

Royel 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 in Chumash peoples. Panelists joined us from colonized lands throughout North America. We recognized the Tongva, Chumash, and all indigenous nations, tribes, and peoples for being historical and continual caretakers of these lands.

Felecia Commodore:

And three, two, one.

Royel Johnson:

Greetings, ASHE family and welcome back to another episode of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. I am your co-host, Dr. Royel Johnson, Associate Professor of Higher Education and social work at the University of Southern California, where I'm also Director of Student Engagement for the USC Race and Equity Center. And shout out to my colleague Shaun Harper and others at the Race Equity Center for being a co-sponsor. I am joined today by my amazing co-host, a newly elected ASHE board member, Dr. Felecia Commodore.

Felecia Commodore:

Hi, everyone. I am the other co-host of this podcast, Dr. Felecia Commodore, associate professor, higher education at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. And excited to be back for our final episode. That's crazy.

Royel Johnson:

Time has flown by. It's crazy.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. So just checking in with you, Royel, how are things going? How have things been?

Royel Johnson:

It has been a crazy semester. Obviously it's been so much going on. I was traveling abroad the last two and a half weeks. I was in Singapore. Teaching is part of our global doctorate program, and then it was my birthday, so of course-

Felecia Commodore:

Yay. Happy birthday.

Royel Johnson:

I flew to Bali from Singapore and spent a week there. And so that was-

Felecia Commodore:

The wealth.

Royel Johnson:

Everything you imagine it was.

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Felecia Commodore:

Well, I am excited that you were able to celebrate your birthday and be in Bali. I was not in Bali.

Royel Johnson:

It was beautiful.

Felecia Commodore:

I was in Norfolk and experiencing the wonderful weather and living in a hurricane area, but...

Royel Johnson:

Well, they say, "Bloom where you are planted." Okay.

Felecia Commodore:

I tried or at least try to stay dry, but things, same here. Just a busy semester just trying to balance work, learning what it means to be an associate professor, but good times. But the semester is absolutely flying by and I can't believe we're at the end of the road here for the podcast as well as almost to ASHE Vegas. Can't believe it. We're almost here.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, that's what I was going to say. We are preparing to go to Vegas. Looking forward to seeing it. It is been so wonderful seeing all of the tweets and commentary about the episodes, which this or that, folks enjoyed, which host they enjoyed, which-

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Royel Johnson:

Participant. It's been wonderful to see all of the dialogue on social.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, it's been really great seeing all the feedback and getting to see everyone's reactions, whether it be words or gifts to the episodes. It's been great to see the ASHE community really join in, in our conversation. That's what we aim to do. So really, really great stuff.

Royel Johnson:

A couple people say, damn, Gina.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. Damn, Gina is the new thing now. Shout out to Dr. Zamani-Gallaher.

Royel Johnson:

Right. So we are at the end of the roll, y'all. We had no idea what we were doing, neither of us had any idea.

Felecia Commodore:

No idea. None.

Royel Johnson:

A podcast before. So it's been wonderful to learn how to do this and you all have a front row seat to this. So it's been a really cool experience.

Felecia Commodore:

So though we're at the end of the road, and this is our last and final episode of this year's presidential podcast, just wanted to say that thank you so much for joining us on this ride as we figured this all out and helping make this such a great time. This episode's going to be a little different from the other ones. And so we want to introduce you to several amazing scholars whose work really represent what it means to do humanizing research for and alongside various communities. But before we jump into that, it would not be right if we didn't start this episode off with a, this or that.

Royel Johnson:

So I'm going to go first and I have two that I'm going to ask Felecia, and if you know Felecia at all that these would be sort of characteristic.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, gosh. I'm nervous.

Royel Johnson:

Felecia is a really big Prince fan and I've learned this many, many, many moons ago. So Prince obviously has a number of amazing albums, but there are only two that I'm going to ask you to pick from.

Felecia Commodore:

I already don't like this. Okay.

Royel Johnson:

Purple Rain or the self-titled Prince album.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, well, first of all, I think it's completely unfair and unjust and dehumanizing to make me have to pick one Prince album. However, because my favorite Prince song is The Beautiful Ones, I'm going to have to go with Purple Rain.

Royel Johnson:

Nice. Yeah, I love The Beautiful Ones.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. Okay, so I have a question for Royel. For those of you who do not know, Royel is a native of the great city of Chicago.

Royel Johnson:

The west side of Chicago to be very clear.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, there you go. And so my question is Chicago house or Chicago step?

Royel Johnson:

Oh, that's a really, really, really, really good one. I would say Chicago step because I grew up in a family of steppers. I grew up going to stepping class on the weekends with my aunts. My mom, that is her social thing that she does every weekend. House music is a thing for sure, but it wasn't as big in my family. It wasn't until later when I met people and I really learned what a house head is and the house picnic and so forth. My family folks were unfortunately stepping in the name of love. That was the thing to do.

Felecia Commodore:

It's okay. We all have to grow. Yes. So you all heard that Chicago step, so that means that the ASHE reception, if you are trying to not step in the name of love, but just step, you need to find Dr. Johnson on the dance floor.

Royel Johnson:

Yes. We'll be hosting tutorials. So I have one for you.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay.

Royel Johnson:

So Felecia is a really, really... She appreciates songwriters.

Felecia Commodore:

I do.

Royel Johnson:

And I don't know, for folks who don't know this, Felecia listens, prepares for the Grammys each year by listening-

Felecia Commodore:

That's right. I have a spreadsheet.

Royel Johnson:

All of the songs and artists who are nominated, and she has this expansive spreadsheet where she votes in advance.

Felecia Commodore:

That's it.

