

# VOICES OF EQUITY PODCAST

Episode 8 Season : Part 1

## KARLA ALEMAN

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: 0:21 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 0:26 Thank you for joining us for the Voices of Equity Podcasts at Lorain County Community College. We are your co-hosts Denise Douglas...

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 0:32 And Kionna McIntosh Pharms.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 0:36 As Co-chairs of the Equity for Students Team at LCCC, we're excited to share the work of this team, the voices of those who do this work, and the voices of students who are the reason for our work. Today we're recording during a time when many Americans are staying home due to COVID-19 pandemic and students are largely taking their courses online or through remote delivery. One of the many things this pandemic has illuminated is the digital divide. Our guest today will share more about this.

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 1:03 We are happy that today's gets was able to take time out of her busy schedule to join us. Karla Aleman is the Dean of the Library and eLearning and the team lead for the classroom strategy sub team of the Equity for Students' team at Lorain County Community College. Due to COVID-19, Karla and

her team, have transformed our training. And when I tell you that they transform, please believe me. They also provided support, resources and capacity for online and remote delivery of courses, in a very short time frame. Please help me welcome to the podcast, Karla.

KARLA ALEMAN: 1:44 Thank you so much for having me. I'm truly honored for the opportunity to join in the podcast today.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 1:50 Thank you so much, Karla. Let's start with the first question. Please share with our listeners your role at the college and a little bit about your background.

KARLA ALEMAN: 2:00 So, I am as noted, the Dean of the library eLearning e-learning division you could say, but there's actually a lot more under my unit than that. So, I'm also the Dean over tutoring and Accessibility services and our open computer labs. And essentially you could say I'm the Dean of all the academic support services. And systems and what have you. A huge component of my work obviously, is working with technology and providing technology. But I'd like to take a moment to think about the core mission of each one of my different units, and I won't necessarily do them individually cause there's such a common theme in all of that. Essentially, you could say that we're a safety net. We are a place, whether it's in tutoring or the library or a computer lab where students think they need help outside the classroom, because learning is so much more than. The things that you do just inside the classroom. There's so much learning that happens outside of it, and so we are there to be a support net and to be a place and a resource and an environment for people to come and get, you know, a little extra attention. In particular in regard to their academics. So, our focus and a lot of our core missions; each unit kind of has a different view of how they approach it, but it comes down to making sure students have access to resources. Whether that's you know additional information, resources that they need as they start to really dive in deep into their topic of study. It's specific services like tutoring. Where they just need someone to sit down with them and just make it make sense. This one thing is

just not making sense and I need someone to help make this make sense to the environments. Sometimes people just need a quiet place. Where they can be free of distractions and we provided those spaces. And of course, training. So, one thing that a lot of students may not know is that we do provide training for faculty on the learning side, and we also provide a great deal of technology. So, it's kind of a combination of so many things that we offer and want to provide to folks, whether it's students or faculty. But at the heart of it, it really is making sure that those who don't have access to you know, people, resources, technology, whatever. That they have an option. We are always trying to find ways to provide services and resources in the way that is most convenient to the student or the faculty or whoever needs them.

MUSIC: 4:41 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 4:48 And Karla, can you share a little bit about your background please?

KARLA ALEMAN: 4:51 Alright so, I am as noted, the Dean of library, but my professional experiences mostly as a librarian. So, I have been in the library field for a good 19 years now. I've worked in the library. I actually started as a student worker in college. And found by my home there and was so jazzed by the core mission of what libraries are all about. Which as I noted, it's about access and it's about leveling the playing field in many ways, and I was so down for that type of work, and so I've dedicated most of my life to that. You can imagine when someone is going to school in the early 2000s when the Internet and social media really blew up. It was fascinating to study. As an information professional, as this is how we see ourselves as information professionals. And so, it was fascinating to study kind of the phenomenon of the Internet and social media, of course. And the opportunity it is given people to express themselves and to change you know, who's the gatekeeper of information that is. You know? All of those kind of power dynamics have shifted so much in the past 10-20 years, and so it's been fascinating to be a part of that and to contribute so much of my work. So, I spent several years as a librarian focusing on online students, and because of that it has given

me kind of a wide variety of experience that may be kind of an interesting fit to take on more responsibilities. As I was looking to step up and take on more of a leadership role in my profession. So, I was fortunate to come here to Lorain County Community College first as the head of the library and e-learning. And have since expanded that role to the to look at some of these other academic support areas like tutoring and Accessibility services.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 6:56 Wonderful thank you, Karla. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the digital divide that students may experience as colleges move their courses online or remote delivery, could you share more about this?

