

Democracy's College, Episode 61

Insights on Working at Bistate Community Colleges in Illinois and Iowa

With guest LaDrina Wilson and host Hannah Kuneyl

Sal Nudo: Welcome to the Democracy's College podcast series. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice and excellence for all students in the P-20 educational pathways. This podcast is a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Learn more about OCCRL at occrl.illinois.edu.

In this episode, Hannah Kuneyl, a senior research assistant at OCCRL, talks with Dr. LaDrina Wilson about her experiences and insights working at bistate community colleges in Illinois and Iowa as both an administrator and practitioner.

Host Hannah Kuneyl: Howdy, everyone. This is the latest installment of the Illinois Community College Leadership Institute podcast. The Illinois Community College Leadership Institute is a professional development conference designed to help aspiring community college leaders build their skills that they need to move toward upper-level leadership roles. The institute includes a two-day in-person meeting in the spring and a half-day virtual meeting in the fall. Recently, the Community College Leadership Institute has expanded to include a podcast, which allows the work of professional development to continue throughout the year.

I am your host, Kuneyl, and today we are joined by Dr. LaDrina Wilson of IMAN Consulting, who serves as our keynote speaker for the spring 2024 Institute. I cannot believe it is already been a year (laughs). Like, it was six weeks ago. So, why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself to our audience who may have missed out on that 2024 institute meeting.

LaDrina Wilson: Sure. We definitely had a time, and time does fly. So, my name is Dr. LaDrina Wilson. I am the founder and CEO for IMAN Consulting, but prior to working in the private sector, I spent 15 years in higher education. My most recent role was vice president for student services. I've worked in Iowa as well as Illinois. Prior to community colleges, I did have a little stint at a university you all may be familiar with called University of Phoenix. I don't really reflect on those times too much publicly, but that's where I kind of cut my teeth. It taught me a lot, but I've always had a passion for community colleges.

I worked my way up through admissions. So, I started with giving tours and became an assistant dean of enrollment and then a dean of students and eventually vice president for student services.

My passion has always been really central to student experience and student success. And I completed my Ph.D. under Dr. Baber at Iowa State University in community college leadership, so it's been quite the journey. I still very much have a heart for higher education, specifically community colleges. I've been working in the private sector for just over four years now. I'm running my company but definitely do work with educational institutions within my work today.

Hannah Kuneyl: Wonderful. One of the best parts of working at the OCCRL, I think, is meeting my extended academic family, individuals who have also, you know, been under the tutelage of Dr. Baber or Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher or have just been alumni at the OCCRL. So, it is always great to make that connection and have an additional member of the OCCRL family.

So thank you so much for kind of giving us a little bit of background on where you worked in previous years and how you're kind of coming to the conversation, but also to your consulting work. So, you know, with that in mind, kind of thinking broadly about policy right now and your work within community college, I really wanted to focus this podcast to think about those community colleges who find themselves on the border of two different states. So, here in Illinois, this could be John Quincy or a number of schools in our more southern districts. Districts might not be the right word—we'll say regions. So, just thinking about that. Actually, some of our schools that weren't actually [part of this talk] are on this too, now that I think about it. So, in your experience in and around college, how do these schools that are on the border between two different states differ in terms of policy and impact?

LaDrina Wilson: Yeah. So, this is an interesting dynamic. Of course, being in Iowa and Illinois, there's a stark contrast, right? So, I think when you're in a border institution, first of all, it depends on what state you're in. And the political environment in Illinois and Iowa are completely disparate from one another thanks to Chicago, right? So, you've got a very much more kind of liberal legislature, although there are *tons* of more rural communities that are largely conservative, but, you know, the demographic makeup with Illinois, Chicago has such tremendous influence, right?

On the other hand, in Iowa, they have had, until recent years, much more hands-off approach to how they have led community colleges. We're seeing a shift now, especially as

we look at, like, social issues, D, E and I and how Iowa is posturing with their policies and their impacts on colleges and universities.

I guess the first thing to note is even the tuition makeup and how the formulas used for what it cost to go to school in each state. So, in Iowa, for instance, their tuition and fees is the largest generator of their revenue that students are enrolling, whereas Illinois has stayed closer to that a third, a third, a third. You know, if you've got your state contributions, your local tax contributions and then the tuition and fees for the student. I say all that to say this: When I worked in community colleges, it was cheaper, or more affordable—I don't like using [the word] cheap when I talk about community colleges. It was more *affordable* for a student who lived in Iowa to go to that border college, Black Hawk College. So, you could live in Scott County, and it would be more cost-effective for you to choose to take classes in Illinois. And quite honestly, depending on, you know, in this particular area, the distance, it might have even been a shorter drive, right?