Royel Johnson:

New efforts to tally and see what percentage she got correct. So that's how much she appreciates songwriters. So I have two songwriters for your consideration.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay.

Royel Johnson:

Baby Face.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay.

Royel Johnson:

And Quincy Jones. I recognize that they are out of each others-

Felecia Commodore:

First of all-

Royel Johnson:

Generation.

Felecia Commodore:

The disrespect for you giving me a question. They are absolutely not contemporaries, which is unfair, but oh my gosh-

Royel Johnson:

But the fact that I couldn't think of any contemporary for either of them led me to bring them together.

Felecia Commodore:

This is not right. And I, Oh my gosh. Baby Face or Quincy Jones. Okay. Okay. Okay. So are we talking simply songwriting or songwriting and producing?

Royel Johnson:

Song for song.

Felecia Commodore:

That's not answering my question. You see how you try to weasel? You can't weasel out of this, because there's a nuance here. Okay. Okay. If we are talking about songs in totality, that means songwriting and production, I'm going to have to go with Quincy Jones because he's my favorite producer of all time.

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However, if we simply, if we separate producing and songwriting and just focus on songwriting like lyrics. I can't believe I'm going to say this. I have to go with Baby Face.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

That was really hard and I feel like my mentions are going to get destroyed, but that's where I land.

Royel Johnson:

So Baby Face is like my favorite songwriter. I mean, I love Stevie Wonder too. Amazing songwriter, but Quincy's range over the movies to the film.

Felecia Commodore:

So this is why I had the caveat because Quincy's production, right? Because you got to remember, he's a jazz person.

Royel Johnson:

Sarah Vaughan, I mean, Miles Davis.

Felecia Commodore:

So his production is to me the standard, right? Songwriting is good, but if I put Lyric for Lyric up against Kenneth Baby Face or Shady Face, as we found out.

Royel Johnson:

Shady Face-

Felecia Commodore:

We learned after the first.

Royel Johnson:

Person, right.

Felecia Commodore:

Lyric for Lyric. I think Baby Face eeks out. But that's tough. They're both amazing though. They're both amazing.

Royel Johnson:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

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Okay. So my last one for you, so those of you who don't know, Royel is a voracious reader of research much more than myself. And so don't judge me either. I hear all you out there judging me. If you could choose, would you rather be a discussant at a conference or review an article?

Royel Johnson:

Neither. Would it [inaudible 00:11:33] say? Those are the only two?

Felecia Commodore:

Those are the only two options.

Royel Johnson:

Definitely review a paper.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay.

Royel Johnson:

Review a paper. It's just so funny, I just had a board meeting the other day for JHE and shout out to Steven Coy, new editor.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Royel Johnson:

And we had a whole session about how to properly review manuscripts and give feedbacks in ways I've never experienced before. But yeah, it would definitely be reading a paper and giving feedback. I mean, the discuss it role, I've done it. I don't like sign up to do it unless somebody asks me to do it, but it's not something I'm jumping to do all the time. I know some folks love it and I'm good on it.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay. All right. Well all you journal editors out there, you heard it.

Royel Johnson:

Please do not.

Felecia Commodore:

He likes your...

Royel Johnson:

Please do not.

Felecia Commodore:

RIP to your inbox. Okay. All right. Well, we hope you all can sit and that please don't ruin our mentions or inboxes after this or that.

Royel Johnson:

No invites to review any manuscripts right now. The door is closed.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, he's just modest. So we're going to move into our episode and in our discussion for today. So during this podcast series, we have talked about how the past few years have brought issues regarding justice, humanity, how organizations and our society at large historically and contemporarily treat various communities and identities. And we've witnessed the dismissal and erasure of certain groups, not only in voice and representation, but also in research and practice. One of the groups that we've seen this occur to is that of indigenous peoples and more specifically indigenous students. With USU society already systemically working to silence their voices, there have been efforts to push back against the silencing of indigenous folks in higher education, research and practice. Dr. Stephanie Waterman, professor at University of Toronto, explores these themes in her research. Dr. Waterman, from her understanding and identity as an indigenous person, was open to sharing her insight as to what humanizing higher education means to her. When we spoke to her, she shared the following perspective,

Stephanie Waterman:

A humanizing future for higher education would consider our responsibilities to watch out for each other's wellbeing. That includes creation. Higher education worries about enrollments during a viral pandemic, during the epidemic of gunning down of innocent people, attacks on women and LGBTQ2S people, war and the devastating destruction of mother earth. Where are our responsibilities? The erasure of relationships to creation, the land, water, air, and our animal relatives is a cause of our suffering now. I see a humanizing future as one that considers our environmental impact, that in turn impacts our health and wellbeing, and even our very future.

There is no higher education without land, water, air, and our non-human relatives. Higher education and market forces have erased from our decision making and awareness, our precarious relationship to the forces that keep us alive, our relationships to each other as human beings have been erased in favor of competition and ratings. A humanizing future would strengthen our relationships, bring visibility to all of us, and focus on strengths of our diverse communities. In an article about Haudenosaunee administrators, I share how our world views and emphasis on using a good mind was their underlying philosophy and their work with students. The administrators assumed goodness in students and worked to maintain good relationships with them, communities and institutions.

We can all do that by listening, including listening to mother earth and embracing respect. I close with a quote from the late [inaudible 00:16:05] clan. He says, "The creator made everything equal. Human beings are the same to the creator as every other living thing, but he gave human beings the responsibility to watch out for the rest of his creation. That makes us the guardians. Look what we've done. Instead of being guardians, some people have learned how to destroy because of greed. The animals and fish and the birds don't do that. They just go on with their duties. So we've got to help change people's minds so that they will protect the land so that their seventh generation from now will have some place to live." Thank you.

