Royel M. Johnson:

So, before we jump into today's episode, it's important that we acknowledge that this conversation was recorded on the land of the Tongva and Chumash peoples. Panelists joined us from colonized lands throughout North America. We recognize the Tongva, Chumash, and all indigenous nations, tribes, and peoples for being historical and continual caretakers of these lands.

Felecia Commodore:

In three, two, one...

Royel M. Johnson:

Greetings, ASHE family, and welcome to season two of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. That's right, we're back. And this year, we are focused on the purposes, politics and practices of higher education. You remember me, I am your co-host, Dr. Royel Johnson, Associate Professor of Higher Education and Social Work at the University of Southern California, and director of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates. And shout out to the Rossier School of Education for being a co-sponsor this year. How cool is it that I get to work with my friend, who needs no introduction, Dr. Felecia Commodore?

Felecia Commodore:

Thanks, Royel. I'm your other co-host, Dr. Felecia Commodore, Associate Professor at Old Dominion University, in the Higher Education and Community College programs. And we're back for another season of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. As we're gearing up for our ASHE annual meeting this year in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we are really excited to be at it again and have the conversations, to talk and learn more about what it means to really do and walk out this field of research and higher education.

So as my co-host mentioned, this year's conference theme is higher education, purposes, politics and practices. As we embark on this year's journey, in unpacking our theme and exploring, to quote Gwendolyn Brooks, "Seeing beyond the well-tended roses out front," in higher education, we wanted to talk a bit more about what this theme means, hopes for the Association, and the field of higher education. And what can we expect this year in the city of his purple greatness, Prince, and the land of many lakes, Minneapolis, Minnesota? So, Royel, let the people know who is joining us today to kick off the podcast.

Royel M. Johnson:

And who better to learn from than our current ASHE president, Dr. Ana Martinez-Aleman, who is Professor of Education and Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs at Boston College?

So, every episode, we kick off with This or That. It's a small little activity game to sort of break the ice, and you can only pick one of the two options on it. The streets are talking, and I learned that you are a cyclist. Is that correct?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yes, I am.

Royel M. Johnson:

So, a road bike or a mountain bike?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Road.

Royel M. Johnson:
Road.

Felecia Commodore:
Oh. Very strange.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Always.

Royel M. Johnson:
Always. Okay.

Felecia Commodore:
Mountain bikes were always interesting to me, because I had one growing up, but no mountains.

Royel M. Johnson:
So, I never know the difference between the two, actually.

Felecia Commodore:
That's a good...

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
We'll talk. We'll talk.

Royel M. Johnson:
I'm guessing it has something to do with the tires, right?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah, that and just, yes, there's a lot more. We'll talk.

Royel M. Johnson:
Okay.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
There's a martini in here somewhere, right?

Royel M. Johnson:
Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Okay. All right.

Felecia Commodore:
Okay, Ana, next This or That. Facebook versus Twitter?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Oh.

Felecia Commodore:
Uh oh.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Uh oh.

Royel M. Johnson:
Neither.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah, these are categorical choices I don't like. Maybe because I study it too much.

Royel M. Johnson:
I know, that's why we asked it.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah, I know. I'm going to take the fifth on that one.

Royel M. Johnson:
Okay.

Felecia Commodore:
I'm going to say MySpace. No.

Royel M. Johnson:
MySpace?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
No, that's...

Royel M. Johnson:
You're turning back the clock.

Felecia Commodore:
Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Oh yeah.

Felecia Commodore:
It's a good time.

Royel M. Johnson:
I did love MySpace [inaudible], yes.

Felecia Commodore:
The best of times and the worst of times.

Royel M. Johnson:
The best of times and the worst of times. Okay, last one. And this is not to be controversial...

Felecia Commodore:
Yes, it is. But no.

Royel M. Johnson:
Chronicle of Higher Ed versus Inside Higher Ed?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Chronicle.

Royel M. Johnson:
Really? Okay.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
I appreciate a lot of things about Inside Higher Ed. I read both every morning religiously. I like it when academics start to write about something and then sort of about the academic profession, because I don't see that enough in Inside Higher Ed. Doesn't mean I necessarily agree with everything that's there, but it's sort of like a view of the profession that I don't get enough of in Inside Higher Ed.

Royel M. Johnson:
Yeah, I agree.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
But if I had to choose, which clearly you're making me, and I am rule bound in that way, so...

Royel M. Johnson:

I can never figure out how to get behind the paywall with Chronicle. I guess that I got to...

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Go to your library.

Felecia Commodore:
I was about to say, your institution should have a...

Royel M. Johnson:
Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah.

Royel M. Johnson:
It's like I need to be logged in on the VPN or something, on the right internet to get access.

Felecia Commodore:
Yeah. Or you can go to the library and search it out as a journal.

Royel M. Johnson:
Oh.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
That's right. Yeah. Free. That's one of the first links that I put on my syllabus for students.

Royel M. Johnson:
Got it.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Don't pay for that.