Hannah Kuneyl: That's crazy.

LaDrina Wilson: Yeah, yeah (laughs). I'm just stone's throw away from Illinois. And depending on where you were situated, that may be the case. Now that wasn't well publicized. Like, people didn't necessarily know that. They made the assumption that it's out of state. But if they were to do the work and do some digging, you could quickly find out. Like, I could go to school in Illinois if I wanted to, for a better price.

Hannah Kuneyl: That's crazy that it would be cheaper to go to college in another state because often when we think about higher education in general, but especially community colleges, being so attached to that tax-revenue base. So, to think, you know, you have a student who's likely going to be paying out-of-district fees, maybe out-of-state fees on top of that, and it's still coming across as cheaper, it's difficult to wrap my mind around.

LaDrina Wilson: You know, community colleges, like, at their inception were really about affordability and making sure that our states found a way to make college a public good. And I think Illinois has held more true to that in their funding formula than Iowa. And I'm sure we could pull out various states across the country and make examples of that, perhaps California being one, right? But when you get to a state where the tuition and fees are, you know, the student is footing the bill, essentially, and there's minimal tax dollars appropriated, or not *nearly* as much as what you would see in other states—yeah, it makes a huge difference in terms of what's affordable.

Fortunately, in our community, how we navigated that at the local level is we did see, whether we were in Illinois or Iowa—I worked at both colleges—we did see college as a community good, a public good, and we didn't think that competition was the goal. I didn't

care whether you went to Blackhawk or if you went to Eastern Iowa Community Colleges. I just wanted you to go. And so we had kind of a handshake agreement that we wouldn't have that type of competition. But that was depending on which chancellor was in the seat.

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: What president was in the seat. And then we, as numbers started to decline under new leadership, you saw people like, okay, now we're going to come up with these contiguous county agreements. So, if you're in a neighboring county, it didn't matter if you were in a different state, we are going to offer you a rate that would be comparable, right? So, then it became a little bit more competitive.

In an ideal world, if college were this public good that we've committed to, we would maybe have complementary programs: Okay, we don't have the equipment to offer grad tech. You should offer that, you know, other college in a different state but still in distance so that we could have all these resources available to students. But we both had two nursing programs. We had programs that were similar. Advanced manufacturing and those types of things, so it can be quite competitive once people know the sticker price is very similar.

Hanna Kuneyl: Yeah. And that additional context is key.

I don't want to go *too* far off in a tangent, but I would be remiss if I didn't say that I would love to imagine a world where we focus on higher education, with the idea of this is a public good for anyone in our nation. Focusing on what would it look like if these artificial borders really didn't matter? And we thought about, okay, well, how can we provide education as equitably as possible to as many people as possible?

LaDrina Wilson: Yeah, you know, community colleges have the benefit of maybe even considering that, right?

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: Because we need to be looking at the labor market differently than maybe a four-year college or university would. We need to be looking at where are their skills gaps and *who's* best suited to fill those gaps? We don't necessarily *need* duplicate programs per se, unless it's an area where there's such high demand.

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: But when we think about our career and technical programs, they're expensive to run.

Hannah Kuneyl: Very.

LaDrina Wilson: It could be a cost-effective model [that would] look like, okay, well, we're going to purchase and own this equipment, right? That way, you don't have to foot the bill for that. We'll have the students that we take and then vice versa. If you decide you want to do dental hygiene—I'm just making a programs at this point—we don't have that, but we know where we can send students and have that kind of reciprocity to fill the gaps that there are in the community. I really think that's really what it should be about. We are businesses, whether people like to believe it or not. Community colleges do have to run, you know, as businesses. And so, we each try to capitalize on where we think we can get students in the door.

Hannah Kuneyl: Absolutely.

LaDrina Wilson: As well as qualified faculty.

Something else that just came to mind to me that was a *stark* difference. The time to create and get approved to the curriculum, to be able to offer programs. And so, I *loved* working in community colleges because of how nimble we were. Our ability to, you know, get a program approved, work with faculty, work with advisory boards in our communities and get it through the state for us to have credentials that we offered that were high-demand. It was a *lot* more bureaucratic in Illinois. Much, much longer process, and so there could be a gap, you know, for two or three years if we had to wait for the state of Illinois to approve a program, whereas in Iowa it moved much quicker than that.

