

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.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([00:28](#)):

If you don't go through the process of collaboration, of getting commitment, getting buy-in, then at the end of the day, they won't be able to share that with their end-users and with the students, right? Cause that's, that's the, the people you want help with at the end, but in it, you're so far removed from that, but you wanna empower people. You want this energy to go on and go on and go on. And the only way to do that is to get them in the beginning to get their commitment

Katy Oliveira ([00:55](#)):

Today on the show, I'm talking about maximizing your student success IT investment with Dr. Chelsy Pham Vice President of Information Technology Resources at Hartnell College. We talk about how institutions can help students become better prepared for the digital world. Why colleges and universities need data to provide equitable student success at scale, a step-by-step process for selecting the right student success software for your institution. Software vendor must haves and how to get buy-in from stakeholders across your campus. 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. Welcome to Next Practices, Dr. Pham, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to share your experience and wisdom with our audience here at Next Practices, we explore how to use data informed approaches to answer urgent questions and go beyond best practices to solve problems in today's rapidly changing higher ed landscape. And I'd like us to start by talking about what you see as some of the most pressing challenges institutions are facing when it comes to student success and information technology,

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([02:17](#)):

Happy to be here. What I find the most pressing is the rapid changes of demand, right? Demand changes in technology, and also how students are changing, how students are changing their methods of communication, how they're using technology, how they're applying it in their life. And also if you look at society, society has changed a lot during COVID. When there was voting, it used to be on paper or paper ballots were very the thing. And then we started voting electronically. DMV started doing a lot more online things. So society is changing around and I think we need to prepare our students or future, you know, citizens of society to be digital ready, you know, to have digital literacy. But in order to have that goal of digital literacy, you need to start somewhere. And sometimes students don't have the opportunity at home, because maybe they grew up in a household where their parents don't use technology.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([03:14](#)):

Like for myself, my mother's a hair stylist. She has a phone and that's it. Right? Don't ask her to do email. Don't ask her to, you know, don't so we have these parents who don't believe that technology is a vital part of life in the future. So we need to help the students who are coming in, whether they're out of high school or their midlife adults, right? To come in, to understand how to use technology to better themselves, to have them function in society in the future. And part of that is, is actually having the technology at the college. And then if you go, even back to having technology, having accessibility to technology, it goes back to how do we help the students? Where are the indicators that help our

students grow? How do we, as a college, find the students that need help and then give them the help that they need. You always look at stories like statistics versus a personal story, right? You have 10,000 people die in a car accident, a train wreck. It's a statistic. But if your neighbor's daughter who's 21 got into an accident around the corner, then that's a story. It hits more emotionally as an individual. Then if you look at everything as a statistic,

Katy Oliveira ([04:23](#)):

Yeah. It's personalizing the data.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([04:26](#)):

Correct.

Katy Oliveira ([04:28](#)):

So what are you and your team doing to solve for that problem? How are you working to help students gain access to the technology? They need to be prepared for their future state.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([04:45](#)):

So you can look at that on several terms you can look at on a very broad term, right? If you go on a hierarchy level of trying to go down a hierarchy like the, the top is level, do you have stuff available? Is your wifi available? Is your network available? Do you have computers in your classrooms? That's step one. It's an important step, but not the most important step. Because now you're just generalizing. Now it's the statistics. And you go down to the classroom, you go into the instructor, does the instructor have the right tools, right? Do they have the right resources? Is there, you know, does their syllabus say, here's your resource. If you need help mentally, you know, here's your it department. If you need help technically. And then you go down to, that's like scratching the surface on, you know, if you go down another level, you get to the student level and that's where you have the most, you wanna be equitable, right?

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([05:36](#)):

You wanna provide help or help is needed. But you don't know that just by looking at, in, in your sea of class of students, there's no way for you to identify who needs help unless they reach out. And the majority of the time, the students who need help will not ask for help. And they won't ask for help now because they're not able to speak, not be because they don't know their resources because culturally they weren't brought up to ask for help. A lot of times you need to have data in the background to help you facilitate that or even give them a nudge. A lot of stories we hear are about people who are very successful, always talk about that one teacher, that one counselor, the one phone call that made a big difference in their life, right? So you try to, I guess, scale that into a grander scheme of things or how do you scale that type of help, that type of inspiration, right?