Royel Johnson:



In conversations around equity and justice in higher education, college student athletes are not always thought of or centered. For years, however, there's been serious concerns about the issue of financial compensation for amateur athletes. Given that the NCAA generates roughly one billion in revenue annually, and the most revenue generating sports like football and basketball tend to be overrepresented with black students and those from low income backgrounds. And given that fewer than two percent of college athletes will go on to play a professional sport, there've also been some concerns about career coaching and life preparation. We chatted with Dr. Wayne Black, who was an assistant professor of sports administration at the University of Cincinnati. Here's what he had to say.

Wayne Black:

I specifically focus on humanizing college athletes in higher ed, and that starts by my research. And at the core of my research is equity and justice in college athletics. I'm a former college athlete and I was a college coach. And so those things are really important to me. So how do I actually do it though? So I'm very intentional about how I research college athletics. So I focus on systemic issues as a way to help make policy change. And then when I am focusing on a specific college athlete identity, for example, black college athletes, I try to make sure that I'm not just viewing black college athletes as football or men's basketball players, a wide spectrum of black college athletes. Me being myself, I was a college wrestler and I'm black, but people always think that I play football.

Another way I do that is by researching topics around college athletes that may not actually been study. For example, my dissertation focused on collegiate eSports and understanding who is participating and who is getting access to college through eSports. And so I really try to use my research to highlight different inequities in college athletics, and trying to get policy makers, administrators thinking about these new things. For example, I have a paper called, Black Tax, which is in the journal, Sport Management. And I co-authored that with Dr. Willis Jones, who I met at ASHE in 2019. And what we looked at was, are historically black colleges universities getting paid equitably for playing in guarantee games?

And guarantee games are just games where a high resource school plays a low resource school, and the high resource school pays the low resource school a bunch of money with the assumption that the higher resource school should win that game. And so that really helped to show how HBCUs were not getting paid as much for playing guarantee games, but they played in way more of them. So there was a financial inequity. And then I'm also doing some work now on college athlete food and housing insecurity, because the assumption oftentimes is that college athletes don't face these experiences. And so I'm really focused on trying to make sure college athletes are at the center of some of these issues that are facing higher education and that their experiences aren't being left out. And I really try to advocate and amplify college athlete voices so that they are considered.

Felecia Commodore:

One thing about student athletes as I talk to my colleagues like Dr. Black, who do research on student athletes, is on the assumptions that we make about student athletes and who they are. And we find that with various groups that happens. And so, one of the interesting experiences I think in navigating the academy in higher education is how so many assumptions are made about who you are, what you know, where you came from, your background and such. And though this can often be related to more visible identities such as race, gender, et cetera, this also happens with identities that are not so visible. One of these sometimes hidden identities is being from a rural community.

As a product of a rural area myself, navigating spaces that may diminish the very things you celebrate about yourself and your community, or even go as far as to use those things as tools of isolation. These

subtle practices can sometimes lead students and faculty alike feeling like they don't belong in the academy, a form of dehumanization, if you will, Dr. Sonja Ardoin whose work centers on rural student populations, class and culture attempts to bring to light these issues in her work. We decided to chat with Sonja and find out from her viewpoint what humanizing higher education means to her, and how she has taken her own background and used it in her approach to her work and her approach to advocate for more holistic human centered research and human centered publications.

Sonja Ardoin:

When I think about how to humanize the higher education experiences for those who are involved in the academy, so students, faculty, staff, other employees, I often think about first, how am I being human? How am I recognizing my own limitations and fallibility and errors and not hiding that from other people and being transparent about some of those things, as well as some of the things that I like to think I'm good at. But I think being human is one of the first and foremost things I consider in that process because if I'm not willing to be human, how can I be asking other people to be human in that process? I think for me as a researcher, which is sort of a new identity, even that I would call myself more of a scholar practitioner is what I would use. But I think about the fact that I grew up in a Cajun culture that was focused on stories and storytelling.

And so that really made me drawn to qualitative research where we do sort of focus on people's stories and providing platforms by which people can share those stories in both individual ways as well as some collective ways. And so I'm drawn to that qualitative piece where even with confidentiality, people might get to choose their pseudonyms or have sort of names attached to stories, I think humanizes part of that process. I also think that in collecting stories and sharing stories, it's thinking about how do we provide opportunities for humanization through nuance and complexity. So not presenting things as a monolithic, even though we may look at trends and themes that are happening in some of the areas that we research, which for me would be first generation college students, also first generation graduate students, and then first generation faculty and staff members alongside folks who identify as coming from poor working class backgrounds. Alongside elements around folks who grew up in rural areas is really thinking about, we can sometimes look at those in monolithic ways.

And my hope is that through some of our research and scholarship, being able to do that alongside colleagues who identify in similar ways to me, but also different ways to me that we're able to provide publications that show that folks who are first gen or come from Puerto Rican backgrounds or come from rural areas are not necessarily one thing. That those identities and lived experiences are nuanced and complex, and heterogeneous in many ways. And for me, that is part of humanization is saying, "Hey, this is not the same for everybody." Yes, there may be trends and themes here, but there's nuances and complexities as well that it's important that we pay attention to. Alongside research, I think it's also important to be human as a faculty member in our teaching and in our shared learning experiences with colleagues and students. And for me that has looked like a lot of different things over time, but one I think first and foremost is knowing that students are people and that they have lives outside of their roles as students.