Hannah Kuneyl: Fascinating. And that, you know, we're kind of teetering on two questions right now, so I'll let you decide which way you want to go with it: One is like, how does being on that state border affect your recruitment in terms of not only students but also faculty? And then the other question is kind of going a little bit further into that *policy* situation of sort of the different governing boards and how quickly things move at different state levels.

LaDrina Wilson: For what it's worth, the checks and balances are there. The processes are there as part of due diligence.

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: But I also think the more bureaucratic the process is in Illinois, the longer it takes and the fewer opportunities students have. You know, these are short-term programs. We're in a community college. We know students are there in some instances longer than they should be, but if a particular industry makes it apparent, or a particular employer makes it apparent, that there is a right-now need, community colleges should be the place where that can be filled. And what you will start to see, and what I started to see in Illinois, anyway, was if we don't make that process a little bit more streamlined, students are going to start bringing their own training in house. It's already happening. I anticipate

the trends will continue to go that way. And while they may not be, you know, specific types of credentials, it starts to erode at the relevancy of community colleges. So, it *is* a threat as far as I'm concerned, whereas the funding structure in Iowa allowed for training dollars that corporations were provided by going through the community college. So, it benefited them. I'm going to forget the name of those dollars now. Begins with an "E." I don't know. I'll have to follow back up with you (laughs). But there are certain funds that are available that make training through the community college the priority in Iowa because there's a set-aside for that. It's a model that Illinois could really learn from, but they're pretty dedicated to the bureaucracy that they have (laughs) and the systems that are in place.

And that's the one thing I will say, Kuneyl, is, like, knowing when it's time to innovate is something I see at the state level that becomes very challenging in some states. And holding true to your policies and procedures and, you know, your governing bodies is important. But what is the protocol for saying, hey, we need a new way? You know, how are our community colleges responding to machine learning? And are we prepared to create a workforce that is, you know, this next generation will supervise robots, right? Just in the same way that I do people. Are we *moving* fast enough for that? And those are some of the things that come to mind as concerns for me, especially in a Midwest region where we're so anchored in advanced manufacturing and not as closely connected to tech as maybe we could or should be.

Hannah Kuneyl: So, one of the things that comes to mind, just thinking about that as you were talking about industry becoming a competitor for the community college. I think about these Google certificates that are becoming really popular. And what I hope that community college leaders and policymakers are thinking about when trying to innovate in response to that is that if I as a proprietor train my employees on *my* system, then they only know *my* system. But if I'm a community college educator, I can teach more *broadly*. And then my students are not beholden to only working for that one entity, or with that one software. So, I hope that they're kind of thinking long term, in terms of their marketing that this is where the community college can be a more sustainable place of education because you can be taught across systems instead of proprietary system, proprietary knowledge.

LaDrina Wilson: Right. I would say Iowa, in particular, has started to get away from some of those more niche or boutique type of certifications. You know, I see things as somewhat cyclical, right? It's like, oh, we need very specific skills, you know, 21st-century skills. That's all the soft skills, right? Then we need, nope, nope, nope, we need very technical, like, training to the job type of skills and then we swing and we say, oh no, but people don't know how to communicate. And then it's like, but no, they need more broader education. So it's

cyclical in some respects, right? But we're *going* to have to recognize that we have to move at the pace of industry. And right now, irrespective of what state we're talking about, I'm not sure we are. And so, in order to maintain that relevance, we need to look at, not only at the institutional level, but also at the state level. Where are the chinks in the chain that are keeping us from being as nimble as we possibly can? Because that's the expectation of the employers.

Hannah Kuneyl: Absolutely. And I'm thinking now, as Illinois is continuously toying with the idea of the community college baccalaureate: What is *that* going to look like, trying to still stay on the topic of the difference between states? Where is that going to put us in terms of offerings for students, but also in that competitive position, especially for these institutions that students may just have more options because they're on a border county, or in a border county.

LaDrina Wilson: Well, I will tell you, last I heard, Iowa was also contemplating this as well. And because they do move faster at the state level, and faster isn't always better, I will be clear on that. I don't want to have anyone jump to conclusions, but *it is* faster.

Again, another cyclical conversation. I do think there's probably more momentum as the legislative bodies have more influence, at least in Iowa. More legislative bodies have a stronger influence in community colleges than they ever have, to the point where they're in the curriculum, right? Like, things you can and can't talk about without risking state funding, which is beyond me. It is shaping the way that faculty—and students—decide where they want to be.

