Katy Oliveira:

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.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

You're going to have in your undergraduate student population, for example, we're going to have seniors that were freshmen or sophomores when the pandemic started, you're going to have juniors that were in high school when the pandemic started, you're going to have sophomores that did their last school year in high school virtually. And then now we're going to have a freshman class that were affected by the pandemic right in the middle of the high school years. So reconnecting with these students is going to be key if we want to increase our retention, if we want to increase our graduation rates, that's going to be critical. Because they went through a year or perhaps two years of non-traditional instruction. And we don't know how much they lost. And we need to make sure that we know how much they lost and we need to know, and we need to make sure to bring it up to speed with our expectation.

Katy Oliveira:

Today on the show, I'm talking about how to remove barriers to enrollment and completion with Juan Gilberto Garcia, the associate vice president of student success at Texas A&M International University. We talk about why it's more important than ever before to proactively engage students. How Texas A&M International University has boosted retention and completion rates since their adoption of conflict free scheduling, and three elements institutions need to remove barriers to enrollment and completion for their students. But before we dive in, take a moment to subscribe to the show, to stay up to date on the latest creative data informed approaches to student success.

Katy Oliveira:

Welcome to Next Practices Juan. I am so happy you're here. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to share your experience and your wisdom on supporting students with our audience today.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Well thank you for the invitation. It's a pleasure being here.

Katy Oliveira:

Here on Next Practices, we explore how to use data informed approaches to answer urgent questions and go beyond best practices to solve today's challenges in higher ed landscape. With that in mind, what are the most pressing student success challenges that your institution is working to solve?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

There are several, of course. Right now, one of the important things to have at least at the university is to reconnect the students after two years of one, completely virtual and the second one, we struggle to engage students in some of our campus activities, that's that's number one. Number two, we were able to get some funding to increase our advising efforts across campus. And we have a very young but talented group of advisors. And something that takes years sometimes at other institutions, which is to develop the workforce around advising for us, we were lucky enough to get some funding from the state to fund our advising program. And we were able to actually develop advising offices in each of our colleges, which is something that we didn't have. One of the challenges right now is that to streamline

the advising efforts across campus, everybody to be on the same page that the advising that they receive in the College of Arts and Sciences is the same type of advising that they receive in the College of Business and vice versa.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And also work on the hand of, which is something that is in theory very simple to do, but sometimes students get lost in the bureaucratic processes of the universities and something as simple as, "She or he's no longer my student. Here you go. You now belong to a different college, to a different advisor." We have failed to do that in a very, I guess, efficient way. One of the things that I don't supervise advising directly, but it is something that obviously affects the students that we recruit. And I am in charge of recruiting. And I also have a background in advising that was my first job in higher ed. And when I was a student, I was an advisor and I also have a background in the university registrar. I work with the catalogs and curriculums and all those sort of things.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

That is, I think the number one thing that we need to do right now with advising, and one of the things that we have struggled is that, so I'm trying to put two simple concepts into this, make a hand or make a transition that is visible. In other words, that the student sees you doing it and sees you talking to the advisor on the other college and make sure that you document the transition. In other words, use the system to code the new advisor, is something that it takes perhaps five seconds to do.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And that is something that is not well done. Why do we need to make it visible? So that way the students cease and they even go to the website and give them their contact information and things like that, show them the picture of the advisory. We have it. And the documentation is whenever they run some of the systems for degree audits and those sort of things, they actually can see the person and that the other person on the other end of the line, the other advisor now can run reports and use the system to identify the students and inherit, I guess, this new student into their student population that they serve.

Katy Oliveira:

It sounds to me like, if it's fair to summarize what you're seeing as the most important challenge is to reengage your students, to build relationship with your students, to make it visible, who is there to support them and to make the transitions and the bureaucracy across your campus, easily accessible to students so that they understand where they need to go for help. Especially after a few years of being less engaged with your institution.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

