long process really did fully revise our advising model. And so that's kinda where we got very interested in Civitas and started using this. So we started a professional advising model, hired new advisors. So the college was very supportive to do this. And so all advisors did have a caseload. So that's when we really decided that we, we needed some kinda tool to help the advisors. And so we did purchase Civitas we've really been pretty pleased with the way we're starting to develop those case models and used the predictive factors to determine certain interventions to certain students.

([11:37](#)):

And we're pretty new to the process, so we, we've seen quite a bit of success. But what we're trying to do now is really divide up those cohorts specifically for particular types of populations of students that really need different types of interventions. We have students, we have students in sports, we have the particular students that I talked to about where there's an automatic transfer after a year into the four year college. So we're really, they, and they're all very, very different. And utilizing those cohort cohorts has allowed us to provide different interventions to particular students. And one of the ways that we're really tracking the success right now is primarily trying to analyze if we're helping the students to clearly decide what program they should be in, what courses they should be taking, and what interventions they're actually going to need. So we've been measuring, you know, over the past year, one thing is the number of program changes and it's actually changed pretty significantly already.

([12:46](#)):

You know, students didn't really know why they were in a particular program. They weren't really connected with her advisor, they didn't see them a lot. So we really worked very hard to spend more time intervening so to speak, into what they may need, helping guide them along. And so we've seen some good progress there. We're also measuring retention and re-registration rate, particularly when students reregister, as you can, I'm sure you know, community college students tend to prolong getting registered back and when they're not registered, it seems to be much easier just to not return at all. So we've had some pretty good luck with that as well with this advising model and, and really a lot more outreach. In addition, we've also tried to be a little more proactive on the front end. We've hired some success coaches that really are working with the admissions in order to kind of help students to think through what it is they really want. We, we, sometimes, I feel like we have students come in in the past and just almost throw a dart at, I dunno what I wanna do, but I'll just pick this. And I think why we've had all those program changes because they really just dunno. So that has been pretty helpful. But even if they do maybe not get it quite right, they've got the advisor working with them on a regular basis and that really seems to have helped us.

Katy Oliveira (14:14):

So what was the model prior to, what were it, was it students walked into an office with professional advisors? Were they working with faculty advisors? What was the change management piece of that transition? What did that look like?

Penny Kelly (14:28):

Well, it took quite a bit of time and, and what was really interesting when I first campus and a half years ago, and I remember we had a long list of students who were waiting to get registered and, and I just couldn't understand why, but it really was dependent on individual departments and individual divisions and when they would register students. Whereas now that we've gone through this process, and it was a long process, we had several work groups put together that consisted of faculty as well as the advising staff, some administrators really talking through what that could look like. It was a year long process and it, it wasn't really an easy sell, I would say cause it's just people are very connected to their programs and very protective of their programs all for very good reason. And, and you know, they know their students and they know the programs.

(15:26):

But just that constant connectedness to the student that the advisors are providing now really has made a significant difference. And I feel like it's really coming along now we have the advisors go to department meetings with the faculty. So the relationship building has really proved significantly, but at the same time we're doing some other things. And that is, you know, the Pathways implementation has been really positive for us. More than half our programs now have really gone through the process of, of cleaning up the programs and making sure that it's less difficult to get lost along the way. Certainly

Katy Oliveira (16:10):

This podcast is brought to you by Civitas Learning. Civitas Learning empowers colleges and universities to achieve transformative levels of student success to reshape higher education for decades to come. Civitas Learning's Student Impact platform brings institutional data together for a clearer picture of each student and situation, equipping institutions to take data informed action and lead with a new purpose to impact student success, ready to help students succeed every day. Visit civitaslearning.com to get started. The

Katy Oliveira (16:46):

Other thing that you, you mentioned, um, is the Pathways as one of the approaches that you're taking to help make a real difference for your students, do you mind talking a little bit about what that process has been like and how technology is helping, helping you to manage those?

Penny Kelly (17:02):

NP009 Penny Kelly

Yeah, yeah. We've been, again, kind of a long process for us. But first off was getting the buy-in of the faculty took some time, but really working through what those programs look like and we spend quite a lot of time and, and I think we do a pretty good job of our, in our program review process, kind of analyzing our program, spending a lot of time with enrollment, graduation rates with all of our programs and really looking at where they are. And then also one of the things that we did was examine the excess credits the students were taking, which was pretty significant as well. And, and that's something we're analyzing right now in terms of where that is. We utilize Degree Works here at the college, so it's a, a pretty easy process for students to track if you have clear programs. But some of our programs had so many options and feeling like I probably should know a Degree Works audit when I look at it.