Felecia Commodore:
I'm one of those people that when they move somewhere, the first thing they do is get a library card. If I can get it for free, I'm doing it.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
That's right. Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:
I have all the tricks of the trade here.

Royel M. Johnson:

Very nice.

Felecia Commodore:

Well, let's get started. We're really looking forward to this conversation, excited that you're here to kick off our second season of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. So we just want to get started, Ana, and ask if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you're currently engaged in.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Sure. Whenever I get asked this question, the first thing that I think about is, I form so much of my way of being in the world or my sensibility about the world, kind of sort of a pretty classic immigrant case. Right? So I'm a first generation college goer, my first language is not English, I learned to read in another language first. And getting to the crux of the theme for the conference, I learned to read by reading modern late Romantic Period Spanish language poets that my grandmother loved. Some of whom were clearly just about love, and unrequited love in particular, apparently. Like Adolfo Becquer, and then being Cuban, Jose Marti, who was the liberation's poet. And he had a really good way of thinking about the need for... How our ideas about the ethics of democracy are sort of cooked into our ideas about being free, as individuals and communities. So that always resonated with me.

So I'm always, I can point to a lot of the stuff that I do and say, "Oh yeah, that's that, that's from that." I think that the work that I'm doing now does a lot of that. It really tries to get at, well, how are we thinking about what we do? What don't we see? I mean, it's kind of a funny question to ask, right? Because you don't know what you see if you can't see it. But I'm always curious about sort of pulling back the curtain. As a kid, one of my very earliest memories was of, back in the day, The Wizard of Oz was only played once and you had to find out the time and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And we had this tiny little black and white TV, so I never understood the whole color shift until I went to college. You know, when they pulled back the curtain to the wizard, you're like, "Oh."

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

And it wasn't that I hated the wizard, it was almost like, "Oh, I get it. You have to make that move. You have to... Don't be afraid, don't overthink it, just pull back the curtain." So I think that right now, it's what I'm doing, it's the stuff that we've been doing with social media and the next push in the social media agenda. And I always feel that push behind me. What am I not seeing? Don't be afraid to see it.

Royel M. Johnson:

So, part of the responsibility as president of ASHE is coming up with the daunting theme for the conference. Can you talk a little bit about what inspired this year's theme, higher education research, purposes, politics and practices? How did you sort of arrive at this place, and what meaning does it take on for you?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. Timing. I would agree that we're in, quote, unquote, "difficult times." Everybody can hook onto that in some way, right? And then I was thinking about it a lot. By the way, when you two run for ASHE president...

Felecia Commodore:

That's funny.

Royel M. Johnson:

Felecia, before you...

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

I want you each to ask to be reimbursed for your anti-anxiety medication. Or at least, in my case, I went through more Tums than I usually do.

Felecia Commodore:

Sorry.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So, I don't know. And I just said, who are we? Who are we? We're scholars, we're researchers. We have a responsibility to stop and consider, think about, argue about. And I'm Cuban, so arguing is good. No one gets hurt. Then, how is it that all this stuff that's creating all these difficulties, the sociopolitical, religious, economic forces coming at us affect our institutions, the students, the staff, the faculty, the towns we're located in? And all of the ripple effects that that has from sort of the forest level view all the way down to the ground, where students live in their cars.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right? So, I wanted to get at the whole, well, have we thought about our purposes lately? And then how maybe politics helps us to think through and sift through how we've thought about those purposes. And then, when you do that, then you necessarily have to say, "Well, that's great, but what does it mean for what we do?" Right?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So for example, one of the sessions is on the student loan issues. So, given all the nonsense in the House and in the Senate with regard to Biden's loan forgiveness strategy. Right, because in the end, it's about that one student going to that one institution, doing all the things that that student wanted to do, needs to do and has dreams about doing.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So I had to pick something that was big enough, yet could get us to sort of stop and think about these things.

Felecia Commodore:
Yeah, and I think, what I really appreciate about this theme is that I think we are in a space and a place in time where the... I don't know, I've only been on this earth for a few years. But where we really have a public kind of questioning and wrestling with the value of higher education, the purpose of higher education. Is it really worth it? Is it really something we should be aspiring to or supporting?

And so as a field, I think it's a really great moment for us to pause and really think about, who are we? Who are we? What are we here for? What do we think we're here for? Has that shifted and changed since we began as a field of research? And really wrestling with our identity as higher education scholars, but also as a field of practice, and as a part of this larger kind of American project and higher education project globally as well, right? Like, where do we see the next great era of higher education? And I'll often say, I think COVID kind of served as a bookmark to be like, "Okay, we've got to now rethink about, what is the future of higher education?" And I think a good place to start is really wrestling with who we are, what do we want to be, and how do we want to actually practice and do higher education? So I really think that the theme is very timely.

Royel M. Johnson:

So, like you all, I'm a bit of a nerd. At a point in time where I had too much time on my hand, I went back and read a lot of the presidential addresses from the past 10 years.

Felecia Commodore:

You are really a nerd.