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: And you also see now practitioners who are beyond the four walls of the classroom contemplating whether or not this is the environment they want to work in anymore. It's kind of sad to say, but there used to be a lot more autonomy in the higher education realm, and I think that there's still definitely autonomy and free speech. All that still stands. But this whole sense of fear associated with that.

I digress. So, the offering of being a bachelor's degree-conferring institution is another form of competition. And if it is the right program, and I think if it is also the right amount of degrees that you're offering, right, like not trying to be a university, right? Like, we still need to stay, I fear mission creep I guess is what I'm getting at when I think about that. And I think the community colleges serve a population who's often overlooked and misunderstood, and we are the place where they actually can be understood. And so, I hope that as institutions consider what their options are, certainly you want to be competitive, but also, like, not lose your roots.

Hannah Kuneyl: Absolutely. And I think it goes right back to that conversation about broadening opportunities for college access. So, what baccalaureate programs, I think is a big component, in that are we offering programs that maybe are not localized to our students? One of the classic examples that Dr. Baber loves to give is like a four-year radiology tech program. *That's* not offered in most four-year institutions, but it's starting to pick up as an expectation in the workforce. So that could be a place where the community colleges could really thrive in terms of offering something that's not accessible and staying true to that mission without potentially duplicating programs that four-years have offered before, and creating more tension in terms of competition and less transfer.

LaDrina Wilson: Right.

Hannah Kuneyl: That's definitely something that's forefront of mine.

LaDrina Wilson: And I guess what I would wonder with some of these degrees that are being considered is, the industry might be *leaning* that way, I think nursing is another example, right? Like there are hospitals that are, [I] believe it's a four-star designation based on how many nurses have their BSN as opposed to their RN. It's a rating that they're chasing, but for who?

Hannah Kuneyl: Right.

LaDrina Wilson: Right? I worry about, in our society, we tend to move toward education inflation. And to me, in our efforts to be more accessible, I still go back to for who? If you are making the path longer, if you are making the path, I don't want to say unnecessarily harder, but maybe the time commitment is more, there are going to be people who are locked out of that process in our attempt to make it accessible. And oftentimes those people are the people of color and the people who have low socioeconomic status. And so I always go back to for who and, like, why is the change needed? And I'm not sure, as these companies or hospitals, I know they're nonprofits, but again, they're businesses in most respects, is it about competition? And is it the right reason? And so, it'll be interesting to see how things evolve over the next several years. But again, this has been a conversation that I've watched ebb and flow. You know, like that pendulum kind of swings back and forth for probably the last 10 or 12 years, and I would say probably Dr. Baber would say even longer.

Hannah Kuneyl: He most definitely would, and I'm thinking, you know, historically, we've seen this before with teacher education, when, in the 1930s, teacher education went from something that you could have at two years in normal school or potentially even be a high school graduate teaching elementary schools, depending on if you were working in the South and if you were working in rural schools, to something that you *had* to have a

bachelor's degree for. Now, on the surface, that *sounds* like a good thing. More tools for teachers. But on the back end of that, that meant that it made it even more difficult for black teachers to get certified and for black students to have black teachers. So, definitely thinking about that. I love the way you put that: If you're going to make the path longer, are you also making sure that you're keeping it wider?

So, you know, we've talked kind of about some of the negatives, so I do want to think about what are some of the *advantages* of working in a school like Black Hawk, where you're right there in the middle of two worlds, in two states.

LaDrina Wilson: You know, I think being able to offer a wide variety of experiences for students. You know, one of the great things that I loved about it was we had students who were, Iowa was their state of residency, but we didn't have residence halls at Scott Community College or within Eastern Iowa Community Colleges. I guess Muscatine [Community College] did, but if you were at Scott, you didn't want to drive 40 minutes to a residence hall. So they could choose an on-campus experience at Black Hawk and be, you know, 20 minutes away from home, but still *feel* far enough away to where they were getting that, you know, "college" experience or that traditional college experience.

In the ways that they were disparate, they also complemented one another. So the sports programs were different, the extracurriculars were different. And I think that gives people more opportunity within their own kind of backyard.

It's kind of silly when I say it out loud, but Black Hawk College, for some people, they thought, like, I'm going to college.

Hannah Kuneyl: Hmmm.

LaDrina Wilson: Whereas Scott had [the title] community college in it, and so people actually thought it was like a college or university, not necessarily community college. Silly as it may be, people did have this kind of notion of, like, no, I'm going to college. It's like, okay, that's fine. Tell yourself what you need to—they're all college, right?