([18:03](#)):

To me even that was very confusing because of the number of, of choices in the programs. So that's really been, we've kinda taken our Pathways implementation in very small chunks, but we knew that we needed to start with the programs because that was really, they really just weren't very clear. And one of the things that we're doing now is reaching to the high schools to work with them to define that pathway for some of the programs so that some of our concurrent enrollment programs are actually flowing a little bit, much more clearly into the college program. So that students will come in with 6, 9, 12 credits we hope, from some of the high schools so that they're started on a pathway. But the next thing we're trying to do is really continue that onto the four year institution and even now with several of our programs into a master's program that primarily our, our number one transfer college and really developing those pathways as well, which I think has really been helpful and hopefully will help with retention, but also recruitment as well.

Katy Oliveira ([19:07](#)):

Yes, making it clearer for students to know the path towards a degree or path towards a certification rather than having overwhelming number of questions. Choice. We like choice, but too much choice can be paralyzing.

Penny Kelly ([19:19](#)):

Yeah. And and it really, it really showed in the data. I mean we really, you know, if you look at the number of program changes and the number of excess credits and, and retention, it wasn't graded and we have this huge change yet, but we haven't seen a little bit of an improvement and we're taking it gradually, but we're happy to see the positive improvement.

Katy Oliveira ([19:39](#)):

Yeah. You started to get to this next question a little bit in our last question, but I'd like to spend a little bit more time there, maybe talking a little more specifically about what it looks like from a strategic planning decision making and then also day-to-day workflow action of, of your team, how you're using data analytics and technology to support these initiatives and to support this, this work that you're doing.

Penny Kelly ([20:03](#)):

Yeah, probably the biggest thing I think that we've benefited from so far is really looking at those predictive factors and what kind of interventions we need for various groups. And as I said, we're pretty new to it, but we're really finding some positive interactions that have been taking place and we're kind of introducing it to small groups, rolling it out to, for example, our housing. We don't have a lot of housing students, but being able to look at that population and have some specific interventions there, working with our E L P program and having specific interventions there. So taking those smaller populations right now and really looking at their success and providing those interventions has probably been the most positive thing we've done so far. As well as, you know, the advisors our, our new advising model, they're really working in keeping all consistent notes across the board.

([20:59](#)):

And our, um, our early alert process really helped us to think through because we changed our early alert programming and I think probably this happened a lot early on, would be my guess when you start early interventions and we were using a platform that I know our faculty are very concerned about our students and I think they do outreach, but I think what happened with that was it became very easy to say, oh, okay, I I, I recorded the student as you know, needs some outreach, but I would say the faculty member didn't provide outreach, but it, it kinda created that, okay, I've handed the student off somewhere else and I don't think that's really the way it totally worked, but I feel like what we're doing now and the way we rethought it as we implemented a new process was really what do we wanna do?

([21:57](#)):

We're concerned about a student in class, okay, you missed some assignments, you, you haven't been to class previously. We kind of said, okay, someone needs to reach out to the student and now we're kinda backtracking and think, no, actually the faculty member will work with the student and provide that outreach, notify the student that they need to address it and speak to the instructor, get some extra support. And just kind of going back to the old fashion way, utilizing the software to help us do what really, really should be done in the classroom. And it sounds kinda simplified, but I think it's really helped us to rethink how to better connect the students at the faculty level and then for those students that need some additional intervention, you know, it's going to other parties as well either to the advisor or the success coach to provide additional support and outreach and that, that really, I think is probably one of the biggest advantages so far that we're seeing.

Katy Oliveira ([22:59](#)):

Yeah, I know a challenge sometimes with early alerts is common, similar to what you described, there's alerts that are flagged more for academic reasons as opposed to behavioral reasons or shifts in behavior that a faculty or like appearance or wellness that a faculty observes in the classroom. And that it can be really easy after an exam to have an influx of alerts for everyone who made a C or less and then pass the buck to the advisor to reach out and deal with that. And one thing that we're seeing that works really well is when folks use behavioral alerts in the context of other predictive factors and kind of determine what does the student really need support with. And then identify the right combination of supports and interventions to get that student what they really need. One of them being that the the advisor, but could also be that the faculty member, like what you're describing, it sounds like you're kind of heading in that direction. Are you using alerts in combination with other predictive factors to surface students who need to be prioritized for support and intervention?

Penny Kelly ([24:04](#)):

We're definitely moving in that direction. Again, it's pretty new for us, so we're developing plans to really determine what type of alert it's, and in turn what action we would take in that. But I think so far right now we've really focused initially on really the academic and the support that we can provide that student and now we're classifying kind of more so, okay, is it a high or low warning? What intervention then would that require? And that's something that's very new to us, so we're, we're really just starting to get in on that. But it's really made us, I think more than anything really rethink that specific communication with the student and what really will help that student and support that student. And I think it's helped our faculty actually to connect a little bit better with the students in general, but also recognizing what that entire support team is able to do for a student.

