

# Democracy's College

## The Importance of the Humanities in Community Colleges for Student Learning, Mobility, and Employability

**Announcer Sal Nudo:** Welcome to the Democracy's College Podcast series, a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students in P-20 educational pathways. We encourage you to learn more about our office at [occril.illinois.edu](http://occril.illinois.edu).



In this episode, Dr. Francena Turner, an OCCRL affiliate member, talks with humanities educators at community colleges in California and North Carolina about the importance of the humanities to community colleges and to community college students. The guests also share some of the challenges they've faced during COVID-19, as well as the challenges they've experienced in introducing students to skills learned through the humanities that contribute to student learning, mobility, and employability.

**Host Francena Turner:**



Okay, I want to welcome you all to this podcast looking at the humanities in a community college context. I'm a proud graduate of a community college in Fayetteville Technical Community College and it was really important to my progress in higher education and really foundational to my having now earned a doctorate. I want us all to introduce ourselves. And we'll go 'round robin and I'll introduce myself a little at the end. And we'll get started with Professor Summerlin Webb.

**Summerlin Webb:**

Hi, I'm Summerlin Webb. I teach English and humanities at Central Carolina Community College in Sanford, North Carolina. I'm also the lead instructor for the department there. I got both of my degrees in English at NC State University, and I have been tutoring or teaching in community college in some capacity for over 13 years now.



**Host Francena Turner:** Okay, and we have Professor Presnell.

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**Hattie Presnell:**



Hey, I am Hattie Presnell. I'm currently teaching history at Fayetteville Technical Community College, though I've been teaching in colleges and universities the last five years. Previously, I was at Guilford Technical Community College, where I adjunct, and I also adjunct at High Point University. My own background: I started at Guilford Tech Community College as a student, transferred to High Point University, and then went to graduate school in the UK, actually. I went to Durham University and the University of York, where I finalized everything for a master's in renaissance and early modern studies, and then came back here to the community college.

**Host Francena Turner:** Thank you so much; and Professor Moreno-Terrill.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Hi, everyone. I'm Professor Steven Moreno-Terrill. I am adjunct faculty at San Diego Mesa College in the Department of Chicana Chicano Studies. And then I am also an adjunct professor at Riverside City College in the Department of History and Ethnic Studies there. Those are my two primary campuses, but I also do teach occasionally on other campuses as well. My main fields are ethnic studies, specifically Chicana studies and history. And I am a Chicano public historian doing work in the community for different organizations such as Latinos in Heritage Conservation and Riverside County, Mexican American Historical Society.



And I've been teaching community college for the last, getting close to a decade now, and always learning, always growing, but definitely have been developing a critical public humanities approach to my curriculum, in conjunction with racial justice literacy. And also I'm a proud graduate of the community college system here in California. I got an AA, two AAs, actually; one in ethnic studies and one in liberal arts.

**Host Francena Turner:** All right. Well, my name is Dr. Francena Turner, and I am a postdoctoral associate for digital humanities and data curation at the Maryland Institute for Technology and Humanities. And so, my work there is based in African American digital humanities and oral history. I'm also an adjunct lecturer for African American history at Fayetteville State University.

My collegiate career really started at Fayetteville Technical Community College, where I went to earn an associate in applied science and respiratory therapy in 2003. And in addition to that degree, I got an associate in general education. Eventually, after 10 years in that field, I transferred to Fayetteville State University, earned a bachelor's in history, and then went to graduate school, where I have a Ph.D. in education policy, organization and leadership, with a focus in history of education. And my very specific focus is the history of black education in the United States context.

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And so, I think some of us have touched on it already. But the first thing I want to talk about is what brought each of you to your current institution.

**Hattie Presnell:**

So, what brought me to Fayetteville Technical Community College is I was an adjunct, of course, and one of the big goals, the big dreams of an adjunct was to get a full-time position, which are very, very difficult to come by nowadays. And I had applied all over the state of North Carolina. I applied in colleges in Virginia and FTCC was the one that eventually hired me. But I always knew I wanted to teach in community college because it's where I got my own foundation. Kind of through trial and error—that's how I ended up here at FTCC.

**Summerlin Webb:**

I also was working as a part-time instructor. I was actually teaching at [Wake Technical Community College] here in Raleigh and working in the Writing Center. And when I was in graduate school, I didn't quite know what I was going to do after graduate school. I thought I was going to go get a Ph.D. because a lot of us think we're going to go get a Ph.D. immediately after we get our master's degree. And one of my instructors very kindly told me that was probably not in the cards immediately. And I said, "Well, what do I do?" And he said, "You got to teach community college." And I said, "Oh, okay."

And a friend of mine, who I was in school with at the time was working in the Writing Center at the community college, and I went there, and I *loved* the student population. It was everybody. I was working with older people, younger people, people new to speaking English, and I really loved it. And so that became my goal was to do that full time. And I ended up at CCCC. I'd heard about it from one of the people that I worked with, and I saw online they had a literary magazine, and it was a rural-looking student population, and it just, it really spoke to me. And I showed up there in 2009 and have never left.

**Host Francena Turner:** Dr. Moreno-Terrill?

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** I want to make mention that I haven't yet earned the privilege of being called doctor yet. I'm working on it. Right now, I have four master's degrees. I tried to make them count into one doctorate, but they didn't like that. You know, I always joke, I tell people that I had a coupon: They had a special at the universities I attended, because it's just absurd to have four master's degrees. It's all part of my educational trajectory, which, in my case, has always been as a nontraditional student. And in my K through 12 experience, I ended up being a high school push-out because of my alienation from my educational experience.

And it wasn't until community college where I really had that aha moment, taking my first ethnic studies courses, where I actually was learning about things that I had been passionate about all throughout my K through 12 experience, which included social justice and also BIPOC communities. But I really didn't get that in K through 12. And so, once I started taking ethnic studies at the community college level, it was just an awakening for me. And where I really began to develop a sense of purpose and connection to my own life and history and community service and activism in general.

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At that time, I made the decision, "Hey, this is where I want to teach. I want to teach ethnic studies and history at the community college level." And from that point, I just kept pushing and fighting and struggling until I kept earning those degrees, and eventually I was able to get my foot in the door through a faculty fellowship program—we have a few here in Southern California—where I was placed at a community college with a faculty mentor, and in particular at Mesa College in the Department of Chicana Chicano studies with my mentor Manuel Velez.

That's really what got my career started in 2013. Even though I had prior experience teaching at the CSU and university level, my goal was always to teach at the community college level. And so that faculty fellowship program, after that I started getting calls more and more because it gave me the experience. And also it was a yearlong program; the *training*, which is really important in terms of pedagogy and the particular unique student population at the community college level.

Along the way, I earned minimum qualifications in several disciplines such as communication studies, ethnic studies, history, and sociology as well, interestingly. Ethnic studies is interdisciplinary by nature; as a trained historian, I bring all those things together in all of my classes.

**Host Francena Turner:** When we talk about different disciplines and fields, I find that we often say it, but not everybody understands what we're talking about. What are the humanities? And what do you see as the function of humanities-type courses in community colleges?

**Hattie Presnell:** For this kind of question, I've looked it up, actually, in the dictionary, like, what are the humanities? And it's, like, just the study of people and it's like, well, gosh, that is humanities. It has history, it has art, it has music, has philosophy, has ethics, has religion, has music. It's *all* of these topics. And I personally find them essential because it helps people to have a more global context on understanding the inner runnings of the world. And I know that probably sounds a little cliché, but you understand things better whenever you have a grasp on those foundational humanities of the world.