And so how are we providing individualized support to students as life happens for them, right? As they become caregivers, as they take on new roles in their careers as they become partnered. What does all of that mean? And so ensuring that they are seen and heard, and valued and supported as individual people. I think for me is part of the humanization process along with adopting practices like grading and then incorporating components into teaching content that show issues as human. So whether that is using documentaries or podcasts, or guest lectures or panels. Helping things go sort of from broad and

theoretical to practical and applicable for me as also part of humanization, that we are people and we need to figure out who we are in the process of our careers.

And also how some of this content plays out for us in the roles we hold and the spheres of influence that we have. And so for me, humanization is considering how are we people first and foremost in our careers, do we see our own humanity? And how do we invite other people's humanity? Thinking about research, particularly for me, for folks who may have been historically excluded and marginalized or silenced, and providing platforms for them to share their stories in nuance and complex ways. And then also thinking about our teaching and how we bridge the theory and practice and how we also support students in ways that help them get to where they're trying to go as well.

Royel Johnson:

So the next scholar we had an opportunity to chat with also focuses on a student population who has been too often overlooked and relegated in higher education. Those are students who've been impacted by the criminal punishment system. Some of you may know this, but it's estimated that roughly 80 million Americans have criminal records. Wow. 80 million Americans. And what we know from research, some of which is my own, is that that experience has enormous challenges for students as it relates to accessing employment, accessing things like education. The good news is that there is some momentum nationally among higher education leaders and others to address some of these structural impediments, such as having disclosure on the college admissions application of one's criminal record, right? Or having access to Pell grants or other forms of financial aid to fund their education. But there's still a great deal of work to do, and one scholar who is working on behalf of students with criminal records is Dr. Melissa Abeyta, who is an assistant professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Here's what she had to say about the work that she's been engaged in

Melissa Abeyta:

As scholar practitioners, imagine a student who is formerly incarcerated or system impact and is navigating not only the challenges of higher education, but the partial system. Oftentimes students from this population are left out of equity conversations when we talk about historically marginalized communities. Specifically, I wanted to share some of the findings from a recent study because when I spoke with formerly incarcerated students, I was able to ask them about the disparities that they encountered while enrolled at our institutions. And I would like to briefly share findings in a narrative using pseudonyms. So first I would like to introduce you to Anthony. Anthony was admitted to a public research university from a local community college. He shared how difficult it was to secure housing. Aside from housing affordability. He dealt with housing discrimination from his appearance and was rejected housing on numerous occasions.

He said, quote, I "I had about \$1,500 and I was trying to find housing. I didn't know how I was going to do it. I'd applied for scholarships, but I was down to live in my car. I applied to on campus housing, but I found this place. I got on the lease, I got a co-signer who vouched for me. I had everything lined up, but three to four days later, I was denied housing. So right now, I'm living and hiding on a cot, and because of my criminal record, I'm forced to live a certain way. Honestly, it makes me feel bad. I'm supposed to hide my tattoos and hide where I'm living so I don't get kicked out." Anthony shared how being stereotypes affect his housing opportunity As a formerly incarcerated student and as scholar practitioners, we're aware of how basic needs affect our students, but an important takeaway here are the layers to housing insecurities for formerly incarcerated students.

Next, I want to introduce you to Ruben. Ruben was a psychology major with a 3.6 GPA, and he aspired to obtain a master's degree and he spent 15 years in federal prison. When I spoke with Ruben, he

described how he was completely aware of his past of being formally incarcerated, but now he embraces his identity of being a college student. He said, quote, "When it comes to college, the identity is for you to be a student. I'm no longer a gang member or a prison gang member. I'm studying to be a psychologist." All of the students I spoke with share this awareness of transforming their partial identity into a student identity. And one way that they do that is through engagement with student organizations on campus. Like Ruben, these students receive peer-to-peer mentoring, and through the student experience, they're able to become socialized into a college setting.

So a question I ask you to reflect on is, how would your campus engaging the student population? Are there student organizations and funding opportunities for them? What are their admissions or faculty support for formerly incarcerated students like on your campus? Thinking about Anthony and Ruben and all the formerly incarcerated students on our collective campuses, imagine what it would look like for our college campus to be welcoming to the student population. I offer the following reflections. First, reflect on the visibility and language used at your institution for formerly incarcerated individuals. Is there a virtual space for them on the institutional website where they can find information or resources? Is the language used to identify them anti deficit?

Next, I would ask students, think about students like Anthony who experiences challenges with food and housing insecurities. Reflect how the student population is part of your institutional equities plans. Lastly, as formerly incarcerated students have found your education and they have their basic needs met, how are they involved on campus? Is there a student organization on your campus specifically for them? Many formerly incarcerated students may have computer literacy challenges. Is there a center or staff dedicated to help with supplemental education programming for them? Thank you.

Felecia Commodore:

So we've talked about rural students, we talked about justice involved students, and these are all identities again, right, that we can't see when we first encounter folks. And as we continue to speak about identities that aren't as easily seen, there has been a group of students who for a while now have not only been made invisible, but have at times had to actually hide themselves for their own safety. DACA students, which stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, are students who entered the United States from another country before their 16th birthday and before 2007, have been continually residing in attending school in the U.S. And have graduated high school and or attained their GED.

One would think that because these students have been given the status, they would be protected while in college. But this has not necessarily been the case. With various institutional, state and federal policies at play, these students often have to navigate college with the added pressure of what it means to be undocumented in higher education. Dr. Steven Ramirez has engaged in some great work centering this particular population of students. And when asking him how he views humanizing higher education and what this may mean for the communities he works with, he shared this.