Katy Oliveira ([25:04](#)):

Yeah, yeah, that's beautiful. I love to hear that. I know that getting as effective and efficient as possible when it comes to student success is of the utmost importance right now, especially, you started to hint at this and you said that you saw some early indicators that it was having a positive impact on retention, but of course were in the early phases of this work. What other differences are you seeing? Has there

been change in day-to-day workflow or collaboration or progress towards goals that you're seeing in these early phases?

Penny Kelly ([25:37](#)):

Yeah, a little bit right now. I mean, you know, a lot of what we're doing is really different focuses right, right from the start. So we're doing a lot of things at once, so, so if I could really pinpoint one item, I don't think that's possible, but we've done a lot with orientation, totally changed up orientation just based on some pathways models and talking about career and talking about connectedness and getting students connected to the right resources, which, you know, we always had orientation, but there's been a much greater focus on that, getting students in sooner to get them registered and, and that process has definitely gone much better with the caseload model and some really common registration days that we've been able to do that kind of speed the process up. I think it's really improved our students ability to get in and get registered quickly as opposed to the bottlenecks, which was was really a problem. And you know, community college students, I didn't get registered, I was going to get registered, maybe I'll wait and all a sudden they're gone. So we're really trying to be much more proactive there and introduce them to their success team early on. And you know, I think the advising model has really helped and they've done a really good job with that right now. So that best process in rid of that bottle and not making students wait and taking them in right away and getting them through the process.

Katy Oliveira ([27:07](#)):

Yeah. Streamlining the student experience. I know the Chronicle of Higher Education recently released a report about rethinking the student experience and how important just the student experience in and of itself is to students remaining at an institution filling a sense of belonging. And that something as simple as not being able to find the classes that you want or having registration feel overwhelming or complicated, especially for community college students who are on the fence about if they belong or not can be enough to deter them. And so streamlining that experience in and of itself can be really powerful.

Penny Kelly ([27:39](#)):

Yeah. You know, I feel like we've definitely done a much better job with that. And we also, one of the things that I think has helped a lot is we really examined some of our, I wouldn't say our thought processes, but we had a lot of developmental courses in place, um, that, you know, we're really rethinking looking at, just looking at a lot of barriers, you know, that really can turn a student away.

Katy Oliveira ([28:05](#)):

Yeah. Well we've covered a ton of of ground and I wanna be mindful of your time. Is there anything else that you'd like to share that we we didn't get to or questions I should have asked that I didn't, that you you'd like to, to finish with?

Penny Kelly ([28:20](#)):

I just think, you know, one of the things that we kind of struggle with this, how to change things up and think differently. You know, the short term credentials for us has been a real, it's a, it's a challenge. We know that that's something the students really are after, but it's very hard, particularly I think from a faculty standpoint to think about what do you, what do you take away? Don't they need all of this? And it's really been an interesting exercise and, and I think it's something that we're gonna struggle with for a while, but we know that, you know, the community's changing and there's, there's lots of demands out there right now for short term skills that we've kind of gotta adjust to. One of the things that we're trying to move to is, is a short, you know, some of the shorter semesters sessions within the semester.

([29:14](#)):

So we're looking at a seven week in a one week break in a seven. We're kind gradually going into that. I don't know if that's the greatest way to do it, but I think it's that for our colleges, the way that we've done that. But what I've gotten from that, from some of the faculty who even weren't necessarily convinced that they wanted to try it is the ability to spend more time with students. And, and that was

probably the biggest thing this particular faculty member got out of it, was the content was fine, but more so was really being able to help the students and provide that support and learning more about them and their needs. So, you know, just some other things that I think that we're doing that I, I think will help. But there's so many things that <laugh>, you know, we're rethinking and it, and it's exciting. It's also really challenging. It's just a very different time right now. But

Katy Oliveira ([30:09](#)):

Yeah, it's a, an exciting time to be, to be at the forefront of doing student success differently and shifting higher ed, which has slow to change, um, has been around in a long time and been doing things the same way for a long time to a new circumstance. So I think that's, that's really exciting. Penny, thank you so much for coming on Next Practices. I really appreciate it.

Penny Kelly ([30:29](#)):

Thank you. Great to be here. Thanks.

Katy Oliveira ([30:33](#)):

Next practices have produced by Civitas Learning Access More Next Practices and learn about how transformational leaders are moving student success forward by visiting CITAs learning.com. And if you enjoyed this episode, be sure to share it with a friend and subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts to stay up to date on the latest data informed approaches to student success.