But I will say, I had great learning experiences because as a practitioner, one of the advantages was moving from, like, kind of a pseudo-shared governance type of model where it was participatory and, you know, faculty were consulted as a courtesy. And then in Illinois, being in a unionized environment definitely was a learning opportunity for me, getting to navigate those dynamics. And as you're growing in your profession and your career, getting those different types of exposure are really important. So, I think when you are in a bistate region as a *practitioner*, it's a learning opportunity for you as well.

And I would also say that the state of Illinois brings together their community colleges differently in how they collaborate and try to work together differently than I saw in Iowa—in a positive way. So being able to connect with your peers and learn alongside them felt and looked a lot different than on the Iowa side.

Hannah Kuneyl: Just as you're talking I'm taking in what you're saying and I'm thinking about the benefits of being a practitioner with two different institutions to choose from that have rapidly different models, and a way of making a more well-rounded practitioner because you can just go work for another state for a few years if given the opportunity and really develop your skills without having to necessarily relocate your family if that's a concern for you, which is an exciting opportunity.

LaDrina Wilson: You know, the practitioners in higher education know that as you ascend your career, the likelihood of you having to relocate is, or I shouldn't say having to, but *getting* to relocate is pretty substantial, right? Like, there's tons of colleges to choose from. That is a tough decision to make with your family, if you have a family and other people that you're responsible for, or a partner who has a career and, you know, things that they're tied to. Fortunately for me, my husband was an administrator in K-12. He was still able to keep his job and it didn't disrupt our family in that way. I was ready for a change and something different. [I] was offered a job in Phoenix, was a finalist in a search in Fort Worth, and it *just* made sense for me where I was at in my career and with my family at the time. And it was very eye-opening at first. I mean, even at the basic level of, like, how many, the records requirements in Illinois. There's just like a lot of rigidity in Illinois that I didn't experience in Iowa. And so it caused me as a practitioner to tighten up in ways very quickly. I mean, there was a policy for *everything*. In Iowa, it just wasn't that same level of intensity. Certainly there were rules and regulations and governing bodies, but Illinois is a whole other ball game. They're definitely going to make you accountable for those tax dollars in a way that had a lot of strings attached.

Hannah Kuneyl: I'm smiling because I'm remembering my transition working as a practitioner at a small MSI in Dallas, Texas, to a *large* land-grant institution in Virginia, and the Commonwealth had rules for everything that in my previous institution in Dallas, it was like 12 of us in a room, we all agree, okay, let's do it.

LaDrina Wilson: (Laughs) Yeah. And Kuneyl, what's interesting is, like, I kind of brought that attitude with me, and I learned very quickly I had to be careful with that because there was definitely a time and place to challenge, like, hey, we've created, even as an institution, our own level of bureaucracy around risk that maybe we need to loosen up on. And then there were other times where it's like, oh, okay, you've got to go through *that* process, right? So, I think it's a balancing act, but as a practitioner going into those two different environments,

being prepared to ask the right questions, knowing when to lead and when to follow becomes really important.

Hannah Kuneyl: Absolutely. And I think that's something that translates to really any position that you have in education.

LaDrina Wilson: For sure.

Hannah Kuneyl: So thinking about your leadership experience, I just wanted to kind of close out with a question—and you kind of already answered it, so maybe you just want to elaborate—but share a time when your leadership skills were tested and what you were now able to understand from that experience.

LaDrina Wilson: Well, I did give a couple of examples, but probably the most poignant example that I could share was how the experience of COVID made clear how disparate the political landscape was in our communities. So it was like I was navigating two different worlds, right? I would go to work. I would have my mask on. I would go through a set of protocols to get into the building. I would leave work. I would go to the grocery store near my home—I live in Iowa—and people would be staring at me, like, what are you doing with a mask on? And if I went into Illinois to run an errand and I was just coming from home and I did not yet have my mask on, people were staring at me, like, why *don't* you have a mask on?

And I use that example, even though that's a *once* in a generation example, it *really* underscores *how* dynamic it can be when you make a shift just 10 miles, when there's a state line there. We have the actual boundary of the river, right? And it divides us, but it's also an opportunity for us to create bridges, and I think as a practitioner, in particular, when you go into an environment and you are working in higher education and you are accountable to the institution, which is accountable to the state and the students, it's important that you observe and honor those protocols, practices, laws that are there, but also be very prepared to challenge when it's appropriate. Like, things don't *have* to be the way that they are forever, and you have to decide what mark are you willing to make and leave on an institution or with an institution when you know you're coming from a starkly different environment that has *some* attributes that could add value. Similarly, you need to be open to receiving the value that those practices that are in place offer.