Stephen Santa-Ramirez:

As someone who came from a mixed status as household, immigration rights and educational equity for racially minoritized students who are undocumented has always been a priority of me. When I'm thinking through humanizing these people and their experiences, there's a lot that comes to mind, which includes thinking of the whole person. Their challenges, their needs, their knowledge, their skills, and their assets. Some of the things that I do in my practices is to work with and alongside these communities, and not work on them. I think of myself as a friend and a mentor to many of these brilliant scholars. I act as a reference for scholarship jobs, graduate school opportunities. When completing any of my IRBs in projects that I lead that focus on these communities because they've been targeted for so

many years, including today's society. As a result of anti-immigrant immigrant sociopolitical climates, I request to only receive verbal consent from these student collaborators versus written consent.

I've been working on the longitudinal studies since 2018, which actually began as my dissertation study. Alongside these communities, specifically student activists and those who participate in resistance efforts for educational equity and immigrant rights and undocumented DACA student rights. I lobbied at the state legislators or with the state legislators, or to the state legislators alongside these collegians. Part of my analysis process is gathering all of these folks and myself together to have conversations about what are we identifying within the data? So they're very much a part of the analysis process because I really want them and their experiences to be at the forefront of what I am pushing out for publications or workshops or presentations as a result of this study and other studies. And they have had opportunities to give me a say on what they want me to present on, and what they want me to write about, which is the most salient parts of their identities and, or their experiences.

I think it's really important to compensate them for their time, work, energy, skills, and assets. So for any project, I apply for different grants. Some of which that I've obtained. Recently I've obtained an ACPA NASPA Foundation grants, a Spencer Post Fellowship. To push these projects forward, but also to compensate them via gift cards for their time and energy, as you know, collaborators. And specifically, I'm working on a new project that looks at the post graduation experiences and preparatory experiences for recently graduated undocumented students. And I plan to hire starting this upcoming academic semester and undocumented undergraduate students to help assist with that study. Again, I believe it's really important to advocate for and on behalf and with these folks at federal, state, and institutional levels. I have remained an active selection committee member for a scholarship that caters to undocumented college students. And at my current institution at the university at Buffalo, I developed a course called Race, Racism and Undocumented Collegians in Higher Education, which really just solely focuses on these immigrant communities.

Bringing their stories and assets and skills to the forefront of conversation in the classroom setting. Very quickly, I know that you all are going to provide a list for folks on different publications and things of that nature, but I can just highlight a couple of some of my recent pubs. So I have a case study that was published in a textbook called, Maybe I Should, Case Studies on Ethics for Student Affairs Professionals. It's the second edition that came out in 2019, and this case study centers on Latinx undocumented students experiences with microaggression. So I also have a pub in 2021 called, Hard Work and Heart Work, First Generation undocumented Collegians Paying it Forward. And that one's in the NASPA Journal of First Generation Student Success. This piece centers on their cultural capital, their wealth and assets that they bring to the college community.

I also have a recently published co-authored book chapter alongside Dr. Susana Munoz, who's at Colorado State University. This one was published in a SUNY press textbook called Racial Equity on College Campuses Connecting Research to Practice. And the chapter is chapter seven, and we really provide a critical approach to how higher education agents can re-imagine institutionalized support for undocumented and DACA students. And I have a few that are forthcoming. One is in one of ASHE's Journals, the Review of Higher Education, and this one centers on these collegians resistance efforts. I truly appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly about some of my experiences with and alongside undocumented students as a faculty member, as a researcher, as a friend, and as a mentor. I appreciate you all doing this, and thanks again.

Royel Johnson:

For so many of the student populations that we've been talking about, those who are sort of institutionally marginalized, those who are underrepresented, oftentimes hidden. We know that the

pandemic exacerbated precarity for so many of them. And one particular group of population that this next scholar focuses on is international students. Think about the difficulty associated with living and studying abroad during a time that was marked with such global uncertainty that coupled with issues of social isolation, racism, discrimination fueled in part by our governmental leaders, travel bans, legal status issues, and also just a host of significant challenges. This is the work that Dr. Katie Koo, who is an assistant professor at the University of Georgia is committed to examining and bringing attention to. We chatted with her about the ways in which she is working to humanize the experiences of international students despite these challenges. Here's what she had to say.

Katie Koo:

As a researcher who is studying underrepresented students, unique college experiences, mental health and wellbeing, including international students. With my scholarly work, I support and advocate underrepresented population and marginalized individuals experiences and their future path, especially for international students and scholars. To humanize higher education for international students and scholars, I work on research on international students and provide support programs and presentations to make this population more invisible and make their voices heard. With my research and practices, I [inaudible 00:40:37] international students unique experiences, challenges, and struggles such as their acculturation process, acculturated stress, social isolation, having limited resources and support systems, English proficiency, discrimination, and racism.

I also unfold some hidden stories of international students experiences that U.S. educators and U.S. practitioners do not know or do not understand. In addition, as I noticed a trend in framing international students as vulnerable, such as they're not actively seeking help, they have higher rates of mental distress, they're more likely to be depressed, blah, blah, blah. So most studies focus on international students' difficulties and problems, not on their surrounding environments, systematic barriers or institutional limitations. Researchers rarely talk about whether U.S. campuses are welcoming to international students, if they're friendly enough to international students, or whether faculty advisors have the cultural competency to support their international devices.

I support international students by reporting that it's not their fault, but I argue that US-centric campus culture, US-centric social norms, US-centric language, strict U.S. immigration law, and public view on perpetual foreigner may impact international students stress, which are ultimately affect their difficulties. In my other side of research, I also report how international students are strong and great strong with great resilience as they strive to thrive in a foreign country away from their family and primary support system, by surviving an unfamiliar culture and speaking their second languages to be successful.