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([06:24](#)):

That type of step in. So I see higher education, they're, you know, looking at the vision of success and then, you know, charting off the guide pathways. And one is really to support the students in their journey. And a lot of places are hiring things like success, coaches, resource specialists, you know, in addition to the counselors. And I think that in addition to faculty, you have this team of people who are trying to help students succeed. And they're not a granular level. You need to identify who those, those

students are and just reach out to them because reaching out, making that one phone call, making that one email, making that one text can make a difference of a student saying or leaving college.

Katy Oliveira ([07:02](#)):

Yeah, it's interesting. I think, uh, my background's also for those listening, I think you've, you may already know, but my background's also in higher ed, I was an advisor for many years and, and ran a first year advising department. And I know that oftentimes the student that raised our hand or came was a student who was maybe not in the, um, was a student who already had the skillset to advocate for themselves. They had the flexibility to come in and they had the skills to ask for help or to know where to get the help. And that often the students who really needed our help, most, we couldn't always see who they were or get to them or get them to come in. Sometimes it was because we felt quite busy because our capacity, our appointments were filled and students were in our lobby, but they weren't necessarily the students that needed our support the most. So that, that makes so much sense that part of it is having the human beings available to provide support. But part of it is having tools in place that allow you to see who needs support so that you can adequately reach those students.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([08:06](#)):

Absolutely. I, I totally agree with that. And, and one thing I always, you know, say, and I kind of just, when I tell our staff and faculty is that data's, non-discriminatory you look at, you know, faces, you look at names, you look at culture, but then you look at just the raw data on who's performing. Who's not who needs help. Those are real.

Katy Oliveira ([08:23](#)):

So as a person who' lens is on providing, uh, institutional technology and implementing technologies on your campus, um, to help support this work. What are some best practices or takeaways that you would share with folks who are looking to bring in tools and systems to help maximize, or I'm not sure they're quite the right word to help facilitate this higher level of support, not even higher level help facilitate this more equitable approach to support

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([08:58](#)):

When looking at tools. And when you look at technology and what tools to bring into the district, or what tools introduce to the broader community. One question I always ask is what difference is it gonna make to who? Right. Cause it's not about the tools. It's not about, you know, how much it is or what it is that you're bringing in. It could be something very simplistic. It could be something very complex, but at the end of the day, who's it helping and, and what, and, and does I answer your why? Right? Who's it gonna make a difference to if I implement this? And if the answer is, well, it's not gonna make a difference. It's just for, for reporting purposes or maybe that that fits a different strategic goal. But if you're looking at student success and the why you're doing what you're doing, and you look at the end result of who you're actually helping at the end, that's kind of how we look at tools and how we want to introduce tools. I always say that, look at the purpose and not the tool.

Katy Oliveira ([09:51](#)):

And then once you have the purpose, what does it allow you as a team to do that? Just looking at a tool alone doesn't provide for.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([09:59](#)):

So once you have your purpose, I always say, you know, what's your wish list. If you had a wish, regardless of the application, what do you want this to do for you? How can it help you do your job to at the end, help a student and to either your goal is to pick up students who need help reach, do outreach and have a cohesive communications or something like that. Then you make a wishlist and you generate that wishlist and you just have it as a list and you don't even introduce any vendors in, right? There's, there's no picking and choosing of who cuz sometimes when you're looking at a tool, you kind of wanna fit your wants into that tool. Right? It it's like buying a house, you go out and you say, you go look at model homes like go, well, yes, I like the kitchen this way because you like that home.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([10:43](#)):

Right. Cause now that's your mind, that's the kitchen you want. But if you never looked at any home and you drew out the kitchen of your dreams, it would be completely different. And then you go out and hunt for the kitchen of your dreams versus saying, that's the kitchen of my dreams because I like this, you know, the color of the house or whatever. So it's kind of like that kind, it's kind of a different approach because sometimes people see the shiny object and you know, they want the shiny object. Sure. I want the Lamborghini, you know, but I live in LA cause that's a perfect car for me. Right. So it's shiny. It's great. It's fast when you can't go anywhere. So you just want the, the Goldy lock style. It's like the just right.

Katy Oliveira ([11:18](#)):

Yeah. So it's instead of looking at a tool and saying, oh that's slick. What could we do with that feature? It's it's reversing the process and sitting down and thinking about what is it that we need to accomplish? What are our must haves like to haves, need to haves and then having a good sense of what that is. And then I'm assuming the next step would be start to evaluate what's out in the market that might fit those needs.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([11:43](#)):

Yes, yes. The next tool after you get your wishlist. So what you have to have, what you wish you would have. And this is like, you know, the ultimate cream of the crop type thing you go out and you start looking, start talking to different vendors and looking at different applications and how you do that.