Royel M. Johnson:

And I was just sort of...

Felecia Commodore:

Oh my God.

Royel M. Johnson:

I know. I was just sort of fascinated by the recurring themes in so many of the addresses, right? We're constantly at this inflection point. Each year, there is some disruption.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right.

Royel M. Johnson:
There is some social, political context or issue that arises that raises new questions about what we do, what we ought to be doing, how do we connect our work beyond the academy? And it's just like, are we in this sort of perpetual state of crises? Is that sort of the norm?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. First of all, you're both right on point and on target, because I too went back and... And I was at all of them, so, you know.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh is that all? That's how I feel. I was there.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

And I remember all of them. No, I really had to go back and read some of them. But the reality was that, oh, right, we are all... All the themes and then all the presidential, whatever it is, talks, keynote, whatever, all have that in common, right? And frankly, I can argue that that's one of the most important things to do with it. Because it has to be big enough to say to the membership, "Hey, I'm embracing this, and I'm embracing you, and we're all in this," because I'm implicated by this, in a myriad of ways, and some of which I don't even know yet. But all of them have that in common, that we need to reckon with ourselves, for lack of a better way of saying it.

And that's good. I mean, we all do it in a different way, we all bring in different things. It's the beauty of having a presidential fingerprint on the Association, to say, "Right, that crazy Cuban asked us to think about poetry." Or whatever the case may be. But it was all with the same idea in mind, that same goal, to have us say, "We do this stuff. What is that stuff about? Have you looked at it recently? What's in your blind spots?" Kind of thing. And that's a good thing. I just think that we all do it differently, and yeah, you're right.

Felecia Commodore:

I think also, and to lead into our next question, but I think also, one of the things I often think about, particularly when we think about organizational change or change overall, is that I think one of the things that happens when we reflect on the idea, the concept, of revolution or change, when we look at movements that have happened historically, I think we often see them as shorter than what they were. Right?

And so I think one of the things that I like with seeing kind of a continuity of us wrestling with these ideas is that we aren't lured into thinking that revolution doesn't take time. And so we are sitting and wrestling, and continue to wrestle, as opposed to a more vapid, kind of superficial approach of saying, "Oh, let's deal with this thing, and then next year, we've moved on and everything's okay," because that's not the reality of how real deep change and revolution work. And it takes time and wrestling and unpacking and deconstructing and reconstructing. And so, to know that we continue to have that line of continuity makes me believe that we may not be where we should be, but we're moving in that direction, and really doing some deep change work.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. I mean, look, it's all, to me, about realizing that it's one big experiment, right? In the sense that, I mean, and it fits with who we are as social scientists, it fits who we are in our ideas about where we sit politically and socially, et cetera, that lots of things are going to require us to fail.

I mean, part of my thinking has... Because I've been greatly influenced by how a lot of dead white guys thought about this existential crisis around democracy, and how what they all had in common was the realization that, goodness, it's not prepackaged. And we're going to really be terrible at some things, and we have to figure out how to engage in this experiment. And I do think that that's how I think as a social

scientist, is like, I look back at stuff that I did, whatever, 20 years ago and I think, "Okay, I wouldn't do that this way now," or, "I didn't see that then." And that's a good thing. I don't kick myself for it because I couldn't have known then what I know now. But it is about that willingness, because part of that willingness is to be okay with risk. Right? And I like risk. I'm not stupid. I'm a pragmatist at heart. But so there's risks that I can see worth taking. And they're not easy decisions, necessarily, but I think that that's... When I look at some of the really key changes in social science historically, have been about taking that particular risk at that point in time, and look, the great qualitative research experiment, right?

Felecia Commodore:

Right. You brought up how you forced us to think about poetry, which is exciting to me. I'm a big poetry fan. And in addition to the theme this year, one thing that has resonated with many people is the Gwendolyn Brooks poem. And so when you announced the theme at the end of the 2022 conference, you quoted Brooks and said, "Brooks' poem is a reminder to me that part of being a social scientist is acknowledging and allowing the want to see something besides my well-tended roses out front, the well-established confining fences of my present and my past that keep me from the possibilities of a future unmet." Could you tell us more about that, and how you saw that quote related to the work that we're doing in the conference this year?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. I think that that poem has always resonated with me, because I resonate a lot with, again, pulling the curtain back, peeking in the backyard. And then in thinking about us, the membership, what we do as a scholarly field, I've thought a lot about, yeah, we're supposed to be asking questions about society, about social relationships. And if you do that, I mean, in this case, in the context of higher education, you're necessarily going to have to ask about change, about correction, about adjustment, about transformation. And if you are somebody like me who thinks very critically about that, as in with a capital C, it means that I'm necessarily deliberating on, thinking about, things like power and the ways that it affects our relationships in our institutions, how it affects our institutions, our comportment as a society, our comportment as a membership, our ability to be blind to our own indifferences, right? So, because we're all in that space where there's no sense of purity, as it were.