Therefore, I believe that I give hope and positive messages to international community, and I provide how student affairs professionals, and faculty who work with international students can provide culturally sensitive and culturally responsive cares and support for international students. I emphasize great potentials, energies, resources, and the contributions that international students bring to us, higher education and show how to help them to feel welcome and supported in a foreign country. I believe all these hopeful messages and positive influences are what I'm doing to humanize higher education. Thank you for listening.

Felecia Commodore:

So the challenges that DACA students, undocumented students, international students, and all of our students really must navigate, highlight the ways that laws and policies can work to not only make pursuing higher education difficult for some students, but also act as a way of enforcing and reinforcing

racism and discrimination within the ways that higher education does what it does. Dr. OiYan Poon, program officer with the Spencer Foundation and Associate Professor affiliate in the School of Education at Colorado State University and a faculty affiliate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland College Park, highlights this in her work regarding bias in the college admissions process.

Right now, affirmative action is back on the docket at the U.S. Supreme Court, and I remember being an undergrad and going to Washington DC to March regarding affirmative action. I can't believe we're we're right back here so many years later. This has also brought up the conversation of race conscious admissions and processes and how do college admissions processes do and do not humanize college applicants. We were able to catch up with Dr. Poon and hear her take on what humanizing higher education means to her, and how processes do or do not contribute to humanizing higher education.

OiYan Poon:

By just simply saying that in my work, I'm always in relationship with people, with communities, and I'm always in conversations. And over the years I've learned and through what I'm talking about today, I really want to highlight that I always want to do my scholarly work in partnership with practitioners, with students, with various communities. And so little bit more about my work. Over many years, I've been studying the racial politics of Asian Americans, college admissions, and particularly policies of race conscious admissions or affirmative action. With my colleagues, Liliana Garsas, Janelle Wong and Mike Wawyn, we've been writing and submitting amicus briefs on behalf of social scientists to the federal courts and to the Supreme Court this coming fall 2022, defending diversity in the SFFA versus Harvard lawsuit. And so for many years, I've been studying how Asian Americans in particular participate in these legal and policy debates.

And in 2016, I conducted a study to really ask Asian Americans why they either agreed or disagreed or felt somewhere in the mix, in the middle between, in this legal and policy debate over whether or not race conscious admissions should be or not be. And what I found is that no matter what side of the policy debate these folks were on, these Asian Americans that I interviewed by and large didn't seem to have a strong understanding, a fact-based understanding of how race conscious admissions was actually practiced. And so that was a big learning for me. And I wrote an op-ed in the conversation in 2018, kind of summarizing some of that work for a public audience. And the editor, Jamaal Abdul-Alim, when I said to him it was really surprising, was that these folks were active in this policy debate. They don't actually understand how race conscious admissions works.

And Jamal simply asked me, "But does anyone know exactly how it works?" And I, being a scholar, researcher, I went to the research literature and there really is a tenuous understanding. And the biggest question is, is there a practice based understanding? Do researchers and practitioners have the same understanding of how these systems work? And I think that there is a gap there in the research if researchers creating publications and theories and models are not grounded and in conversation, in relationship with people who are actually working these systems, leading these systems, the practitioners themselves. So that simple question by Jamal, an education writer and journalist, really set me on a path to really focus primarily on, well then how do selective colleges and universities actually practice race conscious holistic admissions? I was really curious. I've been really curious about the racial logics and how things are actually working within these systems.

Now, when we study systems and we're really after transformations for social justice and equity goals, we can sometimes forget, and I will put myself in this too, I can forget, I have forgotten sometimes that there are actually workers, people behind these systems that we're critiquing. And what we really forget sometimes is that some of these people share our interests for social justice and equity and have a deep desire to change these systems. And so this positions them to be really great partners for research, to

actually create deep impacts for research, to really create impact trust matters. And that's a key point in a book that my colleague Mike Bastedo and I have co-edited and is coming out this fall 2022 out of Harvard Education Press called, Rethinking College Admissions Research-Based Practice and Policy. Some of the contributors in this book are practitioners themselves in the college admission space, and we're really proud of this book and hope folks enjoy it, learn from it, continue to grow in this field of research and considering, and centering these authentic, genuine relationships and partnerships in research.

Royel Johnson:

We've been talking about a number of marginalized or multiply marginalized student groups who are often invisible on campus simply because folks refuse to see them or prioritize them. This next scholar has been studying two important but overlooked groups, those who engage in sex work. So college students who engage in sex work as well as those who are fat bodied. Check out with Dr. Tarah Stewart, assistant professor at Iowa State University had to say about their work.

Tarah Stewart:

So to think about how I humanize students, faculty, staff, and higher ed and my work, I think we have to think about the concept of human. And I don't have a lot of time, but I will say there are some theories, for example, like Afro pessimism that call in to question the very category of the human, who has access to that designation and what it means for our possibilities and our futures. But I'm going to set that aside for a moment and for the sake of conversation, say that all people have access to humanity or should have access to humanity in equal ways. And there's two definitions I stumbled upon, because I really wanted to think about what does it mean to humanize.

And Oxford English dictionary first defines it as to make human, to portray or endow with human characteristics, qualities, or attributes to represent in human form, to adapt to human use. I don't like this definition because I think what it says is that the people that might be engaged in the work that I do, who's at the center of the inquiries that I engage, that they're not already people. But somehow through the process of research, we are making them human. I don't really like that. The second definition feels closer to sort of what I think I do. And that is to make more humane, to refine, to make more gentle or tender or to soften. And I think that's really beautiful because I study people, populations, and ideas that are in the margins of the margins. What that means is particularly those of us that are interested and embrace equity and justice.

