

VOICES OF EQUITY PODCAST

Episode 4 Season 1

MARISA VERNON-WHITE

FEMALE VOICE (singing): 0:00 We are the voices of equity podcast. We are the voices of equity podcast listen up ...ooh ... ooh...ooh...ooooh listen up.

MUSIC: 0:20 (Inaudible)

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 0:27 Thank you for joining us on the Voices of Equity Podcast at Lorain County Community College. We are your co-hosts, Denise Douglas and ...

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 0:34 Kionna Mcintosh Pharms.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 00:37 As the co-chairs of the Equity for Students Team at LCCC, we are excited to share the work with this team, the voices of those who do this work, and the voices of students who are the reason for our work. We continue to conduct our interviews remotely due to COVID-19 pandemic. Students at Lorain County Community College are primarily taking their courses online this fall. Our guest today Marisa Vernon-White, had a lot to do with ensuring the students had the opportunity and the support that they needed to be successful in this environment.

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 1:08 We are truly happy that today's guest was able to take time out of her busy schedule to join us. Marisa Vernon-White is the Vice President for enrollment management and student services. She is also a member of the Equity for Students team and the co-chair of our umbrella committee, Student Completed Council. Welcome to the podcast Miss Marisa.

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 1:32 Thank you both. And I have to say you like such wonderful voices for radio.

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 1:37 We certainly do appreciate that. Please share more about your role at the college.

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 1:45 So, I've been with the college just over two years. I actually started here as Associate Provost and had a title change this past year to Vice President. I really really enjoy it. So, we know our students you know they're taking classes or doing their homework or engaging with all of us. But there's also help that is needed along the way. I get to work with the Deans and the other vice presidents as well as student senate and members of my team to make it all possible for everyone. Most of my background has actually been working in the field called Student Affairs. And I didn't really know that this was something that you could do professionally. So, I had the orientation team for my student employment jobs on campus and things like that. And to be honest, I struggled a lot in college with getting into trouble and maybe not getting the best grades and things like that. And I had somebody who was the supervisor of mine in my student employment job say, "I know you're supposed to graduate soon, but why don't you stick around here for a few years and probably get you a job as a graduate assistant. You can go into this Student Affairs program here at Penn State and you can advise students and we'll just figure out your next step." That's how I ended up in this work and I really love it.

MUSIC: 2:54 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 2:58 The COVID-19 pandemic really caused a major shift in how we support students. Especially in the areas of advising and other resources to help keep students connected to the college. You and your team played a major role in this. Would you share more about this?

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 3:13 One of the benefits of the pandemic is we can kind of find the silver lining. As we all experienced it, which is an important perspective for all of us to have. We were going through these things as people the same way that our students are going through them as people. Which made it much easier to identify what they were going to be challenged with. I myself as a parent, you know, thinking about OK wow. I'm really struggling at home to set up the workspace. I'm really struggling to focus. My life all of a sudden gotten smashed into all these different roles mashed together. And so that made it really easy to kind of think about OK So what are some of the things that are probably trying to deal with. Whether making this really really rapid shift. And we noted pretty quickly and people who work here at the college, are struggling with Internet access. People who try to teach courses who don't have, you know, the computers that they need at home. Or enough computers at home to help to be able to have their kids at school and to be able to take their courses. One of the best things I think we did was we asked our students directly. Because sometimes it's hard to come forward and say I don't have what I need. So within a few days of the college moving into a configurable environment, we reached out to the students, and we said, "Yeah, what do you need?" We found out that people needed childcare, people needed (inaudible), people needed Internet. They needed a laptop. And so, we were able to deploy that really quickly. Instead of just saying, "Hey, we have those things can tell us if you need them." We just went right to students, we anticipate that you need these things, and if you do, we're here and we have it for you." We didn't really wait for our students to come to us, to tell us what was going on. We, you know, all were experiencing it ourselves and so it was easy sort of what the pair ells that were harsh. We had really great success with that, I know that we likely had students that maybe didn't get the help they need. but I'm hoping that as they stay here at LCCC, they will see what we've done to keep other students in school and what we've done to create access to different things and really normalize that. And they feel more comfortable telling us.

MUSIC: 5:12 (INAUDIBLE).

