

Episode 5

Omar (Host): Welcome to Episode 5 of the H.E.A.R.T. Podcast, everyone! In today's episode we'll be focusing on antiracist teaching at community colleges. I'm particularly excited about today's episode because we'll be bringing together colleagues that mean the world to me because of the valuable work we've done together both in Arizona and in Connecticut. Join us as we take a journey down memory lane and hear valuable narratives from our guests about what guides their work and what provides their sense of purpose in the academy.

Omar (Host): We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

Milagros (Host): Thank you, Omar. I'm really excited about this episode also and I'm so thrilled that you and our guests have had the opportunity to work together in different capacities. One of our guests today, Dr. Kenny Nienhusser, is an Assistant Professor in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. His research focuses on how federal and institutional agents grapple with contemporary issues in their daily practice and how their practices in turn shape the high school to college transition of minoritized students.

Milagros (Host): Also with us is Dr. Liz Cantu. She is a Communications residential faculty member at Estrella Mountain Community College in Arizona. Her research focuses on first-generation college student experiences, educational access, and equity of marginalized students in higher education.

Milagros (Host): We also have with us Dr. Lewis Andrea Brownlee, who works in academic advisement at Estrella Mountain Community College and is also an instructor at Arizona State University. He is an educator who has taught in K-12 schools, Community College, and a University for over a decade. His passion lies in educating teachers in the art of meeting the holistic needs of students-of-color. I'm really looking forward to this conversation. Thank you all for joining us and being part of this podcast episode.

Omar (Host): Today's episode focuses on anti racist, teaching and community colleges, but before we dig into how that shows up in the classroom, let's get a bit situated about who community college students really are, and on that note, Kenny, given your research on community colleges. What's your take about who community colleges serve and what needs to be kept in mind by faculty who teach at community colleges?

Kenny (Guest): Yeah, thanks so much, Omar. So I'd like to begin by sharing a little bit of a backdrop of community colleges as well as its students and then also I'd like to end by sharing some strengths that our community colleges have. So, it's well known that colleges are a really important sector of the U.S. higher education landscape however it's also forgotten. It's under researched, underfunded, and really deserves our attention that we give the prominence that community colleges deserve. There are about 1500 degree granting community colleges in the U.S., which are about 4th of the degree granting institutions in the U.S.

Kenny (Guest): In 2018, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated there about 5.6 Million students who are enrolled in two year institutions. That's about 2 Million for attending full-time and 3.6 Million who are attending part-time. We'll talk about that in just a little second. The Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, estimates that about 44% of all undergraduate students in the 2017-2018 academic year were enrolled in community college. However, the enrollment trends in community colleges really are quite sporadic. So, between a period of 2010 and 2017, we've actually seen a drop of about 23% of students who are enrolled in community colleges.

Kenny (Guest): Now, in terms of the age, there are a lot of students, you know, about 37% of community college students who are age 30 or older and the community college sector graduates about 1 Million students each year.

Now I mentioned, and sort of foreshadowed this a little bit, but community colleges enroll a higher percentage of students who are racially and ethnically minoritized, right? Lower income as well as first generation attendees, right? And these are some of the strengths that I'll talk about a little bit having to do with community colleges.

Kenny (Guest): So about 27% of Hispanic students are enrolled in community colleges, 13% Black. 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American 1%, and multiracial students comprise about 4% of community college enrollments. So, very higher percentages of racially and ethnically minoritized students are enrolled in community colleges with 55% of Hispanic undergraduates. 45% Asian undergraduates and 44% of black undergraduate students are enrolled in the community college sector.

Kenny (Guest): Just a little bit more data and information to frame our conversation before I wrap up to talk about the strengths of community colleges. In terms of low income, right, close to 70% of community college students in the 2018-2019 academic year were coming from households of less than \$50,000. And in terms of 1st gen college students, right, in 2015-2016 about 64% of students were first generation students who are attending community colleges, and that's defined as parents who do not hold a bachelor's degree.

Kenny (Guest): So, I share these sort of demographic figures, because I think it's really important to think about them. So we get a composition or sort of a picture of what the community college landscape looks like and its importance to think around antiracist and Intersectional pedagogical practices that are occurring in the community college sector. Now, I think it's important, while I love that our conversation is going to focus in the classroom, I also want to plant a seed. I think it's important for us to think about practices that are occurring outside of the classroom that faculty can also foster and think about how they can also be better supporting antiracist, not just pedagogical practices, but also their actions and how they're better supporting our students in community colleges.