Katy Oliveira ([12:00](#)):

And when you're looking for vendors to work with, do you have any recommendations on what are, are some things that you really or wanting to look at from a vendor institution relationship to know that this is going to be a worthwhile investment for your institution

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([12:16](#)):

With any kinda product I look at in several different lenses, right? One is from an it's perspective, the buck has to stopped with me, right? So when they have comes to help, when it comes to maintenance, when it comes to overall technical debt, like I don't want to bring a platform in that I have to maintain. And then it's it's fault that something's not working. And then it takes more of our time. The ROI has to be there for the team. So that's one of the things I look at platform wise because right now all colleges, right, have this technical debt of different software platforms at different ages that require different levels of maintenance. But we have to have them because the college has been functioning on them for

a long time. So the idea is something sustainable that works with our future infrastructure could work with current, but definitely have to work with future infrastructure.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([13:08](#)):

That's kind number one. Number two is kind of like the wraparound service. I kind of cringe when a vendor sells me something and they go, oh, but we don't implement it for you. Go call somebody else. Like go call these people. They're our partners. And they'll implement it for you. That's flag. Number two, you don't wanna take care of your own stuff. Um, how much does the vendor love their own product and how much they believe in it for them to implement their own stuff? And the third thing and, and probably one of the most important things is service after implementation. Right? A lot of times I say, it's not, you know, if you have a okay product, but your service is great. It's forgivable, right? The make the connections and oh, okay. We'll figure it out. We'll figure it out. There's a trust and support around that. But if you buy an awesome product and a breaks and you can't call anybody, you have no help. But then where you left, you're left with like nothing at the end of the day. So it's all those things that make a difference on what vendor you go to, regardless of the function, sometimes you'll give up a thing or two to get the other thing, right? So I'd give up a functionality. That's spazy on some other platform to say that, you know what, I'll be by your side for this whole engagement.

Katy Oliveira ([14:20](#)):

And that helps it not become a tool. I know from my own higher ed experience or loads of tools that were kind of sitting on a shelf being under utilized by the institution at the user level, because it just there wasn't support or it wasn't implemented well or it didn't do quite exactly what it needed to do. And I think having those things in mind as you're building relationship helps to minimize that from happening. That being said as well. I know that part of it is the decision making, partnering with vendors that are going to be true partners and that are going to support their products. But I think the other pieces of it is getting buy in across campus and rolling out use of the product and adoption of the product. Is that something that you shepherd as part of your work in matching together student success and with good tools and technologies?

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([15:14](#)):

Yes, definitely. Cause if you don't have adoption, then you don't have a product at all. You basically threw away the money, right? The thing is you need to get buy in ahead of time. Like if they constituents or the groups that, that the colleges are, are working with, come up with their wishlist. At that point, when they came up with their wishlist, they're committed to something. If I put that, I wish my house had a pool, I will go look for a house that has a pool. And so that person has already bought in that person is already committed. So you're looking for a level of commitment and by doing that initial wishlist and then going out and saying, wow, this house has a pool. Well, that person sold because the house has a pool. Right? And so you do that and you make sure the groups that you bring in, the different people across the district, you bring in should not be the people who love it and should not be the people who they absolutely have to have this because it has a pool.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([16:04](#)):

It has to the people like I don't even wanna buy a house. Like why I, I like the one I have, you know, I'm happy. Why change? I don't wanna move. I don't wanna do anything. That's actually the people you want on the team, you know why? Because they were outspoken. They say they don't like it. They said they don't want it, but they'll be your biggest evangelist. If you can convince them to say, Hey look, you know, it's not moldy. It's not this and that. It's, it's a different home. It's closer to work, whatever,

whatever the, the idealism is. Right. But you get those people and get them in the front end. Don't be afraid. Because the worst thing you can do is shut them out because then they'll be loud. You not only that they'll be allowed, they'll be against your project and be very verbal about being against your project.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([16:47](#)):