KARLA ALEMAN: 7:07 How much time do you have?

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 7:10 As much time as you need.

KARLA ALEMAN: 7:12 So I, at my core, a lot of my interest is around the digital divide. As someone who grew up in a perhaps reduced circumstances, you could say myself. Access to technology and information was so critical to how I was able to move forward in my life. And so, what is going on when you think of the digital divide? So, what is that? The idea is to consider you know those who because of financial circumstances or family or social dynamics and what have you of their situation. And it is essentially that they don't have access to the digital world. Whether it's through devices and technology or they don't have access to the Internet. And this is of course on a scale. So you would be surprised at you know, folks who whether because of their age, for example, think of you know, not to be completely stereotypical, but perhaps older folks who did not grow up in a digital world and how disconnected they may feel, particularly right now. Because they're not comfortable using computers or mobile devices or what have you. So, there's so many different ways that you could look at the digital divide, but essentially it is to consider that we have a world of information that happens online through devices through technology and not everyone can access that rich world. So, with COVID-19, it has really; It's highlighted a lot of pain

points for so many communities. And when you just look at devices for example. So, 10 years ago when education was really looking at mobile devices as a means for education. Of course, most people are like it's so hard to learn on a on a on a small phone, right? And so on one hand you would have you know folks wanting to set a very high standard of education and they wanted to be rigorous. And then they start to realize wait a minute, my students only have access to this online course or this online content through a mobile device. What does that look like? What does that mean? And so, there is a shift needed. Let's think about how we design our courses, how active or how engaging are they even in a mobile device environment. So, the thing is, is that that mindset some people went forward with it and not everyone did. But the thing about the digital divide is the great bridge for so many people is a mobile device. And that is just the most truest reality that comes to the digital divide is that for some people their only access ready access to the Internet is a mobile device. They don't have a computer at home, they don't have a tablet, it is that phone. And unfortunately, you do have a lot of biases sometimes in our communities where people are surprised that someone in perhaps you know a lower socioeconomic status as them. May, you know, buy a very expensive phone and then people are surprised at that. You know why are you buying an expensive phone? And of course, in my head I you know, and I will say. You do realize how powerful that is that connection is, with through that one device. So, for us with COVID-19 we're starting to get the tension though, which is half, which is still there, which. To say that people have mobile devices, some a good number. Most people way more than they did 10 years ago, but most people have mobile devices but not all education can be done well through a mobile environment. So, some of it certainly can be. And you know CANVAS, which is our learning management system has made huge strides in making you know, that environment, you know, responsive to mobile device needs and stuff like that. But there's so much. Sometimes students need access to certain types of programs that just will not function fully in a mobile environment. And now that students are kind of at home, they can't get access to our computer labs. Where we have the software, we have the computers. They're trying to do things through their mobile devices and it's a challenge of course, so that's kind of one major pain point. Which is just looking at the devices that people have access to. And it's not just mobile phones, I mean how many people have