So I often think about that poem, and then I thought about that poem again as I was thinking about the theme, that to me, I wanted to have something that would get us to think about change and the forces that promote change again, and very much in sort of... And I think Felecia's comments around notions of revolution that the revolution started today, it's over tomorrow, but we're all done. Right? I've never been fond of revolution, but then again, because I exiled from one. But I think I'm more about thinking about things as that kind of, it's a rough kind of subversive change. Because revolutions come and go. Because they do.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

But for me, I wanted us to have something, and allow the membership to sort of hang on to a narrative that that particular poem gives us, and everybody could latch on in some way, right? That, yeah, maybe I shouldn't be stuck in my well-defined front yard. What is my well-defined front yard? Have I thought about that? Have I thought about taking a peek over there?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Why do I worry about the unfamiliar? What scares me about it? And again, one of the joys of poetry to me, in either language, is that I can draw meanings in a way that Royel is not necessarily going to, but at the core, we're both sort of mapping ourselves onto the spirit of that poem and thinking about what it actually means in our lives.

Royel M. Johnson:

So, several ASHEs ago, Felecia and I were in the lobby, in Puerto Rico, and we were having a cocktail, maybe two or three.

Felecia Commodore:

I don't remember this.

Royel M. Johnson:

Or more.

Felecia Commodore:

I was in the casino.

Royel M. Johnson:
And then president elect, Joy Gaston Gayles, pulled us to the side and said, "I have something for you all."

Felecia Commodore:

Ah, yes.

Royel M. Johnson:
And that later followed an invitation to partner together to bring into fruition a podcast. And the podcast was a bit of a departure from the Association, in that then president, Lori Patton Davis, had started this sort of presidential webinar series at the height of the pandemic that was a way of engaging and connecting members of the Association during that time. And I think by that time, everyone was Zoomed out.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh man, we couldn't take another Zoom.

Royel M. Johnson:

And so, Joy had this idea to, how do we still engage our members year round leading up to the conference in a way that is not in Zoom? And so we partnered together to bring into fruition the first season of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. Neither Felecia or I had ever done a podcast before.

Felecia Commodore:
Nope.

Royel M. Johnson:
It was all learning curve. And now, we're at our second season of the podcast, and we hope that it continues to grow far long beyond us. What was your... Why did you want to continue it?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Well, I mean, first, the hosts are awesome.

Royel M. Johnson:
Oh.

Felecia Commodore:
I'll take all the compliments. Make my day.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Exactly. And they're well deserved. So, there. You know, I just think that it provided, and does continue to provide, the membership and other people listening in with exactly what's right about podcasts, right? It's thoughtful people, they're engaged in a conversation, they're free of disciplinary convention and their front yard, so to speak. They're maybe leaning a little bit more into the backyard and taking a peek. They're less scripted. And I think that's especially good for academics, because we tend to, rightly so in many ways, follow these formats that we have and how we tell people what we know, basically.

Felecia Commodore:
Yeah.

Royel M. Johnson:
Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
I think podcasts are really a fun place to think out loud and to, as En Vogue would say, "Free your mind, the rest is going to follow." Just free yourself.

Royel M. Johnson:
Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
You get freed from that academic disciplinary convention. And I just also think that, I mean, the best podcasts, in my experience, are just intellectually playful.

Royel M. Johnson:
I can't tell you how many people after last season beyond academia listen to it.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yes.

Royel M. Johnson:

And wrote me, and acknowledged that, "Man, that episode on the Great Resignation connects to the work that we're doing in companies."

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Royel M. Johnson:

And I was pleased that so many people found themselves reflected in the wide range of topics, even for folks who aren't in higher ed. And that's what we ought to be doing.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Royel M. Johnson:

I think podcasts provide a mechanism to do that.

Felecia Commodore:

The methods episode, we had, so many people reached out and was like, "This is exactly what I needed for my class, for my students. This set it and explained things in a way that I don't know that any article could have done, or reading assignment could have done." And so that was really great to hear people were putting it on their syllabi and assigning it. And so that was exciting too, to really be able to take what we do and make it palatable and accessible in various ways.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right. Yep, exactly. And you know, the other, I suppose the official presidential response to this question is, many of us have been sort of poking at ASHE, and we're poking at ourselves, right? About the fact that we can't only just communicate research in whatever city we're in, in the, quote, unquote, "traditional," way. I mean, I'm sorry, but podcasts, webinars, whatever, and sort of asking me now about social media, it's like, well, it's no longer an it, it just is. So that's how we engage in getting our messages out to folks who wouldn't ever pick up a journal article, because why would they?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

So, Ana, you've been in higher education for some time now. What would you say is the biggest shift you have seen in the field from your first day to today?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

I think the biggest shifts, and maybe the one big shift, has been the intoxication with brand, with competitive marketing, basically the corporatization, right?

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right. I mean, institutions, it's basically of who we are as a, quote, unquote, "business," right? I think that's a big one in higher education, generally. And I do think that I would also say that the academic professions neglect of professional ethics, or the loss of sort of a true north, as it were, I worry about that. Right? Because we're a funny profession. We're quasi-vocational, quasi-occupational.