**Summerlin Webb:** I think of that poster—and I can't remember where I first saw it—that says, "The sciences can teach you how to clone a dinosaur, but the humanities can tell you why that might be a bad idea." I think about the arts in my college. We have the arts under the humanities umbrella in our department, along with languages and philosophy and English and na, na, na, na, na—you know, that thing we do at community colleges where everything is all together. But, you know, thinking about thinking; thinking about what it does mean to be human; thinking about the human experience and what makes us human and what makes that good, I think, is a really big part of it, and how to communicate that both to ourselves and to others.

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**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** My approach to the humanities includes all those things, certainly to understand the human condition, but also to think about *humanizing* practices. And when I approach the humanities, and as a humanities instructor, you know, I definitely bring the *public* humanities approach into my definition. And also, critical public humanities, which is an emerging framework. For me, it's about understanding the human condition, but also working towards improving it with a mind towards social justice at various levels of society.

Paulo Freire teaches us through his writings to promote an education that teaches students how to read the word in the world, so, a critical literacy approach. I very much try to utilize the humanities to foster this capacity in students, which many of them have already, but, you know, wherever they're at in their trajectory. Really use it to make sense of their *everyday* lives in culturally relevant ways through antiracist pedagogies, so that they can understand themselves as critically engaged citizens, able to positively impact and transform their social environments, utilizing critical thinking and *creativity* and the arts as an amazing vehicle towards conscient-izing and really just engaging in that transformational practice at all levels: educators, students, and community members. So, it's definitely about partnerships as well, beyond just the campus. It's about building community. There's a lot of layers to it, in the way that I conceptualize it, definitely resonates with everything that's been said here.

**Host Francena Turner:** A recent study conducted by a researcher on a humanities indicator project indicated that approximately 40% of all community college students were taking at least one humanities course, when the study was done in 2015. Of the humanities courses offered at your institutions, which courses would you say are the most taken? For example, I know English probably wins because it's mandatory in the curriculum. But in terms of student enjoyment and engagement, which courses would you say are the most popular?

**Hattie Presnell:** Let's see. So aside from English, of course, looking at my department here at FTCC, because within our small cluster we have history, philosophy, religion, and humanities as an actual group of classes that you can take. The humanities courses are perhaps the most popular, simply because you've got classes like critical thinking and society and technology. And I think a lot of advisors gear students towards taking critical thinking because that is a nice kind of solid foundation before you begin approaching classes like history and philosophy and the others.

I would perhaps say the second most popular is history, because we do have a lot of offerings in that category. And both history and humanities are not necessarily required for the community college transcript whenever you transfer, of course, but there is a category on the program evaluation for humanities and fine art. So, within that, you have clumped together, you know, history, music, philosophy, English, and I think economics is one as well, which I think is a little stretch there. But, you know, a lot of people do tend to take more of the humanities and history classes in that category.

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**Summerlin Webb:** I'll mention at CCCC we have history housed in social sciences, so I confess I didn't look at that. But yeah, we have a lot of history. We do English, of course, yes, first. We have a lot of students taking arts and music. And as far as humanity-specific HUM courses, tech and society, I believe, has traditionally been the most popular for all the reasons you might imagine, but critical thinking has surged in the last couple of years. We actually had to add several more sections of critical thinking throughout the year. It's not just a one semester or summer situation, so I'm seeing a really big increase in that there.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Well, it's interesting being situated in ethnic studies departments because it depends on who led the charge in terms of the development of the program. At Mesa College, the program has been around since 1975, I believe. So, it's one of the more historic Chicana Chicano studies programs in Southern California. We have our own school, the School of Multicultural Studies. We're not necessarily housed within a social science or humanities division, but that's another unique aspect organizationally in terms of this campus. But the majority of our courses that we offer, I will say are humanities-based courses. Only recently where we've started to develop more social science-oriented courses such as Chicano sociology, which I helped develop with my department chair. But we have courses such as Mexican literature and translation, courses in U.S. history from a Chicana Chicano studies perspective. Those are the main courses I teach. Chicana Chicano literature, literature of La Raza and Latin America, Chicano images and film, Chicano culture, Indigenous traditions of Mexico and ancient Mesoamerica, which looks at art, literature, but also includes an archeological perspective as well.

**Host Francena Turner:** Several of the studies that I looked at in preparation for this podcast noted that a considerable percentage of humanity students at community colleges are people of color. And I think what Professor Moreno-Terrill points out is that in addition to the definitions of humanities that this is where students can see themselves, right? These are the courses where they can see themselves represented. I want you to kind of draw a picture of the average student, which is really difficult to do in a community college context. Who are your students in your classes, if you had to give a summary of the students in your classes?

**Hattie Presnell:** Can I give two summaries?

**Host Francena Turner:** Yes.

**Hattie Presnell:** Because I was hired, initially, as someone who would teach for the high school connections program here at FTCC. So, I do teach a good part of my students that are high school age, so ninth graders to 12th graders. So, both with high schools that are here within Cumberland County as well as with the FTCC Polytechnic High School, which is kind of like the early college here at FTCC. So, I would group them kind of in one separate area and they are, like, your high-schoolers, ninth grade, 12th grade, and depending on the high school, it could be a variety of demographics. In terms of my curriculum classes, that's where I've shared with people, I've taught everyone from 14 years old to 67 years old.

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And it happened my very first semester *ever* teaching that I had, in one class, a 14-year-old and a 67-year-old. And I was like, "I can't believe it happened on the first class."

And because of that, you do have to take into consideration what tech-savvy do they have. It's challenging but a good kind of challenge. And I feel like I'm kind of losing my place here, but it is difficult to kind of pinpoint one specific picture for the students I've had the opportunity to teach, because they do come from all walks of life, from all different types of backgrounds. Even with me teaching here in Fayetteville, North Carolina, it's different than the people I taught in Greensboro, North Carolina, versus people that I taught at High Point University in High Point, North Carolina. I have a beautiful collage, a beautiful melting pot of students I'd like to say.

### Summerlin Webb:

I really agree with that assessment. I laughed a lot about your 14 to 67. The very first college class I ever taught, I walked in and was the youngest person in the room. That was obviously a long time ago. But we have had a big, or at least I have seen it in my classes, a *huge* increase in dual-enrolled students. I'm actually currently teaching two English 111s that are exclusively for high school students. But, at large, we do have the large dual-enrollment population and early college population, and we serve three counties. I should have mentioned that earlier. We serve Harnett, Chatham, and Lee County, which are very different counties and very different areas with very different people.

And I actually teach a lot of night classes because I'm very vampiric in my style. So, I have a lot of adults and older adults in my night classes. But yeah, we see everything, and we have a great large-transfer population. We see everything, we've got all kinds of programs, so it really is everything. When people ask me what's my typical student, I say 17 to 70 because that's really what it feels like.

### Steven Moreno-Terrill:

One of the things that I appreciate the most is that you can have that wide range—so, difference in terms of generational diversity. And also, you know, the mention of the dual enrollment, I never thought that I would want to, you know, work with the high school students; obviously, I had nothing against them. You know, I specifically targeted college-age population. *But* within the last few years, I've had the opportunity to work with the dual-enrollment students and come to find out, hey, I *love* working with these students. A lot of fun, a lot of good energy, keeps me on my toes. These come by way of a special section where it's all high school and I might go to the campus and teach the course, but also I've done public speaking as well.