That is correct. And then right now in the fall of 2022, you're going to have in your undergraduate student population, for example, we're going to have seniors that were freshmen or sophomores when the pandemic started. We're going to have juniors that were in high school when the pandemic started. You're going to have sophomores that did their last school year in high school virtually. And then now we're going to have a freshman class that were affected by the pandemic, right in the middle of the high school years. Reconnecting with these students is going to be key, if we want to increase our retention, if we want to increase our graduation rate, that's going to be critical because they went through a year or perhaps two years of non-traditional instruction. And we don't know how much they lost. And we need

to make sure that we know how much they lost and we need to know, and we need to make sure to bring it up to speed with our expectations.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And one of the important things I believe in order for us to do that is to remove the transaction out of our daily routines. We're going to have to focus on the students more. We need to remove as much transactional work, for example, in an advising session. If you put any advising session in many 60 minute advising session, let's say, we begin describing what happens in an advising session with the student. If you're spending 45 minutes of the 60 minute advising session in trying to figure out a schedule, you invest in 75% of the advising session in something that is not meaningful to the student, because you have to finish in one hour because you already have the next student coming. Then you are only going to allow 15 minutes to look at what I call the human side of advising, that interaction, that direct interaction with a student.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

How do you shift that? How can you spend 45 minutes talking to the student and only let's say 50 minutes doing the transaction side of advice, which is figuring out a schedule based on the student needs, based on the student wants, based on whether they have a practice or whether they work, or whether they have to commute from the other side of town or those sort of things? We do have one of the tools from Civitas, which is a scheduler that has allowed us to do, that has allowed us to change the transaction side of advising into more human side of advising. There's not a single software out there that can identify if the student is struggling at home or if the family is going through something, if they lost a member of the family due to whatever reason, if they're having economic struggles, there's no system that can tell you that. It's going to have to be the human eye, the human intuition, that perhaps can identify these factors and how these factors are affecting the student.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And it is important if we want to reconnect with our students, we need to make sure that we work more efficiently. And by that, I think removing all these transactions that are routine, I guess, and that just takes time. Let a computer figure that out. Because the computer won't be able to figure out the human side of advising. Making that shift I think is important and I think it's going to create a lot of differences and good opportunities for our students in the future.

Katy Oliveira:

We had talked in a previous conversation about how you're doing this exact work, not only with your currently enrolled students, but with students prior, rising freshmen, students who are unusually graduated before orientation, starting to engage students in this way. Do you mind sharing a little bit about the work that you're doing to help with enrollment of entering students, as well as building this relationship with continuing students through making the registration experience more about easing the registration experience with technology so that your advisors can connect and build relationship with the students?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Absolutely. The model in higher ed is the students registering the student orientation. That's usually, I want to say 95% of the universities use this model. The student attends orientation. One of the sessions is, get your schedule, whether it's prepopulated or whether you're going to do it from scratch is usually

the model. Since about 80% of our student population of our incoming freshman class comes from local high schools and regional high schools, high schools are maybe 90 miles away from Laredo, we do a very aggressive recruiting with them. We visit their campuses often during the school year and in the month of April and May we do something called onsite registration, where we actually go to these high schools and for the students already committed to attend Texas A&M International University, we actually take an army of people from the university and we take advisors and we take financial aid and we take orientation programs.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And we do kind of like an A&M International fair at the school library. It takes a lot of logistics and takes a lot of planning. But once we are there, students from that particular high school, they sign up for an advising session and we provide them with 45 minute sessions. And most of the time in the bigger high schools, we have the capacity to see 80 students during the day. We usually start at nine, we usually end at three. And one of the tools that we use to make this event successfully is the actual scheduler. So even before they step a foot on our campus, before they go into a classroom, and even before they graduate from high school, they actually have a university schedule ready, which is meaningful to them, especially for the high number of first generation students that we have. About 60% of our students are first generation, about 80% of them are Pell recipients, it's a very unique student population.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

During these events, they actually sit down with an advisor and they build their schedule, and we use the scheduler from Civitas to build their schedule then, and it is schedule that starts from zero. We don't prepopulate, these are the classes that you're going to take. We actually ask them, "Do you have any transportation issues? Are you going to rely on public transportation? Are you going to drop your little brother or sister at school and then you're going to go to the university? Do you work? Are you part of any sports program? The practice?" All those sort of things. We build that into the system, the scheduler, and then we take a look to see if the student already took any classes while they were in high school. We build it from zero. So we have people trained to provide that good customer service during their first ever advising session at college.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And they're very focused on that. And obviously the less transaction and the less time you spend thinking about different options on your schedule, the more you can focus on them and trying to close the deal to make sure that the stu... To feel the student feel welcome to the university. And that they know that they made the right decision as staying or committed to Texas A&M International. We sit down with them and we actually use a tool and we teach the tool on scheduling at that event. Even before they, again, step a foot on campus, they actually are able to see the tool that they're going to be using when they start here, when they're ready to register for the second semester, we showing them the tool that they're going to be using. And because this is a web based tool, we're able to use it anywhere that has internet access, which is something great.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And we were able to serve more students in these events. We were close of actually suspending what I call the signature recruiting event of this institution because of the lack of human capital and the lack of time that scheduler, it was one of the solutions that we were able to implement, and we were able to use and it saved these events, and we were able to serve more students. And again, the important thing