Royel M. Johnson:

Right.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So, I think those are the two big things. I mean, there's tons of other changes since I started... I started off as an admissions counselor.

Felecia Commodore:

Me too. Yay for the rolling suitcase crew.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Oh, please don't. I still have PTA about the handyments. But anyway, seeing all the changes, and a lot of incredible ones, right? But those dominate. At that time, I didn't know that was what was happening. But now I think about it, and there's some decisions that I made and things like that, or were made for me, kind of thing. So there's that.

I think with higher education research, I mean, the easy one, and the most obvious one, is the integration of qualitative or sort of naturalistic examinations of phenomena. I think that was a huge... I

mean, for many, it was an existential, just 360, right? You had to really get your head around it. I think the deepening of research foci, in the sense that a lot of research now interrupts certain epistemological narratives, and then sort of the growth and the participation of scholars of color. So you see all of these pockets that then just make up the research that we see today as much, much broader and much deeper than it was, certainly when I started.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. And you know, you saying that makes me think about what we are seeing now, is many of the folks who are part of higher education, are at our institutions, the institutions were not designed for, right? And so, as we see more people have access to institutions and be able to participate in higher education, the more we have to wrestle with things that we were not prepared, maybe, to wrestle for, but often for the betterment and the progression of our institutions and for the practice of higher ed.

But I think on the research side, I would say, my perspective is it's kind of parallel, right? And that, to your point, we're seeing these conversations, these research topics, that we didn't think about before, because more people and more diverse worldviews, diverse identities, diverse perspectives, are being given access into the higher education research space. And so, in a space that really wasn't designed to have such a diverse group of people, when we think about the history of the academy. And so, I think that's something that I see, I think, we're really wrestling with as a field, especially a field that I think historically, was more of an applied field, right?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right.

Felecia Commodore:

In that, thinking about... And I'm a pragmatist, I'm always going to be like, "How do we put this into practice?" But I think we're now wrestling kind of these philosophical ideas and these sociological ideas in ways that aren't always easily packaged up into practice and implications. And it's really interesting to watch the field wrestle with our scholarly identity and what that looks like, and what the possibilities of that.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right. Yeah, and look, for me, those points where we wrestle, those times where we wrestle, those times when we have to engage confusion, and we have to be comfortable in doubt, right? Because moments of doubt are really good, they're very productive for thinking. You can't... And confusion too, right? It's like, "All right, well, wait a minute."

One of the ways in which I tackle this with my students, and I have historically done it this way, I say, "Okay, well, let's just take the entrance of women into formerly men's colleges. And let's work from the bottom up. Don't give me the moral argument. Just let's talk about it." And they look at me like, "Well, what do you mean?" I go, "Well, for example, women come onto campus. How should the institution prepare for that?" But for them, it's sort of like, because, how would they know any different? It's like, "What do you mean there's something different? We've always lived this way." Right?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

And you go, "Okay, like for example, what are they going to do with the urinals?" And if you look back at the archives of many of the men's colleges that then became co-educated, they just put plants in them. The women put plants in them.

Felecia Commodore:

That might be poetic in a way.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Oh, in a way, in a way. I would've done something else, but whatever. We can do that off the podcast, we can talk about that. But no, but those things that we think are relatively innocuous and silly aren't.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right? Because then I say, "Okay, so for example, I realize that I may look tall, but I'm not. And all coat hooks in most institutions, to this day, are made for tall men."

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, wow. I never about that, yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right? I said, "So, what were women to do? And let's talk about more serious things. What were women to do about the fact that, quote, unquote, "the medical services," on campus had nothing to do with women's health?" So now all of a sudden, you could see that the database is going in their heads, and right now it becomes something that they can point to. So when I said, "Okay, now, let's talk about access for one of our students in a wheelchair. How are they going to get around this campus?"

Felecia Commodore:

Right. Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So it becomes part of where they are now, and part of where we are now, where we've managed to fix some things. It's nice that they have a women's bathroom, but there are no tampon dispensers in them.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Or in a school of education, you don't have any restroom that has diaper changing facilities for men, people who identify as men.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

And on, and on, and on, and on. So, you're right that there's a way in which we have to think about those large questions about... And the big one is, if you want to frame it, it's like, what's equity about? Because that's something that we think that's one of our purposes, right?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Broadly understood equity, right? Well, what does it mean when the rubber hits the road?

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

What does it mean when I'm on a hilly campus, and I am in a wheelchair and I can't get to class? I don't really, really care about what happened in the past. I'm here now. I can kind of imagine that the future's going to go that way. How can we be better now than we were yesterday? I don't want to judge, that to me, is... It sort of cuts us off at the knees. I want to move forward on this. Can we all ask these questions that are going to make me uncomfortable, going to make you uncomfortable? But it's all for this movement further on. And I just think that higher education generally, as a research field, needs to remember that it's part of that conversation, and it should be the place where that conversation is, as most, complicated, messy, and sometimes really frustrating. But that's how we get better.