Typically, though, when I'm teaching my on-campus courses or my, right now, because of COVID, obviously, the remote courses, it's generally, in Southern California, we have a large Latinx demographic and just because of the history of the state, and also the southwest region, but also the history of education in general in the southwest produces that—what we know as *Hispanic-serving* institutions.

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And so, all the campuses that I teach at—Riverside City College and Mesa College in San Diego—are Hispanic-serving institutions, which means at least 25%. But in these cases, actually quite more. So, you know, we're above 50% on these campuses. And so definitely a large Latinx population, but depending on the region here in Southern California, there's also nuance, too. And so that's in terms of race and ethnicity, but we also have other students, such as students who are in the criminal justice system who are incarcerated, or have been recently incarcerated or some type of experience, as well as veterans and foster youth. And so, really, community college has challenged me to broaden my understanding of what diversity *entails*.

I'm a scholar of race, place, and memory, so, obviously, I understand those dimensions, race and ethnicity. Thinking intersectionally has been imperative in the understanding of my LGBTQ+ students and getting the certifications to work with them effectively and in ways that *empower* various populations, getting that training.

**Host Francena Turner:** What do your students tell you about their experiences in your courses? And what do they tell you during the time and do you keep contact with any of the students over time? What are they telling you about what those experiences in your classes, how they have affected them going forward?

**Hattie Presnell:** One of the comments that I most commonly get in my history classes, and this is everything from the high school age students to curriculum students, is that it's typically, "Wow, I didn't know that that had a history to it." Because at the very beginning of the semester, you do your typical icebreakers. And mine is an index card if we're face to face, and I just tried to gauge what's your understanding of history. Do you have a favorite time in history? And it never fails: I have someone who says, "I hate history. I'm only taking this because I have to be here."

And I tell them, "So, you're going to be the one that I have to challenge myself and *find* that area you're going to be passionate about." So, this semester there was a student who says, "I'm just into business and finance. There's nothing about history I like." And they're in my American History 2 class, so starting from 1865 to 2010. That's the whole span we cover for American History. And over the course of this semester, I found out, you know what, he likes music; or they like music. They like sports. And I started talking about the history of baseball, the history of football, the history of American music, American sound.

And every class they went, "Stop it, you are absolutely blowing my mind. There's a history behind this?" I'm like, "*Of course* there is." And that's the moment for me that I'm like, "Aha, see, you do like history. You didn't think that history could be more than just reading a textbook." History can be fun. Like, I tell people, I'm like Miss Frizzle from Magic School Bus, because when I get that moment, I'm like, "Yes! See, history is fun." And that's one of the common comments I get from students is, "I didn't realize that history could actually be fun." They're all not going to become historians, and that's perfectly fine, but



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that they have some sort of vested interest in history to take that to the next level.

And then beyond that, at this point, my students who have kept in contact with me either through social media or what have you, there's been a lot for letters of recommendation. And they're like, "You're the one instructor I remember." Because, again, I'm like Miss Frizzle. And, like, "Can you write me a letter of recommendation?" And I'm just more than thrilled to do it because the students who ask me are usually the ones I remember the most, because they became the most engaged in class once they had their moment of, "Oh, history! This is history. Okay, yes. I can get into this."

### Summerlin Webb:

I will piggyback off that a little bit, the history piece. I have had the great privilege to teach Southern culture a few times, and we talk so much about how the history, everything that's happened in the south informs what's going on today. And those connections come on and, suddenly, a lot of weird things start to make sense to the people who've lived outside the South. And then the people who've lived here their whole lives go, "Oh, now I understand why this is the way it is, and I've never thought about it looking at it from the outside before."

And students have similar reactions when we do, I have taught pop culture or cultural studies courses. I haven't taught in a couple of semesters. It's a hard one to do remotely. Got to have these spaces and those conversations in person as much as possible—good luck at getting that one on one. And students have been incredibly responsive because they get to share the things that they care about. And they, in many cases, have not looked at themselves as people who are part of an academic conversation. And we talk about that a lot in English 111 and English 112, entering the conversation; a lot of these HUM students haven't had those experiences yet.

So it's often a nice way to get them in and get them started writing, get them started thinking critically. The analysis piece, like, when I have them analyze advertisements and analyze pop-culture icons, they'll come to me at the end of the semester and tell me that I've ruined everything for them because they can't enjoy TV or the music they're listening to. And I'm like, "You know what, I've felt this way since graduate school—welcome. I'm not sorry; maybe a little bit. I'm really not sorry."

And I actually was surprised a couple years ago, I had a student who took several of my humanities courses; he was a veteran, older student. And he actually wrote a letter saying that he felt like this should be part of the students' curriculum at the college. He said that, you know, these classes, as he put it, help people understand there is a world outside of their county, there's a world outside of their experience. But, also some of these students are seeing that their experience really matters in the world is the piece that I have seen really frequently, because they just, you know, going back to that conversation about representation, they haven't seen themselves and their experience as a thing

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worthy of study, worthy of bringing in. And I feel like that's a big part of what it does for them.

And we have a program at CCCC called ACES, which is Academic and Cultural Enrichment Series, that is headed up by a history instructor, our lead instructor, Bianka Stumpf, and it's part of the community. Like, community members come to that. And it's not specific to just the college transfer curriculum. So, we also get amazing feedback from students about that, and from people in the community. We're able to go outside the classroom and connect. A lot of times you'll sign a class to go and find out they already have to go for two other classes, like, they've already been told they need to go attend the event. So, I think that the humanities courses are where they see everything fit together. They start to see how the science and the history and the math and everything else all fit together and fall into place.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** I love that because I remember when that happened for me, when I started to think about all of the courses I was taking in a single semester, together. You know, I've been trying to look for some conceptualization of that, but the closest I got was an interdisciplinary literacy. But really starting to think, "Oh, my English class connects to my history class and connects to my geography class." It's really such a great feeling where you're starting to really fire up those neural pathways. And I remember that when that happened; it was community college. I try to do that as well for my students, as much as I can, to help them see those connections or make those connections.

When I think about my students, really, I tailor a lot of my assignments so that they can take a deep dive into their own lives as text, as material for analysis, and to bring it into conversation with any readings or topics or units we're doing. There's always that personal dimension. And I like to *theme* my courses, as a matter of fact. Lately, I've been theming my courses around the idea of claiming voice and place in San Diego County, and I also do this in Riverside as well. So that there's a local connection and a sense of place that's brought in line with whatever class it is, the thematic approach. Really, I've been getting traction on it and developing a work in progress, always. But it's kind of weird at first, but when I have them do a family history project, or oral history interviews, and I train them in methodologies, and also a community mapping project, where they identify sites of significance for themselves, but also thinking about hidden histories in their local communities.

It really starts to develop that spatial literacy and culturally relevant, personally relevant experiences with the curriculum so that they learn about themselves in new ways utilizing these approaches. And so, I've noticed the impact, especially the oral history assignments that I do, and I've been developing oral history across the curriculum, so beyond history courses and ethnic studies courses. I've been doing it in communication studies courses, interestingly. They learn something about their own family, and I see that impact on them in sitting down with a family member or just sitting down with someone close to them in this unique way. I notice those remarks. I'm always collecting data from them, like,

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"Hey, how was this for you? Do you have any suggestions?" Because that's important, too, in helping shape effective practices and *meaningful* practices as well.