Kenny (Guest): Now, let me talk about the strengths and I think there are many many strengths that community colleges have. I'm not going to have an opportunity to shed light on all of them but I thought it'd be important to just talk about a couple that I hope will help inform our rich conversation today. So, we often talk about community colleges being a people's college, right? As a gateway for educational Kenny

(Guest): opportunities for many communities. Though some scholars have critiqued that it truly is not really sort of open access as it purports to be in many instances. Think of restrictive remedial policies, transfer policies, and other sort of accountability policies that do not really sort of afford greater access. However, we do know, right, that community colleges do have an open access mission, right? So many institutions are just allowing for GED or high school graduation for entry into most programs. There are some exceptions, but in many programs in the community college sector.

Kenny (Guest): Community colleges are the most affordable post secondary education option, as well. It's about a third cheaper than the cost of public 4-year institution tuition. So it absolutely is a way that affords greater access. It's also an institution type that is more geographically accessible for rural communities as well as our Native American populations, right? If we're thinking about TCU's, right? So, it's really important that we also think about geographic accessibility as well, in addition to thinking about access. Community colleges are well situated to better address the academic needs of learners they're serving. They normally have friendlier policies and practices to students who enroll part time, racially and ethnically diverse students, right, and it's considered to be the most flexible higher education sector to meet the needs of the community as well as the workforce development needs.

Kenny (Guest): I could go on and on talking about more strengths of community colleges, but I'll just pause and sort of leave it there. And I hope that this has been helpful to frame around the conversation we'll be having today.

Milagros (Host): Kenny, thank you for that context because it shows how varied the demographics are of students who are attending community colleges and the necessity for people who work at community colleges to have a framework of agility, you know, to be able to really change and meet the needs of a distinct population. So, I really appreciate that context. I'm curious, Liz and Lewis, given your experience teaching at the community college can you share a bit more about how your teaching is informed by the students you serve and teach?

Liz (Guest): Thank you so much, so I would actually say, kind of when Kenny was giving some of the really great statistics about community colleges and who they serve I wanted to share that the college that I work at, which is Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, Arizona, actually has 67% of our student population is first generation. Within the system that we work in, which is the Maricopa County Community College District, half of the students that attend, and we've got about 200,000 total that attend our community college system, where we are one of the largest in the nation, about half of them are first generation students, and as Kenny mentioned, right, first generation students often come from lower socioeconomic status, many times different immigration statuses as well. There is also the racial ethnic diversity and so actually, that is one of the reasons why I feel like community colleges are such an important intervention point, and such an important accessible point to education for any student or community member that is interested in really attaining a higher education degree.

Liz (Guest): The reason why I said community member is because I used to work at Arizona State University, and I had the privilege of working with the community college system, and to do a specific

program and in the program, right? What was really interesting about that program was that the majority of people that were attending the program that we were offering were above 30 years old and I remember that for the funders for this project when they were thinking about the grant that we had, they thought it was going to be 16 year olds, 18 year old students that were following that traditional path. And what was really fascinating was that it was actually not. It was a lot of people who are coming back to college to re-skill, re-tool, um, you know, and to hear the stories of the individuals that were participating in this program. Really? Kind of, I think for me was like, uh, I need to be working in the community colleges. Right? Cause this is the population that I really want to serve. One, I should say, I started off in the community college system, because again, for the accessibility that it had for my family and so, um, it was just kind of this really interesting revelation and it was because of that, that I decided to sort of move to the community college system from the university system.

Liz (Guest): There's so much more I can say about how it informs but I think I wanted to provide the context as to how, and why I'm where I am at this moment in my career. I think it's just really important because community college systems often are that important intervention for a lot of communities that are historically underserved and underrepresented in higher education. We need to do a service to these students to sort of, one, help them help them feel like they belong within higher education, right? Two, how do we get them the skills and the knowledge and the credentials that they need in order to get a career, or get a job opportunity that will help them advance not just in terms of their personal professional goals. But also, in terms of their financial stability, right? The one thing I will share and then I will give it over to my colleague Lewis here is, I think you hear from a lot of students that the reason why they are in college is not just for themselves they're in colleges to help their family, they're in colleges to advance for opportunities that their parents or their family members haven't had. And I think that that again is one of the reasons why I am so committed to helping students, feel like they belong and to help students persist. Because it is not just about them. It's kind of this collective sort of, I mean, college for my people, my community, mi gente, and that's where I feel that I have a responsibility to the student. To me they're not just students in my class. It is a family, it is a community behind them, and so I really feel that sense of commitment to really wanting to help them succeed.