Right? And they can actually set your project to a halt. If you don't get their buy-in. Even at the end of the day, they tell you that they don't want to move, but they'll accept it. They'll see the reason why. So even if you don't get them on their side, they don't become your champion. They don't become your evangelist, but you've already shown them. And so there's this, not this mystery of the unknown are the worst. The human mind with the unknown is the worst thing. Assumptions are the worst. The worst enemy. People assume that's this and that. And that's not really what it is. People assume that they're out to get you buying a house with a pool, but it has a camera. So I know what you, you know, so people come up with us and stories and, and you want to dispel those front.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([17:31](#)):

You want them to be able to ask them under their card questions and you want to see how the vendor handles it too. So it goes both ways, right? You wanna see how that goes and how they react to that is very important. And this is even before, before the partnership or before you're committed to this product or any product, right? You wanna see how the vendor reacts to your, you know, outspoken colleagues. Because if you think about it as I think about like as a probational period. So if this is the way you're gonna treat me, like if I, I, one really management I have is when you hire an employee, their first three months, there, that's the best they're giving you because they're on probation. Can you imagine what you're gonna get afterwards? So you need to take care of that upfront, right? If they're gonna be not a good partner, if they're gonna treat your colleague like this, that's your colleague, whether you love them or you don't, it's your colleague. If it's family, your person from outside needs to treat them very well, no matter what the circumstances are. So that shows you, at least it shows me a very culture of a company. And that's very important to me when we deal with partnerships and stuff too.

Katy Oliveira ([18:35](#)):

It's really smart because it, it makes sense from a human perspective, right? It's it's getting folks to be part of the process from the beginning, but it's also vetting the human side of whatever vendor you're working with to see how they're gonna work with your community. Because ultimately it's not just the person who ultimately gets to make the final decision that the product is gonna be used by. It's gonna be used across the campus. And ideally you want as many people to buy in and be stakeholders. Like you said, otherwise, it's a product taking up space on the shelf, not getting utilized. It's not being leveraged in the way that you intend to make a difference for students.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([19:12](#)):

Exactly. And that's also your credibility, right? If you, if you're launching a product and you're bringing in a vendor and the vendors treating your colleagues terribly, how are you gonna build your next one? How are you gonna build your next project you wanna be on? Right? So really, if you are the one that's leading it and you are the one like, Hey, you know, check out this house. It's amazing. You know, a landlord comes in and starts yelling at your family. Well, it's on you, right? Uh, kind of, even though it's not, it is. So it's all about the whole around credibility. Try to build your, you know, infrastructure at the same time as, as you can get, buy in, get understanding. Cause a lot of times it's not that someone hates or doesn't like it it's because they don't understand it.

Katy Oliveira ([19:59](#)):

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Katy Oliveira ([20:35](#)):

When you follow these steps that you've walked us through over the course of this episode, what have you seen on the other side of that? The difference in once it's implemented, once you've brought on a technology doing this process, how does it help your team to be more effective? On the other side, once the product is stood up and folks are actually using it.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([20:57](#)):

So once the product is stood up and, and there's a team that went through the implementation, that team is extremely comfortable. Like we come become very close that we worked for months with each other and they have no problems bringing up an issue. Because the worst thing that can happen is you have a product you've launched it. It's great, but then there's problems, but no one ever tells you about it. And then there's more problems and no one tells you about it. Eventually it dies because no one's using it. Right. Um, and so what you want to make sure is on the other side, you still have open communication. You still connect, right? You're still like, Hey, how's that going for you? Or did you have any questions and make sure that good or bad, you want to listen to all of it and you wanna accept it if it's bad, just say, okay, you know, let me, let me help you take care of that rather than now that can't be, that's not the problem.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([21:43](#)):

You're the problem, not the product. Right? Don't don't ever take that approach because sometimes, you know, most of like I would say 99% of the time, the person who brought the issue, they have a valid point and they they've actually experienced that more than once for them to bring it up to you. So you wanna make sure that you address it and they make sure that you close the loop. That's very important. Cause if they come to you with a problem and they tell you and you're like, okay, yeah, I'll look into that. And then you don't, you lost the trust already. You lost the trust with yourself. You've lost the trust with the product. So you're kind of representing both. If you, you don't think this has been good for the college, you wanna make sure you close that loop and even, you know, bring in the person to explain it.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([22:24](#)):

Because I worked with the software organization before and when they have a defect, they go, oh, that was an undocumented feature. We'll fix that for you, make it documented. Right. <laugh> you know, um, so they made light, but they addressed it and they closed the loop and they go, oh, Hey, remember your issue you had, this is how we're dealing with it, but deal with it. That's the most important part and leave communication channels, always open don't think that that project's implemented and you kind of like, I'm done take care of it from here. It's like kinda like a pet, you know, you got your, your dog and you got kind of forever like your pickings or whatever, you know,

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

In a circumstance where folks did not take your wise advice and, and do these steps to build coalitions and build buy-in and build communication. What if you have maybe a software or technology that is running into resistance or there is adoption problems or it is starting to sort of fizzle out. Do you have any advice on how to revive a project that maybe has gone sideways?