is to focus on the student and forget these transactions, make it less visible, I guess. And focusing more on the experience and the scheduler has allowed us to do that.

Katy Oliveira:

It sounds like this is quite a large event. I'm assuming that this is a cross-functional collaboration with your campus. What different offices and groups across your campus are working together to pull this event together for your students?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

I'm going to think about the flow of the event, so that I can tell you, so the students come in, we have a signing table there, and then the signing table is usually managed by their recruiter that is in charge of that particular high school. And just to go back to the previous question, we focus on the local high schools in the month of April. And then we go to the regionals in the month of May, so just to put that out there. So then the student goes in, signs, they have a folder prepared with them. That includes ranking SAT scores. All those sort of things, as everything is within FERPA is a one to one. We don't share all this with everybody there. We talk to the students, we kind of do a screening of them.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

If we need to do a change of major, for example, we have personnel from the office of admissions there. We have admissions and the office of recruiting. The recruiters in charge of the event, he or she has the support from the administration of the recruiting office. Once they pass that, and once they're ready to get advice, and we send them to the group of advisors, and we have a combination of advisors from different colleges, but most of them are from the office of recruitment. It's, we have other recruiters advising. We have some of the part-timers also advising, and we have a few college advisors, and we also have a few advisors from the office of retention. Just advising, we probably have about three to five different offices helping. We need to understand that while we are doing that, there's also registration going on at the university. I don't have five advisors from the College of Business, they spare one with me.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Once they're done with that, then they go to, we have a small setup there and they learn about study abroad. The Office of International Engagement is there. They also know about the vaccination requirements here in Texas. We have the requirement of bacterial meningitis. So they have the student health offices there. We also have the Trio programs there trying to recruit the students. We also have a few student organizations sometimes that they set up boots just to provide information. We have the Office of Student Conduct there so they can know about some of the things that they can do while they're on campus and those sort of things. A few times we have had faculty, but they don't have a role. They just walk around and it was one time that it was extremely cool. Because I stopped by one of the advising sessions and I was looking at the schedule and I saw the name of the faculty member that was with me.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

I was like, "Oh, by the way, this is going to be your student in the fall semester." And the student was like, "Oh my goodness, the faculty members here." So we take a few faculty members once in a while just to walk around, but they don't take a role in the session, just they're there in case something is needed or in this case, it was a good introduction to the faculty member. And then they end with the Office of Student Orientation and leadership programs because they actually registered for orientation. And we use some of the computers that they have there at the high school and they register for one of the

sessions. And once I finish, we provide them with a t-shirt and then we have a photo booth there where they can take a picture and use social media and things like that.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Sometimes we have our PR person, our social media person there. I just went over and we probably talking about 30 people, helping in the event from 10, 12 different departments. It takes a lot, and so imagine passing everybody to high school security and making sure that we find parking spaces at the high schools. Sometimes our lunch is like 30 minutes because we run over the next session and we just bring pizzas from different places or they eat actually high school food. They go to the high school cafeteria, but it is a fun event. It's a way to connect with folks in a different way, with departments in a different context, I guess, outside of the normal day to day location, that is the beautiful university that we have.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

There's a lot of people that look forward to these events and like I mentioned, it is our signature event and it's heavy. It takes a lot of planning. It's very stressful, but it gives us a good parameter at the end of May to see how we are doing with our recruitment efforts and how much we have to push and where we have to push in the three months that we have for registration prior to the beginning of the semester. Where do we put our marketing efforts? Where do we put our funds? Do we need to push this sector of the city more than the other one?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Should we focus more on the parents? Which out of town school didn't perform the way we wanted? What do we do? It'll allow us to do that in a better way. By then we already have, I want to say 75% of our incoming freshman class already registered. Then we can focus more on what are we missing? And what area do we focus more? And also gives us a lot of time to prepare for the next recruiting year.