Milagros (Host): That's really powerful Liz and Lewis, I'm curious to hear your perspective here but in response to what I'm hearing I feel like, well, you said was really powerful, it kind of struck my heart a bit because it's about community uplift. It seems to me that going to a community college for many students, particularly the ones that you're speaking about and also, maybe from your own personal experience. It sounds like you started at the community college as well. That it's not just an access point into higher education. But it is a commitment to uplift. One's own family and community, so it's like the whole community is going to college. One's committed to college students are pursuing their education and that's really powerful. So, thank you for putting that out there. Lewis are your thoughts?

Lewis (Guest): I think we're going out a great path because Kenny gives this demographic, right, painting of the student populations that are there and then Liz goes out and goes and does a great job of highlighting the why, right? Why students are going to school and I think a lot of times that is absent from the data. But I think and top of that, now, we know the demographics and that we know that 67% of

students in America are first generation. I think that the next question should be who's going to be the nurturer of these students right? That's the question. And so for me I am always focused on, I used to just focus on teaching education preparation, right, and so to not look at diversity as a negative thing, but more of as a positive. And I found it interesting that you look at anthropology, archaeology, they look at diversity as a positive right?

Lewis (Guest): You have a multiplicity of insects and plants and you have this ecosystem and so that's what we're looking at is this ecosystem. How can we keep this ecosystem to where it's producing you know, great results and to me, I used to just be focused on anti racist training with teachers and at our local universities, people doing implicit bias courses, discriminatory practices, they need to be examined and things of that nature, but also being in Student Affairs I realize that a lot of that anti-blackness, right, anti-diversity those narratives are there as well. And so those injuries can happen there before they even show up in Dr. Cantu's class, right, and now she's working trying to get the student caught up because they have been injured. And so to me, well, if you're going to be doing this antiracist teaching, Student and Academic Affairs have to have to be there. And what we have to understand is that we live in a very patriarchal white supremacist society and so, in the viewpoint of [Frantz Fanon](#), the black psychologists, the racist psychologists, and looked at racism through a psychological impact. What he says is that when these types of injustices are so prevalent, it becomes the norm we don't see these injuries.

Lewis (Guest): What I find amazing is when I go to graduation and I see all these future teachers go across the stage, I am concerned, because are they going to help our students or hurt our students? Right? That's what my concern is so we got to look at the system in totality and understand this is this institution a form of social reproduction? Is it a form of cultural reproduction or are we increasing the level of as well as [Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#). Are we lifting them to be able to not just on a degree or to earn a certification but to also be critically thinking to change the way our society is at large and so antiracist teaching happens at the university but it also happens in Students Affairs is well, collectively, because if not, what we see is that these things are, they're producing a form of Jim Crow. They're just, you know what I mean? So yeah, it's student population is diverse, but your faculty population is not diverse, your administration population is not diverse, right? And so I think those are things we have to examine, like, what is actually being taught?

Lewis (Guest): So, we have these students come in, as Kenny showed, from very diverse populations, as Dr. Cantu showed many of them are first generation college students. Now, the question should be is who's putting this knowledge in their heads right? Because, you know, as a professor, your classroom is your domain. And a lot of times we hide behind this, this narrative of academic freedom. And it can be an injury sometimes to students if you don't understand students and their "why" which is very important, right, and so "oh, I don't see color." That's an injury. You need to see color, you need to see race, you need to see ethnicity. And so I think the biggest challenge is trying, especially at the community college level, even higher education is trying to get faculty members to look at themselves and say, "yeah, you know, you do a decent job, but you can do things better." And it's going to take a movement such as when Michael Jackson talks about in *Man in the Mirror*. You have to look in the mirror to really ask

yourself: are you really lifting students up to where they're at and so that's the way I look at it. From the time of the Outreach, Omar did Outreach, to the time we get them to their academic goals we got to look at what the level of information is being displayed to the student. Is it going to get them to where they need to be? Or will it get them off track?