But the best is when I, at UCR, had seen some of my former community college students. So University of California Riverside, where I had completed my public history program, I ran into an undergraduate student who had transferred from a community college I taught at, actually two or three that I count so far. And just seeing them on campus was a *fantastic* experience. I was like, "Hey! You made it. This is wonderful." And I'd written letters of rec for them for various things and thought, you know, just to really see that trajectory and then also, "Hey, we're not classmates necessarily, but we're also students together now." I was a graduate student, they're undergrad students. That's a fantastic marker of just having that experience with students cultivating their capacities for transfer, but also for self-awareness and then seeing their success and them flourishing and *thriving*, beyond just the paradigm of surviving.

**Host Francena Turner:** And your responses lead me down a couple of paths. First, I want to point out, even in my own work, oral history has been important because, as an invested citizen in my community, it gets frustrating that all history seems to be somewhere else. All important things seem to have happened somewhere else. So, I'm really fascinated by including oral histories, or even qualitative interviews, without maybe not even thinking that they'll be preserved. But it's important, I think, to have students who are citizens invested in their home communities, particularly if those are communities they are going to continue to work in. And because of community colleges' sort of unique experience, really connect in high schools, universities, the community, and industry. I just think that project is so important. I'm just very excited about what you all have discussed.

How are your departments or institutions studying humanities teaching and student outcomes? What are they considering outcomes, quantitative studies, qualitative studies—what's that look like in terms of evaluating humanities programs and courses?

**Hattie Presnell:** This actually happened with us here at FTCC this last year, so, during the pandemic year, the spring of pandemic. So, 2020 spring, that every couple years, they rotate here at FTCC amongst the humanities department, they rotate how they assess the classes, or the outcomes, rather. So we have qualitative, we have quantitative, we have computer skills, then, you know, how do students work well with computers, which, especially during the year 2020, was a massive part of how to gauge students because *everything* was on computers.

But for the quantitative assessment that we did last spring for history classes, this one was for American History 2, we had looked at having a universal assignment. And in this particular year, it was looking at a specific election and the outcomes. This is something that all the instructors who taught that class

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would agree upon, and then they conduct the actual assessment, and then we return the feedback. So, everything from the grades, the actual physical grades of the students, what they actually made, and then we had a rubric based upon how well did they achieve these different outcomes, so almost like a rubric for that specific outcome. And we kind of rotate that out, depending on the class and what assessment we're looking at that year, again, with the qualitative and quantitative and computer skills. So that's an ongoing kind of check on *our* parts as instructors, you know, are we meeting what we hope are our outcomes? You know, are students being successful in the way that we hope them to be?

### Summerlin Webb:

Our data collection in my department is focused on English classes, English 111, our freshman composition class, and we do oral comm data for the second-level English. So you're writing on the disciplines or professional research and reporting because most students in most programs are going to take one or the other. And pretty much everybody enrolls in English 111. We've got a few programs that have a different first English. And it's very similar to what you've described where we have a rubric and a somewhat universal assignment. And the rubric is used for scoring.

So, for instance, a student may make a 85 on the essay in my class, but we've got a four-by-four rubric that we use to score. Same situation, essentially, with the oral comm data. As far as our HUM-specific courses, we don't have evaluation for those specifically, and that's something I would like to think about. And I think part of the issue there is there are so many of them. It's one thing to do English 111, English 112, English 114; it is another thing to do COM 110, 115, 120, 150, 160, 126.

### Steven Moreno-Terrill:

Yeah, the SLOs. That's the dance that we do every semester. And they're not only at that level, but thinking about the PLOs, the program learning outcomes, and the ILOs, the institutional learning outcomes. For this semester, I am evaluating a particular learning outcome for Chicano history. And it's based off of the course outline of record, you know, because it's on a five-year cycle. We go down which particular learning outcome are we focusing on for this semester and then the next semester. We just go down the list.

It's not as standardized, but at the same time we have those conversations, you know, with my chair and with my colleagues, what type of assessment? But it is mixed-methods, certainly. You know, I have qualitative and quantitative data to help in the evaluation process as to whether or not we're actually producing this learning outcome in students. It's basically a departmental accomplishment when we think about the assessments and standardization, I mean, I'm a big fan of it. But I also am a big fan of being flexible, too. So, while I think there should be a base level in how we assess things, you know, I like a little room for flexibility and thinking of new ways of assessing a particular SLO. And that's typically how it works on the various campuses that I work at. As a matter of fact, I'm getting ready to roll out my assignment for that, as we head towards the end of the term.

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**Host Francena Turner:** The students for your courses, are they predominantly transfer students? Do you have students taking it across the offerings the institution has? Really what I'm getting at is those who are in vocational and technical classes. Do you find that they're also taking your classes in large numbers?

**Hattie Presnell:** The majority of my students are going to be college transfer. Even with the high school students with high school connections that they intend on transferring to a four-year university. I honestly haven't had too many students who were in the vocational or technical degrees. I'm even thinking back to when I was at Guilford Tech Community College. I had a handful of students that may have been in the technical degrees. They were evening students. But most of mine do plan on transferring somewhere at some point.

**Summerlin Webb:** I'm definitely in camp, all of the above. And it depends on the semester. Like, you will have a semester where a class fits perfectly for folks in automotive to take it or what have you. So, it's honestly not unusual for me to have, say, a tech and society class where I can divide the class into groups of three based on their trajectory. But I do have a lot of transfer students. I have all of that.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Yeah, the majority of my students are transfer students. Occasionally there's a handful who are perhaps in a nursing program. Because I teach a broad array of courses; so, I teach public speaking from a Chicano Studies perspective and also from an ethnic studies perspective. That is a requirement across the whole campus, regardless of what program you're in, public speaking, or the other course, they have to take some type of communication studies course. And so, in the Department of Chicana Chicano studies at Mesa, we do that special public speaking course in coordination with the comm studies department.

So, definitely I'll get some nursing students. You know, I haven't seen any business admin students, haven't really seen engineering students, but I need to take a better survey of that. You know, typically, that's the beginning of the semester: "Hey, what's your major?" But yeah, the majority of them are transfer students, what we have called an ADT degree, Associate Degree for Transfer, where certain programs are articulated with the CSU system for just a guaranteed smooth transition to whatever campus they target. And so that's part of our pathway program that's rolled out within the last few years.

**Host Francena Turner:** What do you think the humanities might offer some of your vocational and technical students? That across your institutions' offerings, how might humanities help shape or strengthen, improve the kinds of programs that might not normally take those kinds of classes?

**Hattie Presnell:** Now this was actually a question that came up in January of 2020, so pre-pandemic, that we were having a professional development day here amongst the humanities and arts department here at FTCC. And we had a seminar where we actually invited people from different industries here in Fayetteville to give us feedback. You know, what are you looking for in students?