Royel M. Johnson:

So we alluded to your work earlier on social media. I think your work at the intersection of social media and college student experience is so important in this current moment, when we're seeing increases in racialized forms of aggressions and hate. For those who may be less familiar with your work, talk a little bit about the work that you've been engaged in this area, and what motivated you to get involved in this?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. So, back in the day, 2007 or so, here in Boston, we started to get these little bits and pieces of information about something that was coming. A thing called Facebook. Now... So, well, because I'm across the river from ground zero.

Royel M. Johnson:

Right.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. Ground zero.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

But at that time, Facebook, to me, because I had been a dean of admissions at a small private college, they had to explain to me what a Facebook was back then. And then I was like, "Wait a minute. That's a paper thing," and blah, blah, blah, blah, and I have problems with it, whatever.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

But then I was intrigued by it, I have to say, because I saw how... I didn't know exactly how, mind you, I just sort of had this hunch that there was going to be another medium of communication built around this notion of relationships. And isn't that what college students do? And isn't that what college is for? That's as simple as it was for me. I'm not very complex. So, I thought about it, and then my graduate student poked her head in one day and said, "Hey, have you heard the thing about the Facebook?" And I said, "Yes and no. Come in." Right?

So then we started talking about it. And now, if you ask me about it, what we know about social media is a lot. And it's great to see higher education folks getting in on it, sociologists are in on it, communication folks, marketing people have been all over it, the research marketing. And there's been some work on it that thinks about the ethics, and whatnot. And those of us interested in how identities play a role in relationships, and how those relationships are communicated in different spaces, right? That was just me and the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory. I was like, "Yes, get me a ticket now." And I wanted to think about and see how students consumed and curated information, that then impacted how they saw themselves, others, and then how they were in the world. And my world was the campus. That was the perimeter that I drew.

And so we've done a lot of work that has evolved. And you have these epiphanies, these mind blowing moments, of like, "Oh. This is very telling." So for example, when we had interviews with students about what they had... Because we did these ethnographies as they walked us through their Facebook accounts and told us what they were doing, and we would ask questions. So I said, "Well, it seems to me that the black women in your group and your friend group are really getting what some people would say is, get dressed up for parties. Their presentations of themselves are very posed." Right? There's not sort of, what we were then seeing, many white students and the whole, doing dopey things with kegs and beer bongs, all those things. Behaving poorly, how's that? I said, "This is a very different thing, so this is awesome, blah, blah, blah." Because then I'd start to show my age. And I was like, "Oh, this is great," you know, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so she looked at it and she goes, "Yeah, we purposely don't take pictures of the alcohol." And I was like, "Oh."

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So they've curated. It's like, okay. So then, every time we do something with students, you learn this next layer. So it's been awesome. I mean, I have to say that it really has enabled me... I mean, it's not all

about me, but no, just sort of that way in which we can see students and student generations move their narratives forward.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So the narratives around race, the narratives around gender, and everything, the narratives around athletics, or whatever. That, to me, has been the most... It continues to really, really interest me. And right now, we're in Web 2.0, but what's to say that we're not going to go... I mean, the next obvious question are all the AI implications, right?

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

So, now, I'm thinking more, the next piece is trying to think about how to ask students about the sociopolitical that they consume, the sociopolitical information that they consume. So, how do they consume it? How do they produce political and sociopolitical information? Because they can do so much more rapidly, they often do it in echo chambers. And so how are they doing that, and where are the moments that most stress them?

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. You know, it's interesting. One of the things, and I'm probably dating myself too, I was having this conversation with someone that I think... I was part of the group, I was an undergrad when Facebook started. And so when it was just Ivy League institutions, and you had to get your institution invited to Facebook. And so, I went to Drexel, we were one of the first non Ivy League institutions to get invited. And so one of the things I was talking about with someone, with a colleague, was, at that time, you were becoming, quote, unquote, "Facebook friends," with people you actually already knew. Right? So you would meet people and then y'all connect. And it's been interesting, it feels like social media went from this space to where this is a different way for me to connect and share and communicate with people that I know or maybe have had a touch point with, and are trying to stay connected. To, almost, now, social media is a space in which you introduce yourself to the world, right? Or you put this person out and invite people to...

Royel M. Johnson:

Right, it was more bounded.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, to get to know you through this space, as opposed to like, "Oh, I already met you and now I'm connecting."

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right.

Felecia Commodore:

And I think to your point, it shifts how we think about consumption and information and how we present ourselves to the world. We're not presenting just, you getting to know a little bit more about me. It's more like, this is who you're going to get to know, and I may not even be this person in real life.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Right, exactly.

Felecia Commodore:

And so it's very interesting to see that shift.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. I mean, it's both. Undergraduates don't really use Facebook anymore.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

If they do, they're just sort of humoring their parents.