Milagros (Host): Lewis says that's really interesting because what you're making me think about is that Nancy races teaching at the community college in particular given all that you have all shared so far about the unique dynamics that make up the community college, um, it requires anti races teaching at the community college to be more of an institutional ethos. So, in other words, this anti racist teaching is something that happens in and outside of the classroom at the community college. It has to happen through the programming, it has to happen in the classroom and even has to happen in the way the community college connects with and draws and builds relationships with the community itself so really it's a more comprehensive view of the way in which anti races teaching maybe gets employed, or can be employed at a community college and a community college unique context is almost perfect for that institutional ethos approach to be enacted.

Milagros (Host): You also made me think of the second thing, which I was just referring to in a presentation yesterday. You said, sometimes faculty hide behind this academic freedom point and I always thought of academic freedom as a positive thing and being able to teach freely without worry that you could lose your job, you know, about giving certain perspectives in a classroom, but Dr. Anna Neumann actually has an [article](#) about why subject matter matters and in that she writes about students' freedom to learn. So, when we think about freedom in the university, I feel like it has been positioned for, like, what's freedom that faculty have? But you, what you just said, made me think about what is the institutional responsibility towards the freedom for students to learn without being harmed? I appreciate what you shared, and I'm curious where anybody else may want to comment on what has been put at the table here, so I'd like to open the conversation to anybody else who wants to react or comment.

Liz (Guest): So some of the things that I do, I just know that we, I think, wanted to talk a little bit about intersectionality today. And I think it's really important, at least for me, I teach communication courses at EMCC. My favorite class to teach is Intercultural Communication because it really asks students to really kind of consider sort of how it is that they are, they don't exist in a vacuum. They're a part of communities. They're a part of diverse communities, but they are agents for change within those communities as well. And so sometimes we often do activities about sort of intersectionality to really sort of not only show students how they are complex individuals but also, like, where they have, perhaps entry points to have agency within their communities.

Liz (Guest): So, I'll give you an example with me. I tell my students that I feel as a first generation, daughter of two Mexican immigrants, right? My ability to get a PhD, the support that my family gave me all of that. Uh, you know, the support of a great mentor and the support of my community has helped me get to this point. And so, as I have continued on with my degree and as I've continued to advance in my career in the U.S., I almost feel sometimes that that has taken me away from my family's roots and has taken me away from even like, where my family lives right? And so, in many ways, people see what I

have a lot as privilege. Right? And maybe, it's the privilege that I have in terms of a lot, you know a Latinx woman who is in higher education cause I know I'm holding the, you know, I, I have a very big spot to fill in terms of the fact that in academia. We need to continue to diversify kind of like the way colleague Lewis here said.

Liz (Guest): At the same time, right? Like, I sometimes, I feel like all of that power and privilege that it's giving me in the United States, and that it's giving me, you know, maybe in academia, it's kind of also kind of taking something away in terms of my family, right? And so I struggle with that and that's something that I do. Those are the types of conversations I like to have with my students, right? It's like, how do you find how do you balance between those kinds of dialectical tensions that exist in the complexity that happens within the social systems that we're a part of you know, and then again, of course, like, I always say, right but my entry point going back to intersectionality is well, if I have this power and privilege, then it's my even more responsibility to advocate for students. So that they continue.

Liz (Guest): So, it's almost like this idea that that it's not it doesn't have to be one or the other. But I like for students to sort of feel those tensions and to sometimes process those tensions with me because I think that that just again shows that yes, we are a part of these systems and the systems have a historical context but maybe that through that exploration where we can also find entry points to sort of figure out how we can make smaller interventions and smaller opportunities for systemic change within this little micro sort of moments, right? So, sometimes Dr. Brownlee and I, we work a lot on diversity, equity, and inclusion work at our college and it's daunting, right, to think higher education, such a privileged institution: what is our locus of control? And how can we maybe change some of the things we say, the interventions within our classroom activities within our classroom? The dialogue within our classroom that really helps kind of foster that growth mindset in students.

Liz (Guest): But also, that helps students be empowered to say, you know, that I can actually change something about my, you know, my condition, or I can actually go protest and I understand. Now, why protesting and civil disobedience is such an important thing for me to embark on. So, I'm kind of all over the place here, but I guess I'm trying to process all of this as I'm talking right? Is to sort of say, intersectionality, what's powerful about it is it helps us examine ourselves, but at the same time, what I always think is find entry points into how we leverage our position within the systems that we're a part of.

