

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 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:

Okay, in three, two, one.

Royel Johnson:

Greetings, ASHE family and welcome back to another episode of ASHE Presidential Podcast focused on humanizing higher education. 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 Student Engagement at the USC Race and Equity Center. And shout out to Professor Shaun Harper in the USC Race and Equity Center for being a co-host. And I have the enormous privilege of working with my dear friend, colleague and academic life partner, Dr. Felecia Commodore.

Felecia Commodore:

Hi, everyone. And Dr. Johnson has had his coffee this morning. My coffee's a little bit on a delayed time release, so it'll kick in when it needs to. But I'm your other co-host. I'm Dr. Felecia Commodore, an Associate Professor at Old Dominion University.

Royel Johnson:

Recently tenured Associate Professor. Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

Recently tenured. Don't forget the tenure. In the higher education and community college programs. We are super excited to keep our conversation going around humanizing higher education and discussing the various elements of what that looks like. So today, we have some dynamic scholars and thought leaders, regarding minority serving institutions and community colleges and they're visiting with us. So we're going to have a chit chat about what we can learn from these institutions about humanizing underserved communities.

Royel Johnson:

So join us in welcoming our special guest, Dr. Gina Garcia, who is Associate Professor of Higher Ed at the University of Pittsburgh. Actually, when we thought about the invitation of you all today, we did not realize or anticipate that you would be at the same institution. So also welcome Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, who is new Associate Dean and Professor at the University of Pittsburgh and Executive Director of the Council of the Study of Community Colleges. Welcome to the show.

Felecia Commodore:

Pittsburgh's in the house today.

Gina Garcia:

Yep. The 412 crew.

Royel Johnson:

So for every episode, we have a little icebreaker that we do, is called this or that. We're just going to give you two options to choose from and you'll simply just pick which one makes sense. So for Gina, we have Biggie or Tupac?

Gina Garcia:

Tupac.

Royel Johnson:

Tupac. Really? Okay.

Gina Garcia:

West Coast all the way. I'm a West Coast girl.

Felecia Commodore:

I knew she was going to take the West Coast.

Royel Johnson:

I'm more of a Biggie, but okay, we're over it.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay, Eboni. Our next this or that is for you. Giordano's or Italian Fiesta?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Italian Fiesta.

Royel Johnson:

Yes.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Of course.

Royel Johnson:

South side.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

South side.

Royel Johnson:

Yes. A fellow Chicago native.

Felecia Commodore:

West Coast, Chicago in the house.

Royel Johnson:

So I learned that, Gina, you're a fitness enthusiast?

Gina Garcia:

I am.

Royel Johnson:

So we have two options for you. Body pump or core?

Gina Garcia:

Body pump.

Royel Johnson:

Body pump. Okay. I haven't done body pump.

Gina Garcia:

Full body. Full body workout. We need it.

Felecia Commodore:

I tried body pump. My body did not pump. It gave out. So more power to you. Okay. And this last one is for you, Eboni. And I guess Gina too, you can chime in. Would you rather write an article or a book chapter?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

And that's the only option?

Royel Johnson:

You said see [inaudible 00:03:59]

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

I'm going to say. This or that. Neither. Yeah, neither. That wasn't an option, but neither.

Royel Johnson:

I get you.

Gina Garcia:

Wow, I didn't know that was going to be the answer. Mine was book period. So not the chapter roadblock.

Felecia Commodore:

Gina says she doesn't do chapters.

Gina Garcia:

No, I want to write a whole book.

Royel Johnson:

It's above me.

Felecia Commodore:

I write some poetry books over here.

Gina Garcia:

Oh, poetry. Okay.

Felecia Commodore:

That's very telling. Okay, well, thank you both. So as we sit in ponder, maybe even judge a little everyone's responses to this or that we are going to get this conversation started. Recently there's been discussions regarding how there's an increasing diversity present across U.S. higher education campuses and their student bodies. And though access challenges still exist and persist, first generation students and members of other marginalized communities are matriculating through the U.S. higher education system.

And institutional sectors like MSI which include HBCUs, HSIs, PBIs and AAPISs, Tribal Colleges and Universities and community colleges, we find those sectors are really carrying the lion share of ensuring not only access for these students but also success for these students. So as a higher education community claims to want to strive more for equitable success for these groups, we want to talk to Dr. Garcia and Dr. Zamani-Gallaher about what this future actually looks like and what we can learn from the institutions who have already been doing the work to which the rest of higher education is trying to catch up and catch on. So let's get the party going with our first question. And really we're just asking both of you, if you could tell us a bit about yourself, the work you've been engaged in and what humanizing higher education means to you.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

So what does humanizing education mean for me? I guess one of the things that comes to mind is, so 1971 was a dope ass year. I was born that year.