Felecia Commodore:

It's for my dad, right?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. Exactly. I like it because I get to see all of my former students' babies, their whatevers, you know.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. But the sort of pivotal points have always been the extent to which students can determine who has access to what they want to say. Right? And most students' networks actually are pretty broad, because it's very easy to do that, at the same time that they'll also just allow... They'll have levels of curation, right? And one of the things that certainly affected that map, let's say, was anything that was an anonymous medium. So this is the Yik Yak kind of phenomenon.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Which has resurrected, and that's a whole other issue. But then there's this other sort of vector that goes in with the onset of performative driven social media, things like LinkedIn, and online dating. So...

Felecia Commodore:
Ugh.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Right?

Felecia Commodore:
Do not recommend. Zero out of 10.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
I think that's another podcast. It's really... I mean, it is just, you can hop into that world and just find a lot of really, really neat ways to understand, for us, because we like higher education, who students are and aren't.

Felecia Commodore:
Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
I mean, one of the things we found out very early on is that certainly students of color, and especially first gen students of color, they pretty much stick to their, what colloquially we would call their inner circles, right? Primarily their relatives, their friends from home. And then there's this sort of other little layer of this trusted new people, these new people from whom they get social capital. And that makes a lot of sense, especially on predominantly white campuses. That makes sense, right?

Felecia Commodore:
Right. Yeah. Well, talking about dating ourselves...

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Okay.

Felecia Commodore:
ASHE will celebrate its 50th conference in two years. How do you see ASHE in your role as president, in moving the field of higher education forward?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
You know, my mother always said that I was that kid who couldn't sit still.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh. I was one of those.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yeah. And I think that has served me very well in many areas. So I'd like to think of the 50th anniversary, it's sort of in this extension of the messages that presidents should be giving us, in a myriad of ways, but fundamentally have this central theme that says, "Hey, where is it that we want to play next? Where is it that we're a little concerned about? Or, what risks are out there?" Risks are a good thing, as I said earlier, but not all risks are worth either the reward or the punishment. So, what can we put out there as hunches? And can we be more, I don't know, be more like that kid who does want to take a peek and see what's out there? And maybe what used to be seen as a danger isn't anymore. And I think lots of people have done that. It's not like we haven't done it. It's more that, "Hey, please continue doing this, because that has made our field rich and it can just only get richer." So I do think that that's an important message to underscore and punctuate, I guess.

Royel M. Johnson:

So we're going back to Minnesota this year.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yes.

Royel M. Johnson:

And it is the second time, as I understand, that the Association will have gone to Minnesota, the first one being in '92. So over 30 years, three decades.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

I know.

Royel M. Johnson:

What can we look forward to for the conference this year?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Oh gosh. Just for starters, we're going to have a series of conversations with a variety of different leaders. So we're going to have conversations with sitting presidents of color, we're going to have conversations with tribal college leaders, we're going to have representatives from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. They're going to talk about the strategy around safety and equity for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders and their varying communities. We're going to do an interactive session on aspirational vision of democracy through higher ed research, and it'll be literally interactive. And sessions on accessibility issues in higher education, and a ton more. And the keynote is an Latino scholar who is now in top leadership in a public institution, and talking about things like immigration and higher education in the urban setting.

So I mean, those are the big touch points. But when we were at the program committee meeting in Minneapolis in June, one of the exercises that we did was we had each group, each section leader or leaders, just talk about, each one of them to talk about a session that they were very excited about. I glanced at some of them ahead of time, and I was like, "Oh, this is going to be interesting." So, folks have really embraced the theme in that way, and there are a lot of fun sessions. So I'm looking forward

to not just the presidential sessions or the keynotes or things like that. I think that there are just a lot of exciting sessions that really stay true to the theme, which I'm very excited about.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

And shout out to the program committee. who does a lot of very, very, very hard, difficult work that often, I think, goes unseen.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yes. Absolutely.

Felecia Commodore:

So, we want to shout out all the folks that make the tough decisions, and have to be creative and think about how we create sessions where we can make sure we have as much participation as possible.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yeah.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah. I mean, we have to do more than a shout out. The reality is that, for example, you do the kind of work for ASHE that we couldn't pay enough to do it because you bring a sensibility and a commitment to the organization that is reflected in the podcast. That's very clear to me. And the program committee does exactly that as well. Right?

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
And we're nothing without you and them, nothing. We are volunteers, and our volunteers are us. And it's not just perfunctory work. I mean, I feel it in the questions you've asked me today, and how you've thought about the podcast, and last year's podcast, and what you bring to it, and the same thing is true of the program committee. I can see how they've really engaged with not just the operational side of it, of getting the third reviewer, or whatever. So you all need more than a shout out.

Felecia Commodore:

And if anyone would like to join me in at least one day wearing Prince paraphernalia...

Royel M. Johnson:

Oh. Nice.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:
... in honor of being in Minneapolis, just send me a DM on Twitter. We can coordinate this.

Royel M. Johnson:
We can coordinate. Nice.

Felecia Commodore:
We can have a purple day.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yeah. I did think about having sort of Prince air guitar competition.