When we think we have our arms around all the issues, my work is asking the question, who is still missing and why? And what I found is that within the margins of the margins, so maybe some of these equity and justice issues that are not as easily accessible to people's understanding or consciousnesses, that there's this associated stigma. So for example, I study issues of fat phobia and sizeism. And so what society says is that fat bodies are not the way bodies are supposed to be. So then therefore, any negative experiences you have is your own fault is something that you can change and so therefore, it's not a justice issue. You need to change your body. Similarly, to the other large area of my work is I look at the experiences of people engaged in sex work and erotic labor. What society says is that is wrong, that that is bad. It is immoral.

It is against religious and some spiritual principles, and therefore, if you have negative experiences around that, that is your fault. You should do something else and become clean and to become whole. And so for me to make higher education and post-secondary contexts and the world more gentle or tender or soft for these people, is to work alongside with them to help render visible these issues as justice issues, the justice issues that they are. To think about sex work and erotic labor as labor, as work,



as labor under capitalism. And what does that mean for what they are owed? What does that mean for their particular experiences as they try to make meaning and survive these particular systems of dominance just like the rest of us? And so I think to make more gentle or tender or soften is to invite them into the process. To abandon participant frameworks or participant as language. In my own work, I use collaborator and I give as robust financial incentives as possible.

And I ask the people apart of the studies with me, Where do you want your stories to go? Who do you want to hear them? How do you want to hear them? In most importantly, I am alongside them in the work. I am proud and I don't shy away. And I try to illustrate and try to make sure that my practice is aligned with my sort of politic, that I am just as proud to do work with fat folks and with sex workers as many fat people are proud to be who they are and comfortable in their bodies. And as proud as many people engage in sex work and erotic labor are proud that they are able to do that work and to keep themselves safe and to make the living that they need to be well, more often than not.

And so I think it's important, and I think if we think about what does it mean for our work to make more gentle or tender or soft, particularly for [inaudible 00:54:57] who often don't get to have lives of softness, of gentleness, of tenderness because of the system of dominance and the system of power. I think that is really an important consideration for us to think about, and what does it mean for us to invite them more fully into our processes, to stand bold and unashamed with them as we do this work? And as we reject neoliberalism, we reject white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. We reject any of the logics that stigmatize particular groups, respectability, all of those things. And so I think the more that I disrupt, the more that I kick around the hard and cold and rocky soil, that higher education foundation rests on, then the softer I'm able to make that soil for something to be fruitful, for something to blossom and for something to grow from it for the people who have historically been denied, that gentleness, that tenderness, and that softness.

Felecia Commodore:

Wow, we really appreciate what Dr. Stewart had to share, and in those very enlightening words about how we think about students and humanizing higher education and what that means. And to all of our scholars who took the time out to talk to us about all these different populations of students that make up this ecosystem that we call higher education, and hopefully we can reflect on the things they shared with us, the things they made us think about as we move forward in serving these students and advocating on behalf of them and creating, and recreating and reimagining policies and practices that impact all of these various identities and populations in the work that we do. So as you all know, we usually wrap up our conversations by asking our guests one question, how are you finding joy? Or what is bringing you joy right now? So since this is our last episode of the series, I think it's time we turn the question on ourselves. So Royel, how are you finding joy in this moment in your life?

Royel Johnson:

That's a really good question, and it's one that I've been thinking about a lot, especially you know this, as we both have transitioned from assistant to associate and earned tenure promotion. I've been sitting with what it means to reclaim joy for myself because I feel like the first leg of my career, that assistant professor journey sort of robbed me in many ways of lots of things and experiences that I would've otherwise engaged in. And so one way that I'm centering joy is by resting. Rest has been a radical act of self-care and preservation. And so that looks like not trying to publish five or six articles this year, and it looks like going to Bali and enjoy birthday-

Felecia Commodore:

That is joyful to me.

Royel Johnson:

It looks like all the things that make me smile and being in community, and joy will be in a couple weeks going to ASHE and seeing you and seeing other friends, and being intentional about prioritizing those relationships in people in my life. That's one way that I'm creating joy. I also have an amazing three pound Yorkie some folks know-

Felecia Commodore:

Hi, Tiger.

Royel Johnson:

On Twitter, Tiger brings me joy, and so I'm spending more time with him. How about you? How are you finding-

Felecia Commodore:

So it's interesting. It's November. November is a tricky month for me in transparency. For those who may not have known, I lost my mother in 2021 and her birthday is in November, as well as was my parents' anniversary. And so November's a tricky month for me, as well as one of my closest friends growing up in high school also died when I was a freshman in high school, I mean college, in November around Thanksgiving. So this whole month is usually very tricky for me emotionally. And so I realized that I have to intentionally or be intentional about finding joy at a time where there's so much, that reminds me or triggers or stirs up my grief. And so for me, what is helping me find joy during this time is really being intentional about celebrating and being community with the people that are here in honor of the people that are not here.

So I am putting a lot of energy into being in community with my sorority sisters and my church and my friends, and looking forward to ASHE as a being in company with people that care about me, people that I admire and that I like to sit around and think with. And so that is bringing me joy. And then also sometimes they want to stress me out. I think they get a kick out of it. I'm also finding joy in the students that I'm working with, particularly the ones that are dissertating right now, and watching the process of them discovering knowledge and figuring out who they are as scholars, and just watching that process and watching them emerge as their scholarly selves is really bringing me joy right now reminding me why I do what I do, and why I got into this crazy world of doing research. And being a faculty member in the field of higher education. So that's what I'm doing right now to find joy.

Royel Johnson:

So first, sending you lots of love and energy and to others as well who are grieving. I know the holiday season can be difficult. I also lost someone really important this year and this will be the first holiday without. So I'm sending lots of love and light to all of us who are in this season and learning how to exist in this sort of space.