Katy Oliveira:

Yeah, it's pretty remarkable because it really solves two challenges that I think a lot of institutions are facing. One it's declining enrollment and getting students to engage with your institution. But the other is getting students the information that they need. My backgrounds in student success. I was in first year advisor for many, many years. I've worked many summer orientations for days, registering students one after the other, after the other and organizing orientation with other stakeholders across campus. And I just know that one of the problems we always faced was information overwhelmed for the students that we are cramming, all the information they could ever need to know about being successful in college into two days when they're interested in getting their schedule and meeting people and seeing what the res hall's going to look like.

Katy Oliveira:

And we're like, "But no, you need to know all of these things that might happen to you." And some of that comes in one ear and out the other. But what you're doing here is you're introducing, you're sort of slowly rolling out and introducing and reintroducing and sharing information over time. You're giving yourself time to recruit students and manage enrollment in a healthy way. But you're also giving students time to make the transition to higher ed experience.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

That is correct. Actually, it's funny, you mentioned that we have, I guess the previous or the previous two directors of orientation leadership programs, they were like, "So how am I going to make them come to orientation if they're not going to get their schedule? They came from different areas." And I was like, "Don't worry about it. They'll come." And they do, we have a huge, and it's a mandatory orientation. So if they don't come, we put a hold on the students, but we have 95% participation. Our newest director, he said like, "Oh my God, this is great because then I can put more of my programming into the session and it has worked tremendously well." Something I forgot to say, which is huge, is very important, is that I felt to name is the Office of Financial Aid. Actually, before they go into the fairs or into the different booths of the information that we have, a mandatory stop is the financial aid officers.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And right after they get their advising and their schedule, they stop with financial aid and they have their computers there. They look and make sure that they don't have any items spending that the financial aid was submitted correctly. That if they need a form, they have it right there. There was one time that we took IT with us. We had some issues with the creation of the emails, but the two offices that are on call are the IT department. So we have somebody that is on call at every single event. And then we have the Office of the University Registrars in case we have issues with registration errors. If some class is closed, can we increase the capacity? There's somebody on call for each one of these events. I just forgot to include them, but yeah, that's step with financial aid is key because you can have the schedule, how you're going to pay for them?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

We take at least four advisors and one of the administrators from the financial aid office and they, they also participate in this event. For orientation, they have more space to put fun stuff or maybe academic stuff. I don't know. But our current director said, "This is great. Typically, I had to spend four hours at scheduling sessions and the coordination with everybody just is probably, you probably go there, it's a reading registration, everybody there's, I don't know, 50 tables around, 50 advisors. And they just see students, but most of the time that their schedule's already pre done. They just basically fill that up with a couple of options.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

But removing that from the orientation you might think, well, what is then for the students attending this session? Well, it's more than just making a schedule, it's the connection with their future classmates, is the connection to university, is knowing what we have to offer meeting other people outside of the recruitment office and things like that. We haven't had any issues with attendance due to the fact that we don't do the scheduling and orientation. Now, for students coming from out of town, the students that we don't serve in these events, they're actually scheduled a meeting with them within the orientation. There's a dedicated time for those students who don't have a schedule yet.

Katy Oliveira:

You're also using capacity, because I know we would just be for lack of better word, slammed back to back hours, long, long days, where you're seeing students just one after the other, after the other, you're offloading some of that. Creating some easy capacity during orientation because you're seeing a certain subset of students who don't come to these events, you're spreading out your advising registration over a longer period of time than just the traditional orientation season.

Katy Oliveira:

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Katy Oliveira:

A few things that I heard you say about the impact of doing your enrollment this way is that one, you are able to be more efficient in your scheduling, which allows more time with advisors to get to build relationship and get to know those students and actually understand what's going on with them as a human. What are some of the challenges that they might be facing that may make college more difficult? I'm curious since shifting to this way of doing enrollment, this way of doing scheduling, where you are having scheduler do the heavy lifting of figuring out the schedule for the student and the human doing the more empathetic work of connecting with the student. What kinds of results have you seen for your student? How has that changed the experience for your students?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