Lewis (Guest): Once when Liz was talking to, she mentioned the term intersectionality. I think typically, when we use that term we think about us and our intersectionalities with our identities, but I think we kind of can also transmute that to the process of this thing, we call education so intersectionality between the community college, the community, the business is at hand and so to me, because I like, I list, keep talking about my, my privilege, I have to do something with my privilege. I think one of the disservice that we do to students is, we do teach and this vacuum, right? Where it's like, you come into the class and I'm teaching you how to do a widget but I'm not really telling you that as a woman of color when you apply for this job it's five times more likely that a white man would get this job, right?

Lewis (Guest): We're not being honest about that. So that's intersectionality also with the anti racism. So it's not just about using our culture, relevant education. That is very important. I'm a big fan of that, but it's also letting them know when you graduate from here, you're going to run into some issues out there, right? And that's one of my privileges, this one of the reasons I kind of got into teaching because I've seen in the workplace as an engineer. Like, man, this is wrong, you know, a lot of tokenism and glass ceilings that were there and stereotypes I try to overcome, and so when I advise students and I teach students, I let them know your culture is very important. It's valuable. However, when you walk off this campus, I'll just use me as an example, I'm always, I don't like the police. I'll just be honest. I'm always in constant, I get high levels of anxiety when I see them, because I know even though I have a doctorate, I'm still just as [James Baldwin](#) says, I like how he puts like, "the Negro problem is your problem, because I'm not a Negro, right?" The Negroes are a figment of your imagination. I'm not that. But, however, you materialize punishment and oppression towards me based on your imagination. So I'm definitely aware of that. And so I agree with Liz that when we talk to students, we have to communicate those ideas.

Lewis (Guest): But at the same time, we got to prepare them for life. Like, we do our own children, right? You can run it by so you're going to fall, you're going to crash and skin your knee, but that's not the end of the world. And I feel like at the community college, we have a better chance of doing that and maybe at the university, well, a lot of time the focus is on research and building the lives of students and that's what I enjoyed when I was at Clayton State College and University. My first, got into school, was that I had, I could get it was really my academic advisors, not faculty. They kept me in school. They are the ones that told me you can do it, to stay in it. Hey, if you don't get this degree, you know how hard it is for a black man in a society without a degree like, those are the conversations we had, right and the data shows, if a black man has a degree, he's less likely to go to prison. He's less likely to go to jail. Not saying he won't. But he's less likely to and so it was almost like these are forms of deterrence against white supremacy, right? Against patriarchal supremacy, against homophobia, against these types of things that are in society. So, I want to look at intersectionality. I don't really like being limited to people, which is people as Kimberly Crenshaw points out, but I also think of intersectionality as Liz has talked about, like, okay, I've seen the system, right? I've talked to the wiz, I've pulled back the curtain. He's not real. Let me tell you what's going to go on outside of this campus, and we're going to do some form of anti-oppression and in a variation, so yeah.

Omar (Host): Lewis, your comments made me think about the higher education trajectory of students and how CCs can be a very nurturing environment but we can also harm them as they enter the system and oftentimes even before that takes place. One of my mentors, who is also an educator, shared with me that she's in disbelief with how often educators and administrators forget that they once didn't know. We all once didn't know how to complete a college application, how to apply for FAFSA, how to send a proper email, and so much more! How can we nurture students before, during, and after their college trajectory, as you eloquently mentioned Lewis. It's super valuable to be straight up with them and their parents and the family unit overall. By not sharing valuable information with them, we're essentially doing them a disservice. Lewis, you mentioned a very interesting word, "injuries," and it reminded me of our concept of remedial coursework and I've come to envision it as a chronic injury that should have been addressed years before. And unfortunately in those situations, institutions put the burden to catch up both in terms of

time and money on the student, who already has so many responsibilities on their shoulders. I just really want to uplift your choice in using the word "injuries" because I think many students, specifically students of color, are suffering at institutions at the moment and more should be done to address the humanity of this situation. I'd like to pass it back to Milagros.