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And one of the representatives said that they were looking for people who genuinely had critical thinking in the sense of, and that's not to demean anyone, it was just they said that there have been situations where people were textbook, they knew everything by the textbook. They were *incredibly* bright when it came to textbook work, but when it came to actual application that they struggled a bit. And they had given an example of someone who was in an accounting program and was, you know, just the star of their class, and when they were hired for a position that when it came to crunch time, very stressful situations, especially around tax season, that the individual didn't know how to handle that kind of stress in the sense of, well, the textbook said to do this and then apply it. There was a bit of that disconnect between, this is what I've read and this is how it should be applied.

So it's a great opportunity for us faculty here to be able to hear directly from the industry representatives here in our community to say, "We want more critical thinking, not to say that people are not bright, but we want people to be comfortable with their own thinking so they know what to do when it comes time to do it."

**Host Francena Turner:** What do you think of vocational technical programs that aren't transfer programs? What do you think those students, how do you think they might benefit from these kinds of courses? And then also, what is industry telling you they need?

**Hattie Presnell:** Well, I would personally love more people to take history classes because I think they're absolutely essential. I'd love people to take more humanities classes because I think it's good to kind of understand, you know, the inner workings of everything. I think it helps you as a human, and I know that sounds cliché, but it helps you to try to understand what brought other people to this point. I think that's a skill that everyone should try to have, try to at least strive to understand, better understanding, rather, of those individuals. And yet, in terms of, you know, what the industry is saying that they want, most certainly, like, looking at, just critically think. That's the big kind of takeaway that I got from that seminar was that, you know, we want people to be able to kind of look at the situation and then come to some sort of understanding without hesitation, in the sense of, you know, well, this is what the textbook said and here's a real-life application, and then you don't know what exactly to do with it.

**Summerlin Webb:** I really agree with all of that. Yeah, the critical thinking piece is so important and something that I hear people say is lacking. And in talking to people in other departments and other programs is something that they cite over and over again. And that's why I think those classes like critical thinking and technology and society are so tremendously helpful. One of the things that I do in my tech and society class is the student has to go interview somebody in the industry that they're planning to go into about the technological changes and where things are going to go, so that they've got a clearer picture of what things are going to look like when they get there. That is often an enlightening experience. They go in thinking they're not going to get anything out of this, and then they

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find out about all the things that are changing and how people have to apply their knowledge on the job that is not, you know, pick one of these multiple-choice answers.

And I do find that often students are really uncomfortable with that. There are many students who want to be told what to do. I drive students crazy with my open-ended prompts and my activities that are not, you know, fill-in-the-blank word bank. You have to actually think about this. And I do a lot of, you know, come up with a solution for this problem. I'm not even saying you got to come up with the right solution, but I want you to think about this and think about how you would fix this thing.

In all of these classes, think critically about the things that they take for granted. Why is it that way? As you were saying, why are things this way? Why are we doing this? How is that affecting us? I think those skills translate really well. And when I've talked to people who find out what I do for a living, those are the kinds of things that I hear them saying they need at work.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Absolutely. Critical thinking is imperative *across* the curriculum. It's one of those non-negotiables, right? But another non-negotiable for me is communication competency. Because I have a background in communication studies, I integrate this in my other humanities courses, in my history courses, in my ethnic studies courses, so that they're learning effective and appropriate practices of communicating with others in society at the interpersonal level, but also in terms of public speaking and also thinking about things like conflict management, communication climate, intercultural communication competency, how to communicate across differences in effective, appropriate, and in mutually *empowering* ways.

I have been also developing this approach, communication competencies across the curriculum. And again, I get these weird looks sometimes, you know, "Oh, why do we have to work in small groups?" "Well, because it's part of everyday life." Congratulations if you escape it, but if you learn how to do it, then it's less anxiety-inducing. You know, you don't get good at things by not doing them. So, by practicing them at multiple points, you don't necessarily have to be in a communication course. You get it at multiple levels, that only adds to your capacity through that practice and that repertoire that you're getting.

So, this is something that I try to do—vital. We look at the research management and across various industries where they indicate that communication competency at various levels, so we think about small-group, public presentation skills that are most *important* skills that leaders desire in their workforce. And so, this is something that I lean heavily on. They're always presenting in my classes, they're working in groups, and they're thinking about themselves reflexively as well, you know, as communicators, as social beings, so that they're understanding themselves. And then also, importantly, the ethical components of communication, and how to make ethical and moral decisions. To have that kind of capacity, where if, you know, if you're in biotech, you can

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ask the question: Why do we need this? What are the implications in society in developing this particular technology? Will it negatively impact particular groups and disproportionately benefit others? What are the ramifications at the moral level? And thinking about things like bioethics and things along those lines.

**Host Francena Turner:** Now we get to pivot to some of the programs and initiatives that you might have going on at your institutions around humanities. I know Professor Moreno-Terrill, there are a couple of initiatives I found out about at San Diego Mesa College with the PATH program and the Constance Carroll Humanities Institute. And then also, I believe Professor Webb was talking about the ACES program, and then Fayetteville Technical Community College has initiatives as well. So we'll start with Professor Moreno-Terrill and work our way around.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** You know the San Diego Community College District, I've just been really impressed with these initiatives that are district-wide. We have further campuses: San Diego City College as well as San Diego Miramar College, where the Constance Carroll Humanities Institute really is the umbrella program that then through our other campuses, different types of programming manifests, and in the mission statement of the center, it's the internal vehicle for cultural interdisciplinary and Mesa College community priorities. And so all the activities, they're designed to increase student engagement, recruitment, and retention. That's a use of humanities in this very strategic way to produce desired student outcomes. You know, keep them on campus, keep them in college, and then also get them to transfer and graduate as well, and also bring them to campus. So it's definitely an incentive.

But the great thing is that there's funding available for various professors who are interested in developing either a curricular approach or something programmatically in terms of the events and more opportunities for students to engage in humanities at the various campuses. I've been working on application for a project that I loosely have titled "The Chicanx Public Humanities Institute" in the department of Chicana Chicano studies. And I'm developing curricular resources based on local historic and cultural sites that instructors will be able to plug into their courses, build in that local spatial literacy, but also giving students the opportunity to engage with sites either through service learning, internship, or volunteer opportunities, bridging those pathways to the curriculum, to the community, where students are learning beyond the campus. They're actually applying things like history, developing those communication skills by maybe presenting at a museum as part of a speaker's bureau on a topic of hidden histories.

This is some of the work that our center at Mesa College and in the district really encourages. And so, you know, you can write a proposal and get some funding to roll it out, as well as, you know, really the bulk of it is on events *on campus*. This is Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and so, definitely, we have a whole host of events rolling out through the humanities initiatives that we have. And it's all virtual at this point, but it's a great opportunity for students to engage. We also have the initiative where it's a partnership with UC San



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Diego to really promote a pipeline for humanities transfers from the community college to the UC system. We've had events where former humanities majors, you know, now working in the field coming to speak on what you can actually do. You can work in state or national parks, you can work in the museum field, you can work for consulting organizations. There's just so much potential that people aren't aware of.

And that's one of the main functions of this is to really help students understand that while a humanities degree doesn't have a direct translation such as computer science, you know, I'm not getting a job at the philosophy factory, but those types of majors can be fine-tuned and applied at *multiple sites* in the community and in society, bridging the gap of that understanding because we've been so STEMified, you know, the STEMification of higher ed. Nothing against STEM; certainly important, but really trying to diversify students' pathways and understandings of what you can do and protect also the vital necessity of humanities in society. We need it.