Felecia Commodore:

And let us all remember that when we're down at the ASHE and as we move day to day in our work in our communities, that so many of us have experienced loss in this season. And so to be kind and to try

to be good colleagues to each other, and remember that we are all human and all experiencing so many things at the same time.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah. It made me think, I always prided myself as someone who always made deadlines and was attentive to details in that way. I have never needed as much grace in this period of time than ever. I can't recall a time in my life. Everything is late, everything is delayed, every email is weeks behind. And I remember used to being so frustrated by people. Why can't they just respond to an email? Because at the end of the day, it is not as important as we think it is when so much is happening personally and in the world. So give folks grace. You never know what folks are experiencing.

Felecia Commodore:

Absolutely.

Royel Johnson:

That in mind.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay. Well, we have just one more order of business because I can't let us go without sharing our last scholar soundtrack selection. So those of you have been along with us for this ride, know that at the end of each episode, we like to select a song for our scholar soundtrack. It's a song that came to mind as we reflect on the day's conversations. And today, and really throughout this whole series, we have been discussing the diverse experiences by diverse groups of people who we find in higher education, those who have been touched by higher education, and those who have been impacted by higher education. And at the core of all of those experiences, all the work, all the expertise, all of everything, all of us are just everyday people traversing through this project called, U.S. Higher Education. And for that reason, the song that came to mind today is Sly & The Family Stone Everyday People, because for all we're striving to accomplish, for all we're trying to do to move forward and achieve in higher education, what we can never forget is that there are everyday people whose lives are impacted by what we do. And because of that, it is imperative that we honor their humanity by continuing to strive and humanize higher education. (Singing). So Royel, can you believe this is the end?

Royel Johnson:

No, this is wild. Listen, I mentioned this before. We had no clue what we were doing. Neither of us had ever, I mean, we've been on podcast before. We've never in our lives produced, written scripts for, podcast before. Thank you so much, President Joy Gaston Gayles.

Felecia Commodore:

Yay.

Royel Johnson:

Keeping enough of us to invite us to do this together. I would not have wanted to do what anyone else. So thank you for being an amazing collaborator and co host.

Felecia Commodore:

Same.

Royel Johnson:

And it has been a wonderful ride. I know it's only six episodes. It has flow by. Maybe there will be another season of the ASHE Presidential Podcast. If you want another season of the ASHE Presidential Podcast, tweet and at the association, tweet the president.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Royel Johnson:

And Rick, make your request known.

Felecia Commodore:

Let them know. Let them know what the people want. Well, I agree, Royel. This has been an experience beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I don't know that I woke up in 2022 and was like, yes, I'm going to be hosting a podcast. Yeah. And it's been great hosting it with you and feel like we're having a conversation with friends. It's been really great. Thank you. Also, I want to thank President Joy for putting your faith in us and believing we wouldn't ruin the name of ASHE.

Royel Johnson:

Hope we hope that we didn't embarrass you too much.

Felecia Commodore:

And thank you to everyone who's played a part to our fearless executive director, Jason, who kept us on track and slightly slapped our wrist when we relate with things.

Royel Johnson:

Right. Grace, grace, grace, grace.

Felecia Commodore:

To Dr. Shaun Harper and the Center for Race and Equity at USC, thank you for all of your support in doing this. It's been invaluable. And also thanks to the people wondering-

Royel Johnson:

Yes, who hosted us.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes, who hosted us, who helped us, and all the engineers-

Royel Johnson:

Our editor, Adrian, who has been wonderful. Thank you, Adrian.

Felecia Commodore:

Amazing. All the people who played a role in pulling this off to all the staff at ASHE who helped get it out and tweet it and post, and all of the things. We couldn't have done this without you. And then lastly, but not least, thank you to everyone who tuned in, who clicked, who shared, who commented, we really, really appreciate it. So podcast is nothing people talking if nobody listens to it. So we really appreciate that. And so, yes, I'd like to thank all of you who took the time to listen to the series without any clue what we were about to do. It's been an honor to be in community with you in this way over the past few weeks. Make sure to share the series with your families, your friends, other higher education nerds.

Royel Johnson:

Use it in your classrooms. There are associated readings with each episode. There's music and media that you can incorporate also to examine different topics. We hope that there is some utility to this. This is why we wanted to do a podcast, something different, something that would sort of be a living and standalone sort of medium. And we would love to hear about how you're using it as well in the future. So let us know. Drop us a note on Twitter or email.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes. And if you start to miss us, you can always pull us up on your favorite place to find podcast and hit that replay button. Yes. But until this happens again, if it happens again in the words of that classic Semisonic song, it's Closing Time. (Singing). Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end. And though we won't be here in your earphones in the coming weeks, we will be in Las Vegas in just a few weeks and we can continue all this great thought exchange and all of this sharing of ideas and philosophies down at the ASHE annual meeting.

Royel Johnson:

At every open bar. Find me there.

Felecia Commodore:

Even the one to win ticket. Well take the tickets too. And maybe even some of you down at the casino who been with me. But anyway, we can be scholars anywhere. We can't wait to have more convos and more thought sharing as we come together as a community to continue figuring out how we humanize higher education. Royel, you have anything you want to-

Royel Johnson:

No, I'll just say, it's not a goodbye, it's a see you later. We look forward to engaging with you in different ways soon. Thank you for everything.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay. So with that, see you down at the ASHE and until then, I'm Felecia.

Royel Johnson:

I'm Royel. Keep it human.

Felecia Commodore:

Keep it human.

This transcript was exported on Nov 08, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Royel Johnson:

Ciao.

Felecia Commodore:

Bye.