Milagros (Host): At this point, wondering, Liz and Lewis, what is one piece of advice you would provide our audience on enacting antiracist teaching in community colleges with a focus on intersectionality, kind of going from the conversation we're having on intersectionality. And Kenny, too, if you can join that list bit of the conversation if you can come in at the end, after Liz and Lewis, and take us back to where we started and help us make a connection in terms of antiracist teaching in community colleges and how we can make it relevant in terms of policy at community colleges. So, I'd like to turn it back to Liz and Lewis, I'd love to get your perspective.

Liz (Guest): Haha I wanted to give you more time. I've spoken a lot and I wanted to give you more time. So, I think that many times people, there's a perception in our society that, like, community colleges, or even training schools are not valuable, or they're for the students that weren't able to get into college. I definitely think as a society and as a nation, we need to really reframe and really understand that if anything community colleges are a very valuable intervention or educational institution within our society. You know, in Arizona we have, and I don't know the full history about it, but I know our, um, community college system is uh, even though it does have some state money, um, attached to the funding, it's very little. Um, and there's a historical background that I don't know enough about, but I definitely feel that there needs to be perhaps more investment, um, within community colleges and not just investment in terms of, uh, the, um, in terms of you know, like, the I think that needs to be more investment also, in the services that we provide is what I'm trying to say.

Liz (Guest): You know, I think that many times what I have heard since going from the university over to the college system is, oh, well, colleges have such, like, lean budgets and because of that, we can only do this. And I feel that. And so, sometimes, when I bring in examples from what I see, other 4 year institutions doing, or what other universities are doing, people feel like it's not possible to do at our college. Like the imagination just, I guess, isn't there? Because I kind of feel sometimes like it is, like, resources are one thing, right? But as we kind of mentioned, how do we leverage community partnerships? Right. Um, how do we, um, perhaps, uh, you know, think creatively about some of the ways that we can provide better wrap-around support services for students. And then, I think also, kind of going a little bit into what Kenny mentioned about under research, I think, because maybe we don't fully understand a lot of these nuances of the community college system compared to the university.

Liz (Guest): Maybe that's why there's sort of, um, a lack of understanding about not only the importance of community colleges within our higher education landscape, but also the opportunities, right? Like, if we do research, then we can have better opportunities to figure out how to solve problems. Um, you know, and maybe even how to again have more partnerships that can help sometimes um. Uh, meet the needs of students or the needs of communities in a way that we haven't even thought yet. I really feel that has helped us be creative and helped us kind of reimagine education. I hope that that doesn't stop. Uh, even

after we have settled into our life posts, the pandemic, because I think that we need to continue having those, those discussions because um, and I haven't had a chance to talk about entrepreneurial mindset because I'm very big into that within my students is this idea of, I want you to think, um, and be adaptable and be flexible. Right?

Liz (Guest): Because that is the 21st century for us. Our technology's going to continue to change. Our knowledge is going to continue to change. Maybe some of the systemic stuff is still constant, but if we have more innovative thought, and an ability to reimagine, we cannot continue to accept the institutions that we're a part of are not able to be changed. Right? And then again, that's why I sort of feel like that tool change agency is important for students. The idea is that we're trying to transform right? Not just the student, but the social, the society, the community.

Lewis (Guest): So, for me, I think that as a resource we need to tap into, because they can tell you how to navigate and deal with these students. So, I think a lot of times what we do, and I am not a fan of this at all. I'm totally against this. I don't like when we go hire these big name people. You pay them \$32,000 dollars to give a speech and then you never see them again. Like I am. I don't think that's a trend that I want to participate in. I think it's better if you're going to do that to partner with the people who have been through the system and come up with new ideas. Liz is talking about being imaginative. So, I was not recently, well a couple of months ago. I was being interviewed about what is the solution to homelessness, and I told her, well, go talk to homeless people. Like, they're going to tell you how they end up where they are. Everybody's not homeless because they're lazy. It's a cornucopia of reasons. So if Liz is a first generation college student, I'm a first generation college student, and we're say 40% of your faculty and staff are college students and use them as resources because they can give you the knowledge that you need to make sure that you reach these students. Good, bad or indifferent.

Lewis (Guest): We're the ones that went through the system, right? We're the ones with the tenacity. We're the ones with the testimonies as me and Liz are constantly trying to push our campuses. These counter narratives are sharing stories, not for the sake of sharing stories, but this is rich qualitative data, right? So, like, the reason I went to college is not the same reason that Liz went to college, but I can tell you our testimonies would be very similar. I literally went to college because I didn't want to go to jail. I was so scared in my community because George Bush and Clinton had a war on drugs and a war on crime, which was a world black, poor people. And when I learned about the Pell Grant, I ran to the university and went to that's why I went to school. However, I knew that going into a classroom that these teachers don't care about me. How did I know that? Because they didn't care about me in high school. So why would they care about me at the community college?