### Summerlin Webb:

I had mentioned the ACES program, which has brought a lot of unique speakers and experiences to our campus and also brought the community. Really kinds of puts the community and community college and we have so many people in the community taking part. Some examples of events we've had, playwright Mike Wiley has come and performed on campus. We've also been to Temple Theater to see him there and a variety of shows at Temple Theater that have tied in with something students may be studying. We've had Bill Adair from PolitiFact. There has been a presentation and photo exhibit from Jose Galvez, lots of events. We've had authors, all sorts of things, Holocaust survivors, we've had speakers from the Holocaust Speaker's Bureau, survivors or their family members have come and spoken.

So that has been a wonderful resource for students. It's been great for transfer students and other students who need to be exposed to these kinds of events and getting to ask questions to people that you may not normally get to ask questions, hearing about all these different perspectives on life and the participation, seeing people from the community care and come and be part of that, it has been a really wonderful component at CCCC.

### Hattie Presnell:

A lot of what my previous colleagues have said here, we actually do here at FTCC as well. The College Pathways is one of our perhaps strongest programs, especially looking at college transfer and trying to introduce students to more of the humanities courses. And part of the College Pathways is also connected with the concept that if you achieve a two-year degree, if you get the associate's degree here at FTCC, whether it's Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, what have you, that you are able to transfer to any public North Carolina university with your first two years essentially out of the way, and we have special agreements with universities such as Fayetteville State University and East Carolina University, oh, and University of North Carolina, Pembroke. Those are our three big universities a lot of our students end up going to, but we do have some that kind of trickle on to NC State and UNC Chapel Hill.

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One other event that I thought of was the photograph exhibits we have here at FTCC for Black History Month. They started doing this within the last couple of years. Well, this year we had it but then we didn't have students. But just before the pandemic, I was able to take my class—it was actually one of the high school connection classes—and take them to the exhibit which was held in our Student Center. And me being, you know, history-minded, and I am *obsessed* with museums, I told my students, like, "This is a museum being *brought* to you." Because it was a traveling exhibit. That it was such a *wonderful* experience to bring my students there and say, "Look, we have actual artifacts."

They had a whole collection of Madam C.J. Walker's beauty supplies, and I told my students, I said, "Do you even understand what you're seeing?" And most of my students were like, "Yes, we grew up with this." I'm like, "That's awesome!" I just, it blew my mind because I didn't even know that they were going to have things like that. I thought it was just photographs, but they had actual artifacts. Like, this is *incredible*. And my students probably thought that I was out of my mind, but I think they left with something because I heard them talking when they thought I couldn't hear and they're like, "Whoa, this is really kind of cool. Like, can you believe they actually had that here?" So that's one of the initiatives that we have here that I hope they continue on.

I would like to see traveling exhibits like that more frequently here at FTCC, especially when they correlate with the different histories of the month. Currently, we don't have an exhibit, but hopefully I could be a part of that process to bring in more of those kind of humanity-based initiatives here at FTCC. And they tell me I'm ridiculous whenever they see me get so excited. They're like, "You need to calm down." I'm like, "No, I can't. History cannot calm me down. I will not be tamed."

### Summerlin Webb:

I love it when you sell them on that, too. I geeked out about something so hard in my Southern culture class that two of the students were like, "Can we just meet you at the North Carolina Museum of History?" I live in Raleigh. And I was like, "Yeah, let's take a day. We don't have school if y'all want to meet me up there, we can absolutely do it." And they did. I was not sure they would do it, and they did. One of my friends works there and she came down and, like, took us to the places and the enthusiasm effectively nerded out onto them and got them invested.

### Host Francena Turner:

I'm interested in how you experience being a humanities faculty member. You've all discussed some public engagement, but I'm also interested in teaching loads and the weeds. I'm interested in that. And also any kind of professional development programs you've been a part of.

### Hattie Presnell:

I love being a history instructor. I love being part of the humanities. And I will sing the praises of the humanities, especially, *especially* in today's world. Because unfortunately, the trend very lately for those who follow on social media is that a lot of universities are beginning to eliminate their humanities.

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And that's *crushing* to me because there's *such* a need for it. I'm very proud to be in this position, and I will use it to the best of my ability.

In terms of my workload here at FTCC, we have where we teach six classes and we're required to have five office hours for our students and then five division hours. So, I'm on campus quite often. And then intermingled with all of that we do have lots of professional development opportunities, both with what we have offered here on campus to our faculty, but I search everywhere. I search high and low for opportunities from other places like museums. I typically do a lot with the Smithsonian's African American History and Culture Museum, which has fantastic ones. They had one with Madam C.J. Walker not long ago on her philanthropy.

Recently, I did one with NISOD on teaching, especially here in community colleges. I did several seminars with that. I take all the professional developments I can get because I can never stop learning. And I always feel like there's room for me to grow. And I've given my own professional developments here at FTCC, but they've been more along the lines of kind of the hidden histories as we've all kind of talked about here, you know, looking at those hidden histories that people don't necessarily realize are there that I try to present to my fellow faculty here at FTCC.

### Summerlin Webb:

I've been lead instructor in the department, wrapping up my second year of doing that. Prior to that, teaching load was similar to what you had mentioned. For English and humanities faculty, there's overlap with us. It's a five-course load plus Writing Center commitment, and so right now I'm teaching fewer courses because of all the things that go along with the lead instructor position. I have started a few things that I would like to get published, but, you know, some stuff has happened in the last two years. It's been a little tough.

I have not presented any conferences lately. I have a couple things on the burner with some colleagues, both in community college and university that we've been kicking around. And I have to say that kind of my great lament is that with everything there is to do all the time, you know, with advising students and I'm in the midst of English 111 research paper season right now. So, I just wish that I had more time to do the kinds of prep and professional development and resource creation and finding that I want to do. But one the only *lovely* things, one of the only lovely things, that has come out of the last year and change is that so much professional development has been offered online. And the last conference I took part in, they recorded all of it, so you could watch all of the sessions. You didn't have to choose and be sad when you couldn't go to the two things at once. And they're keeping it up.

So, I'm going to have to go in and cram like a last-minute student next week and get all the sessions in. But I have really appreciated that. And I hope that we see more of that because it is so hard to do the full day or the full weekend or the full four days and travel. And it's great. Like, we love that. But yeah, that has been one thing that's great is that we've got these recordings and we can go

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back to them now. But I'm hoping to see more of that and be part of more of that in the next year or two.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Yeah, it's really great because I targeted the community college system specifically for the emphasis on teaching. But I think for me, because of just my research interests and background, like, the research aspect is always there as well, at least for one part of my research interests, which happens to be racial justice literacy and community college courses, culturally relevant approaches and antiracist pedagogy.

So, in one sense, I'm developing that aspect and working on that part of a research agenda, which is actually an application of those professional development goals. For instance, we have this great, on both campuses that I teach at, the Riverside City College and San Diego Mesa, we had an abolitionist book club, which featured Dr. Bettina Love's most recent text, "We Want To Do More Than Survive." I highly recommend this text. It's fantastic in terms of understanding the concept of abolitionist teaching, and then what she terms as the educational survival complex.

Basically, it's critical approaches to education, critical-race approaches, grounded in story and not so much of the jargon. We've been developing these opportunities where we get together and we're talking around this book. I've really seen my colleagues who are at different levels, in terms of engaging with this type of concepts and the material, really just come together and say, "Yep, you know what? Yes, like, how do we do this?" I see them energized. It's just really good energy to have something like that available on the campus, you know, a book club, right? But also the professional development, I echo the sentiment, like, hey, it's so great that now we can just watch them. Even if we can't, like, participate live and direct, it's great to have those recordings. Still lots to be learned in that way.