Felecia Commodore:
Oh. You know, we should talk about this Ana.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
And then I thought, we should also have a Sheila E. drum... You know, sort of.

Felecia Commodore:
We should talk about...

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
So I think there's lots to be done.

Felecia Commodore:
A little lip sync for your life.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
Yes. Exactly. We have to be really wary of the copyrighting.

Royel M. Johnson:
Right.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
I can tell Jason is sweating right now. So, yeah, no, I know. I had that little moment a couple of weeks ago. I was like, "Do I own anything purple?"

Royel M. Johnson:
Plenty of time to get some.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:
And I was like, "I'm going to have to change that."

Felecia Commodore:

I may or may not be on the store VIP list for the Prince estate, but you know. It's just maybe, maybe not, maybe.

Well, you know, Ana, we're really excited that you were able to come here and talk with us and introduce yourself to those who may not have known you, and kind of cast your vision for ASHE this year and for the conference. And we're really excited about the theme, and the conversations we're going to continue to have in relation to that theme here on the podcast. So, one of the questions we're asking all of our guests, and so we want to kick off with you, is, this work, particularly as ASHE president, is taxing, time consuming...

Royel M. Johnson:

Thankless.

Felecia Commodore:

... thankless, other than a little toast. And so, what keeps you committed to this difficult, yet very necessary, work?

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

I've always been motivated by possibility, I guess is the best way of putting it, of what could be better and what could the good look like. And I don't mean that in a kind of lofty way, but like, what should I be doing? The Jesuits here have a way of asking students to do it. It's sort of around purpose. You know, like, what does the world need you to do? Right? And I look back on it now, and that's very, very true about me. I've always thought about, given my limitations, I guess, is a way of putting it, but I've just always been motivated by, there's got to be a better way to have the kinds of joys available to more than just a few people. And I just, I've always liked that. That's what I loved about admissions work. It got me right away.

And I often think about, well, in this case, there's this organization that's done a lot for me, and I see my responsibility to others in it. And that's part of the tiny little pieces of how I can do good, I guess. I'm hoping that it's good. But I do have to say, it does bring me joy and satisfaction, things like this. I love talking to you two, and thinking about what you're thinking about. And yeah, I think that's kind of what motivates me. I often think about, what should you be doing now?

Royel M. Johnson:

Well, we can't wait to see what is in store for Minnesota.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Royel M. Johnson:

If you're listening now, it's not too late to register for the conference and confirm your seat.

Felecia Commodore:

That's right.

Royel M. Johnson:

You want to be one in the number.

Felecia Commodore:
Yes. And what you should be doing is listening to the podcast, because we've got some really great episodes coming up, and we're hoping to continue to unpack this theme around higher education, purpose, politics, and practices, and have you all geared up and ready for the ASHE annual meeting, and...

Royel M. Johnson:

Yes. Get ready, get ready, get ready, get ready.

Felecia Commodore:

... before you have to read our current president's address, you could be there to hear the presidential address, which is always a great highlight...

Royel M. Johnson:

Yes. I look forward to it every year.

Felecia Commodore:

... of the conference. So, Ana, again, thank you so much, thank you for your leadership, thank you for the opportunity to continue this podcast, and we're looking forward to all the great things we know you and the board and the program committee have planned for us in Minneapolis.

Royel M. Johnson:
Yes, and shout out to Jason, our executive director, and all those who are working in the ASHE office to bring to us an uncomplicated experience this year.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Ana M. Martínez-Alemán:

Well, as always, "a sus ordenes" (at your service), thank you, and I greatly enjoyed. This was fun.

Royel M. Johnson:

Yes, it was. Thanks for having us back.

Thank you to our guest, Dr. Ana Martinez-Aleman, for joining us today, and sharing more about her work and what we can expect for this year's conference and her vision for the Association, moving closer to our 50th anniversary.

Felecia Commodore:
At the end of each conversation, we like to engage in a segment called Scholar Soundtrack, as we reflect on what musical selections ring in our minds as we think about the day's conversation. Today, the song

that came to mind was Rie y Llora by Celia Cruz, because ASHE as an association, and we as higher education scholars and stakeholders, sit in this present moment as we continue to wrestle with the good, the bad, and the complicated of our field and our institutions. We may laugh and we may cry, but what we continue to do is persevere and strive to see beyond the well-tended roses in our own respective front yards.

Don't forget that there will be both a Scholar Soundtrack and syllabus for today's episode, and all of the episodes in the ASHE Presidential Podcast series. The conversations lined up are going to be thought provoking and inspiring. We're just getting started, folks.

Royel M. Johnson:
Buckle up and get ready for the conversations to come. You don't want to miss this. Join us next week as we continue to discuss the purposes, politics and practices of higher education, with special guests, Drs. Bryan Brayboy and Linda Eisemann. Until next week, I'm Royel.

Felecia Commodore:

I'm Felecia.

Royel M. Johnson:

Until next time, be fearless.

Felecia Commodore:

Be fearless.