Lewis (Guest): University classes are so big, I don't think they have the bandwidth to even kind of connect. And so I think, and so, right now, I know Liz is doing a wonderful study where she's going to be interviewing students. Am I correct through Title V? And I'm partnering my study with her study where I'm interviewing all of the black employees and asking them, what are some qualities that Student Affairs possess and Academic Affairs, who possess to better serve students, right? And so it's going to be about 20 participants. I'm working with IRB right now to get that data. But I think we overlooked the people

who've come through the pipeline. Like, I would love to talk to Omar and say, man, how did you make it? You know, and get 20 Omar's together and come up with a study and say these are 5 qualities, compassionate and loving, caring or whatever. And then how do we get that? I think a lot of the time our hubris and our egos get in the way of who we are important versus meeting the student's needs, right?

Lewis (Guest): And so if you're first generation, a college student, you're just trying to survive that first year. You're just trying to make it and so, but you still have questions in your head and so to have mentors is very important. I didn't have a mentor when I was in college, but I would have benefited from it. The closest thing I had to mentor was my academic advisor. She was amazing. And so, I think, and I cut this short because I figure, like, I mean, and a half left, but I could assure it, but I think. Human beings, if your budget is tight, that you should be leaning away more your human resources, right? Not Human Resources Department, but the employees of the campus to come up with solutions, you have creative people on your campus, they can give you answers versus always looking outside at other people to come and solve something that you really have the skill set to do on your own campus, you have people with doctor degrees, multiple doctorate degrees, multiple masters degrees, but instead you look outside. I don't I don't understand that. You have people right here. That could tell you this is what we need right? But I think you just, I'll just come down to just valuing people as contributors to solve the problem, and I think we overlooked that, so.

Kenny (Guest): So, you know, I'm loving, Lewis and Liz, how you're how you're encouraging us to think at a more macro level, and thinking about about issues from an intersectional perspective and how there are social systems that are absolutely impacting the things are looking, like, sort of on the ground and community colleges and and in the classroom itself, and I'd like for us to think a little bit about public policies, right, and how that is evidenced around anti racism towards the community college students, and the staff members that work there right? When we talk about community colleges, I think it's important that we talk about the financial hardships that community colleges face around how they're disproportionately funded by the state governments and by local governments and how those contributions should be larger. So, for looking at what that looks like in terms of inequities, it sits over \$8,000, that community colleges get less as compared to 4 year institutions, right? I don't want to pin 4 year institutions against 2 year institutions. I don't right, but I think it's important that we go ahead and call out those equities in Connecticut. That gap is \$14,000, right? In Arizona where you are Liz that's \$9,000 close to \$9,000 to the gap. Right? So it's really important that we talk about the inequities that exist in relation to funding.

Kenny (Guest): That is really, really important that we go ahead and highlight. Now. Why does that matter? Right? Because we can't have more full time faculty who are teaching in community colleges. Right? It is really important to be able to help support students in the ways that we've been describing and talking about today not just in the classroom, but also outside of the classroom establishing policies that are going to be more welcoming for our BIPOC students are documented students, and older age students, like, we've been talking about et cetera in addition to that, right? What does additional funding could do? Right? It could create anti racist pedagogical practices and really sort of foster training around that for our faculty for our adjunct faculty to really sort of be able to think about how we could to use a

term that you used Liz and I've been thinking quite a bit as well. So, I loved when you said this is "imagine," right? How can we imagine a classroom in the community college sector, right that really centers the needs of the diverse learners that we spoke about earlier today. The other thing that I think is really important also for us to think about is how public policy decisions and those discourses are shaping the community college sector.

Kenny (Guest): All right, so what I mean by that, right? We often have public policies that frame community colleges and its students from a deficit perspective, right? And that's really problematic, right. So we have public policies that favor full time student enrollment over part time student enrollment and how it disproportionately impacts our community college learners, right? Financial aid is a great example of that and how that's evidenced. In addition to that right, think about remedial education, right? How remedial education is sort of placed often and some systems right? CUNY in New York City, like, how does that go ahead and help frame faculty's understanding of learners in their classroom right and how could that perhaps seep into the way that our community college faculty and agile think about students and our learners if we're going ahead and framing them from that deficit perspective, those are things that I find to be particularly concerning, for sure.