And more and more of the opportunities have been geared towards contemporary issues, which have always been persistent issues in U.S. history if we're going to be real. So thinking about white supremacy culture in the college campus, thinking about culturally relevant-responsive approaches to the curriculum, and antiracist pedagogies like I mentioned before, but also, like, humanizing practices and thinking about things like healing in the classroom, which is not always on everyone's radar, depending on your training. It's home cooking for me, so I, you know, I eat it up. I'm like, "Yes I'll take seconds and thirds. Thank you."

That's why all the difficulties of COVID in terms of growth and development as a college community, with my colleagues, there has been *a lot* going on, and it's been really energizing. I definitely appreciate all these opportunities and partnerships with my colleagues. But yeah, summertime—research time. That's what I'm digging back in the archives and so forth. You know, the challenge is can you blend both? Can we train students as researchers and engage in projects working with archival materials or even preservation projects and

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digital history? Can we do digital mapping projects that adds to the landscape, the cultural landscape? These are the challenges that I'm pushing myself in that direction to meet.

**Host Francena Turner:** We know that during the last presidential administration, we saw an upsurge in media attention paid to a decidedly anti-humanity, perhaps anti-critical, thinking stance taken against institutions of higher education. I want to know how that has affected or not your work at your respective institutions. But what we have to blend in there is the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic, these two things have definitely affected the higher education landscape. And I'm interested to know how that's played out in your own careers at your institutions.

**Hattie Presnell:** So the last five years, being a history instructor, history is so important, well, humanities are so important. And I have had some kickback from some students who don't necessarily see the importance of history or humanities. And because of that, they don't really engage in the work as much, which is heartbreaking for me because that challenge for me has always been, like, "Okay, you don't like history, I'm going to find something you're interested in."

And I have, unfortunately, have had some students that are just, you know, they're there to do the grade and then that's it. There's no true engagement. Or when reading certain primary sources, because that's one of the assignments I do every week is that I assign primary sources for students to engage in the voices of the past, to try to understand what people were thinking at that time and how they were perceiving society around them. And I have had certain assignments, and even as recently as this last week, where someone had read an assignment, and they took it a completely different way than I anticipated. And it really shocked me, and it comes into that mindset of history as important because of what we've been seeing in American society the last five years is that, you know, whatever, that's your point of view for your history.

And it's like, this is concrete evidence of certain things. I feel like I've been a fighter in some ways to kind of push. You know, we need to have more history placed back into schools, you know. We need to have more of that emphasis on the humanities, especially in the last five years.

And in terms of how it's affected me since COVID, I started last spring 2020 with *the best* class I ever had, face-to-face curriculum class, people of all ages, all backgrounds. I had veterans, I had high school students, I had people all over and this was such a *beautiful family*. I mean, it was truly a family where, if people were not there, other students would start calling them, saying, "Hey, where are you? You're not in Mrs. P's class." It was just such a beautiful family. And I'm interested in epidemiology. So, as soon as I started hearing about this coronavirus, I started sharing it with my students before class. You know, "This is what I've been reading, and one of the things we're going to look at in our class is the pandemic of 1918."

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And when it got to that point, I remember one of the last classes I told them, I said, "Read everything. And most importantly, for me, as a history instructor, write down your points what *you* are seeing, because that will be a primary source for futures to come. You might think it's just a journal entry, but people are going to be able to look at that and say, 'This is what they were going through.'" And that actually ended up being one of my extra-credit assignments in my classes since, even to this semester of "What have you experienced in this last year?" And the challenge for me last spring was this beautiful, wonderful family of a class I had almost deteriorated because we didn't have that face-to-face interaction; that it was all computer-based and I had students who lost jobs, students who became homeless, and then I became kind of just that wall for people to talk to.

So, I felt like I became history instructor to both history instructor and that person that's always there for them. And that's still the case even to the semester. I still have students that I say, "I am here for you." And I truly honestly mean it, like, whatever you need me to do, I am here for you. Because I feel like a lot of students, especially with the pandemic, have gone through, obviously, well, we've all gone through incredible things, bad and good, but I feel like it kind of helps students to understand that it's not just them, that there are others who are also experiencing these adversities, and that someone is willing to listen to them.

I tell them, "If you want to just kind of spew your words into this document and send it to me it will never be shared with anyone else. It will be for my eyes only and I'll let you know I'm here to listen." That's how the pandemic has affected me with all of this as I become that ear for everyone throughout this year.

### Summerlin Webb:

One thing that I'll definitely come back to what you just said about that sort of family and being the wall, because I did have some of that experience last year and even into this year. But going back to sort of the shift in I guess the public view of the humanities, something that's been interesting to me to look at is how people's views on believing and questioning seem to have changed in tech and society and in all of my classes. I mean, everything I teach, I'm telling people to question whether we're talking about a historical account we read in a literature class or something for tech in society.

I didn't realize that was going to extend to a student arguing with me about whether the world was round in one of my tech and society classes. Like that was not the lesson that I went in planning to discuss that day. And, you know, we took it back to choosing sources and, you know, everybody on YouTube can't be trusted, et cetera. But I've seen a lot more students really embracing conspiracy theories. They believe that they are doing research because it's out there and they see it and they look at it. And so one of the interesting—I don't want to say side effect of COVID, that's not what I actually mean—one of the interesting kind of *side events*, we'll say, from that, has been students doing research in English 111 and English 112 that's COVID related and actually looking at scholarly sources.

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So kind of helping them get the train back on the tracks a little bit there, telling them, "You know, personal experiences are important, but, you know, an anecdote is not the same as full-on study, for instance. But I have definitely seen a difference. And, you know, a lot of people were surprised at how the 2016 election went; because of the students that I have and because of the pop-culture class I had that semester, I was not. And colleagues reported seeing a lot of students not in class the day after that election. There were *a lot* of students of color, and a lot of our Latinx students, who didn't come to school that day.

I mean, that was something that we saw and something that I noted. And I tried to pay, and my colleagues tried to pay, a lot of attention to who had gotten really quiet in class, who felt like they couldn't speak anymore, and tried to reach out to them as much as it was comfortable for them to do so.

But yeah, in COVID I will say, COVID has changed, obviously it's changed everything about how we interact. I had a similar experience. I had a night English 112 that was like class of dreams. It was very similar to a Southern culture class I had taught two years prior. We usually have one potluck and in Southern culture, we had three. We had just become like family, and I moved my class online. I met with them still at the same time every week online, usually, like, with my 3-year-old climbing over my back or whatever; they were in similar situations. And, you know, a lot of them got through it, some of them didn't, but we really did communicate to keep it together.