I'm going to focus on two important success measures, retention and graduation. It's going to be hard to measure the retention the last couple of years, just because of they were abnormal. But what we saw was for those students that started as a freshman, building their schedules using scheduler, and those that were advice with this model of shifting the whole transactional clerical work of advising and just focusing more on the student, we always had a very good retention rate, but it just put it to another level. We were always above seventies, which is for the student population that we have and for being a regional school, removing the flagship, the A&M college station and removing them from the list of systems schools, we're number one for more than 10 years in a row. This actually put us from the low seventies to the high seventies.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

The last class, the retention for the class of fall 2019, for fall 2020 was 78%. And before that we were averaging about 74%. You might say, well, it's only four points. Well, if you put it in numbers that represents more than 150 students. It went down a little bit on the pandemic, but it didn't go down to the low seventies. It remained at the middle seventies and again, it might be one or two points difference but whenever you're actually talking raw numbers it's a huge difference. The other key statistics that I'm going to give you is graduation, and the graduation, you need to wait four years. The first class, the class that came in using scheduler that were advised by advisors using scheduler and as students use scheduler, that class was the fall of 2017, I believe. That class graduated at a five percentage point higher than the previous class.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

As an institution, we made some improvements. We were graduating at the low twenties. And then we did some changes, some of the structures that we did and some of the processes and some of the things that we're handling, we did mid twenties and it remained on mid twenties, but that 5% jump from one class to the other was just outstanding for me. I saw that and was like, "Oh my goodness, what happened there?" So we went back, let's put this out there. I mean, a scheduler maybe was not the main thing, but it was a very important thing on some of the operations changes that we did. That class that they don't know better. They came here and scheduler was already a thing and we were already using it

and they started using it since they were freshmen. That class graduated at the largest percentage points in school history.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

They graduated at 30%, four year graduation rate. The previous class graduated at 25. You look at strategic plan of universities, they say that in 10 years, they're going to increase the graduation rate by five points. We did it in one. Yes, maybe the number was low, but having a 5% increase from one class to the other was just remarkable. It was just amazing to see. The next year went down one point, it went down to 29, but we already talking that we are the high twenties, low thirties, rather than the low twenties, mid twenties, so it's huge. It's huge. Again, there are strategic plans developed to improve some of the success measures and we were able to do it in just one year. Those are two very simple of interesting facts, tangible data points that I can show that talks about some of the changes that we have done internally at this institution.

Katy Oliveira:

What do you think makes the difference? What do you think it is about the shifts that is yielding that like remarkable result, you said it's only four points, but I know being a person who managed an office who's were very interested in retaining our students, it was very hard to move one point. We moved one percentage point. We were really excited. And when you think about it in raw students, it's remarkable because those points are actual individual students who are retaining, are staying in school. What do you think is making it easier for students to stay enrolled and persist on towards graduation?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Well, number one is the fact that you have a tool that can help you identify the best schedule possible. Sometimes if you're in a rush and you're just there trying to build something, you build whatever you find first, and just go with it. With a tool like scheduler, you're actually able to put more into it. And perhaps students might add a class that maybe they didn't see fit, or maybe they didn't know it was available, or they are able... The system is able to provide them with all of the options that there are out there and before they didn't have it, it was again, more transaction. It was just one by one, looking at what's open and looking if you were able to fix it and then doing the highlight on the hour grade that all of us, remember when we were in college.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Students are able to identify all of the schedules that they can possibly have in all the different options and in a faster way, in a more efficient way. And again, adding an extra class by semester might reduce amount of students who are graduating in five years to four and a half or those graduating four and a half to four or those graduating four to three and a half. That's number one. And the second one, it will be like I mentioned before, going back to the actual advising sessions, focusing more on the students, making those advising sessions more meaningful to the students and planning. You need to talk about what happened. So you have a student that started with a 3.2 GPA one semester, and then is going down 2.9, 2.7 2.5. Obviously something's happening. So what is going on? At one moment can you intervene to, and have time to talk about a possible change of major, perhaps? Maybe a possible identification of change of a career at an early stage?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And if you identify these things prior to being so late, prior to changing your major, when you're a junior rather than changing your major in your first semester as a sophomore, it makes a huge difference. Because then you're going to be taking so many classes if you're going to switch something that has nothing to do with what you had pursued, what you were pursuing, then obviously you kind start from zero sometimes. Well, not from zero, but you know what I mean? You have to take more classes, it's going to take you longer to graduate. Perhaps you run out of financial aid or perhaps you don't longer have a scholarship and things like that. And all these things just delayed the graduation for the students to graduate on time. Those are the two factors I think, putting more options to the students and focusing more and making more meaningful advising sessions. And that's why I think we're seeing the high success rates that our numbers are showing.