Lewis (Guest): If I can comment on that I think the greatest assumption that we have is when faculty show up, they're complete, right? Because we're grading them on the mastery of their knowledge of the content right? Not their ability to nurture and love and so compassion towards students. I think that's the biggest problem, right? And so, as long as I can master my content, I don't have to look at maybe some microaggressions or microaggressions that I project. I don't have to look at my anti racist the way I build my syllabus, right, that may be very exclusionary and it's just like a hidden curriculum. I can look at the syllabus. I realized oh, you don't value me as a person. To look at our implicit biases where I lean towards more than one group of students and another. And so when students come out of these Teacher Education programs the assumption I think a lot of times is that they, they, they know what they're doing in reference to this when my dissertation examined this idea of alternative pathways of certification. And because Arizona, we have a large gap in the sense of we need more teachers and so we do these emergency certifications, right? So I can literally go into a school district and I even have a bachelors degree, but if they need a warm body in this class, they will give an emergency certification. I haven't taken any pedagogical classes.

Lewis (Guest): They don't know if I even like students and then if I have a bachelors degree, I can go and get a teacher certification but I never take an anti racist class or a multicultural education class or class on gender or anything of that nature to make me look at the mirror myself or even a class on poverty, right? And so the policies, dealing with finances, also the policies impact because the Arizona Department of Education determines what students are going to learn in their program and so we can kind of start there. So I remember just when I was teaching high school I would hear statements like that student is a waste of flesh, right, I would hear some faculty say, oh, she's that girl, Tina, she'd be pregnant by the time she graduates like, these are things that I heard. I'm like, well, why are you teaching?

Lewis (Guest): I had a teacher. I was about to say this name right now. I'm going to hold this name back for this podcast but he said that Mexicans are biologically/genetically designed to work in agriculture because they're short, and they can pick cabbage and those types. I was just blown away. Now, this is a person who has a certification and teaching but we need a certification in anti racism. We need a certification and love and compassion when a certification for social justice and it's not mastery of content that's what the issue is to me. So, these policies agree. These policies also determine what these teachers or potential teachers or potential professors are going to learn that will diffuse to our students and so if you look at them in a negative way, you can't, you can't teach somebody in an equitable way, if you look down upon them, right. And so we have to be honest about ourselves and be like yeah, I'm not all that. You know, I struggled, I didn't know everything too and just being honest and I think that our ability is what makes you a better teacher.

Liz (Guest): I want to just say one more thing, because I know we're running short on time. Um. Absolutely, what my colleague said, uh, I always think about when it comes to my educational experience do I think back on that fantastic test that I took, or that, you know, I don't, I think back to the teacher that took time to get to know me that had an ethos of care. Um, that was invested in my education and how I did, that's who I look like. That's what I remember. Right and so, at the end of the day, it's about humanity right? Um, and in higher education, I think, like, we say, we privilege the knowledge, we privilege the credentials. Not always thinking about whether it's really in service to the humanity of all of us.

Omar (Host): We would like to extend our gratitude to today's guests, Dr. Kenny Nienhusser, Dr. Liz Cantu, and Dr. Lewis Brownlee for their valuable insight and powerful narratives that showcased what guides their work. Today's conversation reinforced the idea that community colleges play a huge role in the lives of families and there's potential to put the "community" back in community colleges. To find the resources noted during our conversation, please visit cetl.uconn.edu and click on the banner for the H.E.A.R.T. podcast.

Omar (Host): We hope you'll join us for our next episode, where we'll be talking about antiracist teaching and indigeneity. Our guests for that episode include Dr. Sandy Grande who is a Professor of Political Science and Native American and Indigenous Studies at the University of Connecticut and Dr. Chris Nelson who is a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Denver. We thank them in advance for the rich conversation and learning they will share with us!

Omar (Host): We would also want to thank the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Office for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Connecticut for all their support to make this podcast possible. "Because it takes a village and it takes heart."

Resources Noted

- [CCRC at Teachers College, Columbia University](#)
- [Frantz Fanon](#)
- [Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#)
- [Dr. Anna Neumann article](#)
- [James Baldwin](#)