And it's definitely I feel like changed the student-teacher relationship. I know that a lot of us have given a lot more grace, and that's been hard to handle with deadlines and end-of-semester assignments and things like that, you know, that's something to navigate. But I think the students, too, are seeing the great importance of these humanities classes. Like, there are some hiccups here, but I think that, overall, students are seeing, "Hey, this stuff matters." And I think about, you know, you talking about the 1918 pandemic, you know, some students didn't even know about that. You know, hey, this has happened before, here are some pictures. Here's, you know, people who didn't believe in this, and how that went. So, I think that as awful and difficult and challenging as so many aspects of the last few years have been, I think that *maybe* we're seeing some hope on that side.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** I love history, I'm a historian, but first and foremost, I'm an educator, I'm there for the students. So, I use history as a tool. I definitely, you know, draw that distinction because I've seen it be the case where other colleagues or other folks in the field are just about the field in and of itself. And while I'm not here to cast aspersions, when we're talking about students, I get highly protective. You have to be committed to them, and not to draw just stark binaries, either, Right? There's nuance in there: To what degree are you centering the students over your obligations to the discipline?

It's another non-negotiable where we have to, as educators, really humanize our courses, our classroom, our Canvas Shells, our virtual spaces, whatever

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system you're on right now, as much as we can, so that our classrooms are safe spaces, but also *brave* spaces, cultivating that culture that I've heard in, you know, Professor Presnell and Professor Webb, I heard that in your testimony—that's really great. Cultivating that inclusive, empowering culture within the classroom is just so necessary now more than ever, with everything going on in terms of struggles for racial justice, struggles in dealing with the pandemic, and then also, *really* important, the struggle against the pandemic of misinformation.

Really, I've been leaning heavily on information literacy and partnering with the library in helping with this, and really cultivating that research competence and awareness in my students so that they know how to vet all these sources and understand the politics of knowledge. Thinking about things like, "Hey, a key term in this course is "epistemology" and "ontology." And not to be too jargon-y with them, but, like, "Hey, let's talk about how knowledge is produced and the politics behind that." And also, let's talk about discourse and rhetoric and what's going on using everyday case studies. When we talk about undocumented immigrants and families, that's a case study I definitely use, where we look at, hey, how are these issues being framed by different positions, and what's at stake? And what worldview is it centering? You know, who benefits from this?

To get them to begin to think along those lines, and, you know, I want to be careful not to say "begin," because a lot of them already do that. To help them identify the ways that they may already be doing that work, as well, is absolutely vital, and I put a lot of pressure on myself and I have to, you know, kind of tell myself to chill out. Like, I'm not here to save or, you know, this assignment is not going to save the world. I'm not here to be a hero or anything, but what I am here to do is to be a partner and support them in multiple ways. I'm there as a community member. You know, I'm struggling too. This stuff hits me hard, you know, where I feel like I'm out of my mind, and I'm crying. And I want to, like, you know, I don't know what to do. I've been sharing those feelings of helplessness. And just to be honest with them, say, "Hey, I'm a human being. Like, I'm struggling too and I got your back, and I'm going to be flexible with you, and what kind of resources can I provide you?"

**Host Francena Turner:** What do you enjoy the most about your work in the humanities, particularly working at a community college?

**Hattie Presnell:** I love the aha moment, whenever the students get it. It's like, this is the reason why you're using this assignment. Because I've had people ask me, "Why are you assigning these old documents from the 1400s?" It's like, after they read it, they go, "Oh, okay!" And in fact, that reminds me, this was probably three years ago at Guilford Tech. It was a world civilizations class, and we were studying the French Revolution. And I get a little passionate with that topic, and my students I had them read an excerpt from Maximilien Robespierre, and they were all just kind of looking at me like, "We can barely pronounce his name." I was like, "I get it, just read this."



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And I had one student kind of raise their hand and I walked over there. I was like, "What's up?" And they said, "Do people have access to this?" I said, "What do you mean?" They read this and they said, "This happened in the past. This happened before!" Again, within that five-year timeframe and they said, "This is how people were reacting to that individual." I said, "Yes." They said, "Can I print this off? I want to share this with my friends." I'm like, "If you want to, by all means, you take this paper, you share it with everyone you know." And it was such a moment. I had to stop myself from crying because I want to go, "Yes, they get it!"

But they were reading and they said, "How can people not read this from the past and apply it to what's going on right now?" And I'm like, "You take that, you take that and you spread the word." Those are the moments I *live* for. That understanding of, "Whoa, okay; okay, I get this. I want to share this with my friends." I mean, who's going to walk around saying, "Oh, have you heard of Robespierre and how crazy he went to the point that he was going to have his health beheaded?" So, this student read and he was like, "I'm going to share this with *everyone*." It was incredible. Those are the moments I love most of being a humanities instructor.

### Summerlin Webb:

I'm with you on that. I've just worked with a student who, you know, had this, as she put it, crazy idea bouncing around in her head about the poem that we were working with. And at the end of our English 112 class, they put together all the different disciplines; we look at humanities, sciences, social sciences all in one. And she was able to attack the idea that she pulled from Emily Dickinson from all these angles and come up with something, and I told her, "You need to do with it. This is not just for me. Like, you need to do something with this." And I have so many moments like that. You know, in Humanities 110, I give crazy-free rein with some of my assignments. It's a love-hate relationship for my students.

You know, I had somebody write a *Black Mirror* episode. They will come up and do so much cool stuff when I give them the freedom to do it. I have to give some parameters; I'm still working on that balance. But when I see the stuff they turn out for that final project, we do like a little science fair where we all walk around and look at everybody's stuff for over two days. Seeing that, seeing the aha moments in pop culture when somebody looks at this thing that's been in their life forever and suddenly goes, "Oh, wow, this is weird from a perspective about gender or race or whatever." Those aha moments. "Isn't that what we all live for? Isn't that how they get us to come back every year?"

**Host Francena Turner:** Absolutely.

**Steven Moreno-Terrill:** Oh, my goodness. I love all that. But yeah, I mean, what I enjoy the most is really making those connections with students and really, you know, getting to know them, certainly. I learn through them, as well. You know, and I really go to lengths to position myself as teacher and a learner, simultaneously. But really getting to know them and also providing the opportunities for them to learn about themselves and one another in community. I participate in that process.

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You know, I tell them about myself. And, you know, we get to know one another throughout the semester. It's really about building that community. And each course is its own thing, right? It's its own culture, it's its own community and experience.

You know, there's challenges. I don't want to romanticize it—this is hard work. But really, you know, when it hits and that energy is there, and the synergy, positive synergy is going; it might not be every day, but it's in those moments, you know, that we celebrate. When the challenges are there, those are opportunities for me to take a look at myself, sometimes *check* myself. I got to check myself. And that's an important practice that educators really need to integrate.

You know, when I see in them, the impact of them learning about their own family history, and I be careful because not every family, I have to think about trauma-informed practices as well, so I give them options. But at the same time, you know, the opportunities are there for them to learn about their selves and their history and the community in multiple ways. And I see them light up, and I tap into that passion that they already have, tap into the knowledge and experience that they *already* have and help them understand it as such, like an assets-based approach, like, "You already know stuff. Let's work with that. Like, you already care about stuff, let's use that energy."

And, you know, when it hits, you know, I get fired up. Just like everyone here has been sharing: That energy is *magical*. And it keeps me going, it sustains me. And it really just helps me feel like, hey, this is how I'm contributing in making a difference. And I'm so thankful for being able to *do* this. It's a privilege but also a great responsibility.

**Host Francena Turner:** Thank you all for participating in our discussion about humanities in community colleges for the Office of Community College Research and Leadership. Thank you all so much.

**Announcer Sal Nudo:** Background music for this podcast is provided by Dublab. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to equity, justice, and excellence in education for all students.