old laptops? You know how many people and you're like, you know, solid. I if I can make it last five years. So, if I can make it last 10. Laptop, it's a, you know, it might be a brick, that might be a brick, it might weigh ten pounds, but if it's still working you know. Some people are using the devices that they have in front of them. Some people are using devices at work because they don't have access to, you know computing at home and so now that they're disconnected from their work. They're disconnected from the libraries are disconnected from the campus and they really are just stuck with what they have. And usually that's a mobile phone. Then you start to, you know, add to that which is just the question of Wi-Fi access. Who has access either through data or Wi-Fi? And when it comes to data, who actually has access to unlimited data? And of course, unlimited data is not truly unlimited, there's at a certain point you use enough data it will start to slow down. That's like an automatic thing as part of the system. Certain, to a certain point, and from there from there your Internet slows down. So, people are having to make decisions over you, know how much communication am I doing? I might want to stream Netflix, but if I if I only have so much data on my phone and I know I have to do this sort of Webex session with my professor, you know which do I choose? And do I have enough data and that those, we never, maybe I shouldn't say that people have had to ask those questions. But I think the people having to ask those questions has opened up. In the end, too, when you take a step back, there's a lot of people who are unplugged in ways that you don't realize. I think for us, one of the most fascinating things for me was to talk to one of my one of the staff members in my area. And we were discussing we're working from home, which is a question so many people had to have in March. And to find out that she didn't have a computer at home. And I was so blown away that there's so many people who choose to be unplugged when they're at home. And again, whether that's just you know, comfort levels with devices, or you know lack of financial means to get their own devices at home. And there's so many different reasons why people might choose to be unplugged and now everything has been forced to into this sort of distance communication world. And you know, you can look at the devices and the Wi-Fi and sort of decisions. You know personal preferences, but it also comes down to training and familiarity. You know how many folks have had to become very familiar with Zoom because you know they need to talk to their grandkids. There's so much around the use

of technology and that's a huge portion of what libraries are all about is teaching people how to use information. And think of all the information that's being you know, thrown about right now? Just about COVID-19. It's amazing when you see people who maybe are not on the Internet as much. They go in there seeking answers and now they have to wade through. So a splurge of information. There's so much overwhelming information about it. What is actual accurate information? And you're going to hear different things from new sources. And then you've got these blogs over here by experts. And then you've got the CDC. And where do you go and what's the right answer? And so, all of these things, any part of the digital divide and then the again that that pressure and that the pain points of people who either because they weren't familiar with the digital world and now, they're having to embrace it. Or because they had don't have means and technology themselves. Or because they don't have the Wi-Fi. And how many people are sitting in the parking lot of a McDonald's right now trying to get access to the can't go in, you know? So, they're still trying to use the Wi-Fi. I mean, there's just so many ways to look at it. You can look at peoples ages. You can look at, you know, demographics, and their socioeconomic status, and it hits different populations in so many different ways. And right now, it just it become, t has become apparent, you know. New and interesting ways that the digital divide is still very very real.

MUSIC: 16:29 (INAUDIBLE).

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 16:34 Absolutely. And you know, going back to your point about the number of people who may or may not have access to the Internet. Our current Governor DeWine just mentioned today in his press conference is he's concerned about the number of individuals in the state of Ohio who do not have Internet access. He quoted over a million Ohioans do not have Internet access and this is a cross urban rural, it doesn't matter, it's all over the state. And that's and he's significantly concerned about that. So, I agree with you.

KARLA ALEMAN: 17:07 So, one of the fascinating things for me is to I've been able in my career to jump around to many different states. You could

say. And I've lived in a rural environment. I've lived in in very big cities and now I'm in this kind of strange suburbia that is, you know, Elyria, right? It's not strange, I swear. It is for me when you're when you're from big cities. In any case, it's every as you said, so many people don't have access to the Internet and the librarian in me sees the Internet as our right. It's not a privilege, it is a right and it should be treated as such. Everyone should have the right to the Internet. And it is that powerful of an information source. It is a game changer in so many people's lives there. So much opportunity. That is an in-end information that is communicated through the Internet and not having access to it. It's a game changer in many ways for so many people. And admittedly there are folks who can live their lives outside of the Internet, but and that you know, maybe someday I might be them. I might choose to go that route; I do advocate for healthy relationship with the Internet. You don't need to be on it all the time, but it's there's just so much information. Just think of all the health information. All of the you know, job opportunities. All of the you know, just knowing about people's lives. All the news that is communicated through the Internet. There's so much and it is unfortunate, a lot of people don't have access to it.

KIONNA MCINTOSH PHARMS: 18:53 Yes, that information was so great and you definitely proved that equity is on any level that you can think about. The thought of the conversation regarding equity certainly is embedded in anything that we can talk about today.

DR. DENISE DOUGLAS: 19:14 Thank you so much, Karla. Thank you again for joining us today. Also, thank you to our listeners for joining us for this episode of Voices of Equity Podcasts at LCCC brought to you by Boom Radio.

MUSIC: 19:26 (INAUDIBLE).