And so I would encourage people, if you are in a bistate area, if you're working as a practitioner, you've got the benefit of your retirement plans and whatnot. You have to make the decisions that make sense for you, but I have been honored to have the experience to be in both places. I lived the community college experience through Black Hawk. And what I mean by that is I started there in College for Kids, you know, as a 7th or 8th grader, and it

was where I wanted to be. It was where I planned on going to college my whole entire elementary school years up to adolescence. And through my athletics I had other opportunities, so I didn't actually go there as a student. But for me, it felt like coming home and was full circle because I got to impact students who had that same vision of how wonderful college was through these entry kind of programs that we have and continuing it and so I encourage people to take advantage of the bistate region. Even if you are not taking a job in a bistate region, connect with colleagues and peers that are just across the state line and glean from their experiences to make you a more well-rounded practitioner.

Hannah Kuneyl: Absolutely. I mean, as community colleges, we say the word “community” all day, every day, but what steps are we taking to build that community?

I think about new policy implementation, such as here in Illinois, it's the Developmental Education Reform Act. And we're thinking about how we're doing this and that different institutions across the state, there might be a handful of folks who are working on that. There might be an office that two people. So, if we're thinking about, hey, well, how are other colleges around us thinking about this policy? Or if they don't have this policy because they're in a different state, how are they addressing developmental education? Suddenly a burden shared is a burden halved.

LaDrina Wilson: Right.

Hannah Kuneyl: And we can start thinking about new ways of doing things, even if we're not in a position to invite in new staff.

LaDrina Wilson: Right. Well, and I think, you know, we as practitioners go to different conferences and have different experiences, we get business cards, we connect with people, we'll call somebody in Walla Walla, Washington, and we'll call somebody, you know, at Tarrant County and, you know, pick their brain because we met them once. Well, they don't know your students. And if you're in a bistate area, the likelihood that you're changing developmental ed, well, what's this college doing? We had lots of students who –

Hannah Kuneyl: Yeah.

LaDrina Wilson: – took a couple of classes with us and then went across the river, right? So, like, *hopefully* the students don't experience any disparities. They should be able to go, if they choose, between *both* institutions, irrespective of what state it's in, and have a quality experience. So, I think just connecting with your colleagues just right across the border could go a long way and would show a deeper commitment to the students and the community that you serve.

Hannah Kuneyl: Well, that is about time for us. I do want to pause for a moment. If there is anything you would like our listeners to know, please share them all.

LaDrina Wilson: I would say maybe, like, a little bit of a shameless plug, we are actually working on a product. It's called Civil Discourse: Disagree Better. We've recently rolled out this product and we're really wanting to connect with students to educate them on how they can have their opinions, their positions without isolating themselves from people that they know, care about, or people who think differently than them. We also really want to educate people on how to have more than just an opinion, have like an educated and founded position on something. This stems from the number of students who we've connected with, and even adults in the workforce, who have isolated themselves and created echo chambers through social media. And as our politics become more "polarized," human connection is still at the core of our instinct. And we want to help people learn how to deal with that cognitive dissonance that comes when people don't agree with you or have different world views than you. So, if there's *anybody* that's listening who has student groups that you want to get some training on how to disagree better, we've got a tremendous opportunity with this Civil Discourse curriculum that we've *just* rolled out, and so they can feel free to reach out to me at imanconsulting.com.

Hannah Kuneyl: Yes, please do. I know we are in a podcast format so you cannot see the aggressive head nods.

LaDrina Wilson: [Laughs]

Hannah Kuneyl: And the cheering. But I think that's a wonderful product and I can't wait to see more about it.

LaDrina Wilson: Yes, awesome. Thank you.

Hannah Kuneyl: Thank you so much for listening to this edition of Democracy's [College] podcast and our Illinois Community College Leadership Institute series.

LaDrina Wilson: Take care.

Sal Nudo: OCCRL's next several Democracy's College podcasts will include community college and university leaders who will discuss a wide range of information on data, everything from what data is to the renewed importance of using data to effectively meet student support needs. These podcasts will be a part of OCCRL's collaboration with the Office of the Governor on a project called Higher Education Futures Roundtable.

Background music for this podcast is provided by Pixabay. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to equity, justice and excellence in education for all students.