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 5:18 One of the many things that I know about Marisa Vernon-White, is she normally sees things or looks through things through lenses she has been through for her life. And as mentioned earlier, she talked about not being such a great student. She talked about you know, going home and seeing the complexities that she had at home. Setting up an office and she is deemed a professional in society. So I had to make mention of that because, I would like for that information to be included in the next question which is, what is your equity story?

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 5:56 My story is really that I grew up in a home with a mother who had borderline personality disorder. Which creates a lot of trauma for kids that are in the home with somebody with that particular disorder. It's one of the ones that many therapists believe actually has the highest impact on the children that are in the environment. And I've really come to understand you know, some of the things I've been through with that lens. One of the things that that has taught me about some other life experiences is around the impact of trauma. When you kind of understand that everybody has traumatic experiences in their lives it makes it much easier to come at things are more of an equitable perspective. So, what you see on the surface is not reflected of the person or even their reaction to something. Sometimes it can be literally so hard wired in their brain to be defensive, or to argumentative or to fight for what they need. Or to come across as you know, scrappy or you know, whatever you know, term people might use to describe them. And so, I think that you know, people's actions are really important to see and to coach into mold but also with the understanding that everybody gets second chances. That's actually what we should be doing as opposed to being so punitive. So, that is definitely a lens that I come out with as a professional just because, I've been there personally. I think another piece of this too is that one of the things that I definitely notice in my line, is the role of somebody's family and support system. That in and of itself is an equity issue. We have some families and students who have families who are there for them every single step of the way. They get fully engaged. They understand how to work a system or how to advocate for different things. Or then you have other students that are really

trying to do it on their own. And when you are lacking that support system or somebody who can kind of guide you through how to navigate college or some other system, you have to be very resourceful and you have to be curious about how to carve your own way. So that in of itself can create some issues in terms of equity. Based on your who's in your social network, and who could advocate for you, who's behind you. And so, those are kind of some of those things that they're not seen on the surface but i know where they are inherently just because I have experienced a lot of those myself.

MUSIC: 8:09 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 8:16 And I can kind of guess based on your personal story this next question I'm about ready to ask you but please elaborate a little bit more why is equity important to you?

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 8:28 I think equity is important because it's, you know we need to look for those discrepancies in students' experiences. Like where are the gaps that haven't been filled in due to no fault of the student, in due to you know, systems or support issues or lack of resources. And when you kind of look at the world through that lens, you are much more able to look at people as individuals and their story. And kind of understand what is needed to level the playing field for them to be successful. There is a difference you know, the student who has really thought throughout so much of their life and scraped by the resources with support and still is able to graduate from college and maybe he doesn't have a 4.0. That person has same level of resiliency as somebody who has a 4.0 GPA, who you know, had a little bit easier path and so there's value in that. And I think some of our students they feel like because their story is slightly different from others that there is something, they somehow didn't achieve the same or that it was less than. It's actually quite the opposite. They have been able to overcome a lot of those things. Which makes it more interesting life stories. It just makes so much more for celebration and it's so important for us to notice those things because, that way we can get all students to

the finish line. But we have to fill in some of the gaps that people have when they come here and that's what equity is all about.

MUSIC: 9:51 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 10:00 Thanks Marisa for joining us today. Is there anything else you want our listeners to know about you or about equity? Anything else that you would like to share before we close out today?

MARISA VERNON-WHITE: 10:09 I would just say that LCCC is a really special place around this particular topic. Love the fact that we've been having really open conversations about what our students need, where the gaps are, and it's very unique. And we don't always realize that because we're in it. We are kind of in the fishbowl, so we don't realize how unique that is. This is an institution that listens to what's going on with students. Listens to what's going on in the community. And really trying to find out as best we can grasp the things that come up. So, I'm really proud to work here and I'm also love working with our students because it's just such a complex and creative tapestry here with my things people bring in. So yeah, I'm excited about the work this year around equity, and to continue to make this a place where everybody feels like their home and feel complete.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 10:56 Wonderful, thank you so much Marissa. And thank you for joining us today. Also thank you to our listeners for joining us for this episode of Voices of Equity Podcasts and LCCC brought to you Boom Radio.

MUSIC: 11:10 (INAUDIBLE).