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([23:23](#)):

Well, I would go back to why do you, why, why did you get in the first place? There had to be a reason why you said the engagement, right? So, and maybe the people are here and maybe they're not, and maybe you wanna take their, you know, a fresh pull of people or the people who were involved in it and saying, you know what, look at your notes or ask them. So why did you get this product in the first place? And then go back and see what their wish list was. And then look at the implementation. Did they actually meet their wishes? Cause sometimes it didn't meet their wishes or sometimes, and, but their wish, but they didn't know it. If it's the first scenario where it didn't meet your wishes, well then you need to retire the product. There's no use paying for it, maintaining it and having something that's a technical event to you.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([24:05](#)):

If it's a, Hey, it did meet your wishes, but you never knew about it. Well, let's relaunch it. Let's get a training program together. Let's get that vendor involved. What tools do you have? I don't know anything about it. Can you refresh everybody so we can really use a tool? Cause we think it's gonna be beneficial. So there's different ways of approaching it depending on like what phase the institution is in or what their goals are. Maybe their goals have changed and they don't want that function feature anymore. Then it's time to do sun setting

Katy Oliveira ([24:34](#)):

In your experience. What kinds of results have you seen your institutions be able to achieve for student success by approaching the implementation of technology in this way that maybe they weren't otherwise able to achieve in other iterations of this kind of implementation,

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([24:55](#)):

What I've seen is that their buy in their commitment to the application. So it's kind of like, they grew up with it so that they know it so well that they can train others and they can talk about it and like make it their own. Because at the end of the day in it, we implement the services. We help make the connections integrations, but it's really the functional users and who really are the front lines of this connecting with the students. So they're the ones that have to love it and use it and, and live in the home. Right. And share it with others. And if they love it and they were invested and they were committed, they'll share that out. So that's the difference. If you go out and you just go buy something and slam it in one, they were never connected with that.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([25:38](#)):

They don't know anything about it. And, and two, they're not gonna sell it because they've never, my role is I won't sell what I wouldn't buy myself. And that's kind of like the, you know, if, if you go in and you take the approach, I'll just do this, put it in. It's great. I think it's great for everybody. I'll just do it, but no one liked it and no one knew anything about it. And no one was trained informed. They're not going to use it no matter how beautiful, how wonderful it is. But if they were committed at the beginning at

their wishlist, they saw their wishlist come true. They're gonna sell it cause that's their wishlist. Right? They're go, oh my God. I wanted to pull. Here's a pull like how beautiful it is. You know, that's the difference. If you don't go through the process of collaboration, of getting commitment, getting buy in. Then at the end of the day, they won't be able to share that with their end users and with the students, right? Cause that's, that's the, the people you wanna help with at the end, but in it, you're so far removed from that. But you wanna empower people. You want this energy to go on and go on and go on. And the only way to do that is to get them in the beginning to get their commitment.

Katy Oliveira ([26:38](#)):

We've covered a lot of ground on best practices for maximizing your student success information. I kept wanna say institutional from maximizing your student success technology. Are there any other lessons or any other pieces of advice that you'd like to share for folks who are currently either in the process of a revitalizing adoption of a platform or who are in the market for a platform before we close our conversation,

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([27:06](#)):

Don't make it your idea. Beause it's not really for, for you, for the technology. It's not really for it. You know, it's really for the end user, it's really for the students, you know, and make sure the frontline people are, are involved. Because they're the ones that are touching the students in business. Like having a sales force, you as a sales director can go tell your sales force, which really the sales force interacting with your customers at the end. Um, and if they don't like it, then they're not gonna do a good job selling it. And then your customers can feel it at the end.

Katy Oliveira ([27:37](#)):

Thank you so much for coming on Next Practices. I really appreciate your time.

Dr. Chelsy Pham ([27:40](#)):

Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here. Take care.

Katy Oliveira ([27:46](#)):

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