Katy Oliveira:

Well, we're almost out time, but give space for you to share, any other lessons that you've learned that you think others doing this kind of work would benefit from.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

I think there are important elements. And this is I'm not discovering anything here. There are three important elements that you have to have in place in order to produce an efficient process. Number one is, people. You need to have the human capital. You need to train them. You need to find people that are willing to work in student services. And as you know, people working in universities and student services, we didn't come to school to work at universities. It's a profession that we fell in love with for whatever reason, because we had somebody that mentored us, because we had a great experience as a student, things like that, we don't... I major in finance, I never thought that I was going to be in this position. That was not the career that I wanted. It's a career that I fell in love with. Finding these elements is difficult, but not only that, making them love the profession of student affairs, making them love the profession of higher education, you have to work on that.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

We don't have the highest salaries in entry level positions, so then how do you compensate those things? So having that human capital is important. And then you need to have systems. What systems do you have in place? Do you have the right technological tools. Do you have the right software in place? Do you have the right setup in the software? Is everybody in the university using it? There are certain softwares that don't feed the university culture. Finding those things is important. Obviously, sources making sure that we find the sources to buy these things. I was one of those that would go to all these conferences and go to the exhibit halls. And I just grabbed the free candies and the free food and I went to my room because we never purchased anything, but we were afraid to engage with technology.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

And we were automatically asking for more people, I need one more person that can help me with the schedule. I need one more advisor. I need one more... And it is just, again, going back to this thing about, we don't pay enough, we don't retain well, having somebody else there is maybe not the solution. Maybe you don't need somebody, you need something. And that something is technology. But losing that fear of technology I think is something that we need to do. And instead of asking for a salary, or let's say $35,000 plus benefit, sometimes that's how much the systems cost. And the systems, guess what? The system works 24/7, the systems they don't get sick, the systems they don't ask for vacation. And sometimes these are the tools that will help them, the human capital make their job way better.
Juan Gilberto Garcia:

You have the humans and then you have the systems. And I think the third element that you have to throw into this circle is the process. You have the people in the right place, you have the right systems. How are you defining the process? Looking at the processes, like the one where I mentioned at the beginning, the hand of to the student, something that in theory is very simple, but in practice is difficult to do. Do you have steps within your processes that you don't need? Do you have rules that nobody knows what the rules are there for? Or nobody cannot trace the rules of why that rule was implemented? What sort of things that we have in place that is not, I guess, friendly to the current demands of the students? Looking at your catalog, some of the graduation regulations that you have, are they mandated by the system, or they're mandated by the state, or they're mandated by the institution, or they were mandated by somebody that no longer work at the institution?

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Connecting people, systems and processes are important. At the moment that you're able to do that connection and for everything to flow correctly, the ones that benefit the most are the students. I always say this, we tend to study a lot, why students fail, but we fail to study why we fail the students. And sometimes we don't have the right people in the right positions. We don't have the right systems in place, and we don't have the processes, the right processes for the students. So if we're not able to create these workflow internally and to make these things work, we're failing our students and shame on us because it is sometimes in our hands to make sure that we've this...

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Life is hard as it is and if we're just creating these obstacles and then creating more bureaucracy in what we do every single day, then we're failing our students. That is something that I truly believe. And I hope everybody thinks about that. What do you have in place that is not student friendly? And revise it and make sure that you think about how you can remove those barriers. And the ones that will benefit at the end will be the students and the rates, graduation, retention all that will definitely improve.

Katy Oliveira:

That's so important. I'm going to leave it there because I think that's really the bottom line, right? What can we do to remove barriers for our students so that they can be successful? And if we're thinking strategically about how to do that, then the metrics will take care of themselves. Thank you so much for your time and coming on the show and sharing your experience.

Juan Gilberto Garcia:

Thank you. I'm going to be honest with you, this is the first time I do a podcast. I had a lot of fun, so thank you. It was great. Anybody out there if you want to contact me directly, just she'll be able to give you my information. It'll be great to share, and I'll be more than happy to show you what we're doing at Texas A&M International University.

Katy Oliveira:

Thank you so much.

Katy Oliveira:

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