Royel Johnson:

Nice.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

But Mickey Mouse and Disney World kind of came into me. But it was this article that was dropped by Terry O'Banion in '71 that is a go to staple in some of my work. And it's actually got this whole theme that President Gaston has provided for us with this year's ASHE around humanizing education. Education and community colleges we often have to remind folks to think about the humanity of our students in the two year sector. And it's not uncommon that there's been some dehumanizing when you think about the portrait of a community college student and institutions that have routinely been on the margins of the larger higher ed discourse but doing the most with the least for those that are the most marginalized.

And so Terry, 50 plus years ago, talked about humanizing education and community colleges and like him, I very much feel that they're and unfortunately with five decades later, where higher ed still has this kind of production model when it comes to higher ed. And I think that's dehumanizing in a way for students, for staff, for faculties when we think about this whole production model. And what is equality education or what does it mean to be able to bring your whole self within an educational context and environment in a different dimensions. I think that we're still in a place, unfortunately that renders us incapable of having figured that out in some cases. And I think that for me, humanizing education does go back to not just that we have equitable student experiences and outcomes, that we are broadening participation and enhancing access and matriculation to completion.

But that we have these examples in terms of compassion, in terms of the courage to learn, the courage to have difficult dialogues in response to what have been dehumanizing matters in terms of our situations and issues within our institutions. Which are again, just reflecting what's happening in larger society. And so I think we are still at a point where we're played and that we're in a contest of winning hearts and minds. And many of us have felt heartbroken to the extent that we do not see everyone in the full fold of participation. That everyone does not feel emancipated, that folks are too routinely diminished in that our post secondary pathways still have this kind of pollution, if you will, where folks can't be fully human and we need more opportunities, we need to have more accountability. And on this around who's going to answer that call?

Royel Johnson:

Wow, academic pollution. I'm going to sit with that for a minute. How about you, Gina?

Gina Garcia:

Just thinking about humanizing education, I mean, I'll talk a little bit about that, the work that I do with Hispanic Serving Institutions and thinking about it through that perspective. I mean I think there's a really theoretical answer to what humanizing education is. We can draw on all the scholarly work that's been done around liberatory, emancipatory, humanizing education. But I think at the bottom line is we don't generally think about people. And I'm not just going to say students because I think it's people, I think it's everybody in higher ed as people. And I think the idea of production that we focus so much on production that colleges and universities are supposed to produce outcomes, produce graduates, produce future alumni, future givers back to the institution. It's all about production and not about actual human experiences. Yet we know from decades of research that higher education provides humanizing experiences for students and people.

But often that they or we have to create those spaces ourselves, that it's part of that the focus is so much on production and producing whatever it is that the desired outcomes may be. But in the meantime, along the way, those of us that go through college and university systems and that never leave, all of us, we're still in them, that they somehow became humanizing. But often we made them though, we create those spaces. I mean even I think by my panel here, we all are affiliated with different groups, Greek groups, affinity groups that we found some of those humanizing spaces like that if the rest of the university experience wasn't humanizing, at least we found them in our own ways and our own rights.

So I guess I think about it a lot as how does higher ed value those things a little bit more? And I will say that I don't like to say COVID gave us things that were, I don't want to say COVID was good, but there are things that we of came to the forefront.

Royel Johnson:

Absolutely.

Gina Garcia:

Which was that we had to, I think faculty, at least the faculty staff, people I work with at HSIs have really stopped and paused and been like, people are struggling, right? I'm struggling, we're struggling, we're all struggling. And it was sort of a moment that we had to really think we're only human, we're dealing with a pandemic. People are dying, people who we love and know are dying. We can't afford to live. There's national crises, there's racial injustices in our face every day.

There's all these things that went on that we all kind of paused for a moment and thought, "Are these humanizing spaces?" And then we saw or we're seeing the mass exodus, people are leaving higher ed because they're not humanizing spaces. So I think just been a moment for us to really think, how do we be better because we're not good. And it's clear and COVID helped bring that even to the forefront of we really aren't good for anybody, for faculty, for staff, for students, for anybody. So, yeah, I think we got a lot of work to do.

Felecia Commodore:

You both mentioned this idea of production and products and one of the things I share with my students is that though we engage in some business endeavors, it's really challenging to put these production business models on higher ed because we're maybe one of few industries where our product is people and so the product and the consumer are also the same person. And that makes it really challenging if you forget that people are involved because you're thinking of people as widgets and products. And so I think that is a really great point of how do we rethink and reshape outcomes as opposed to just being something we produce but really how we shift and impact people? I think Royel's had a question.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, no, I was just going to say the point that Gina made earlier about this moment right now provides an opportunity for us to sit with what we've done, what we've done historically and what worked and what didn't work. And so much of the conversation around the pandemic has been about returning back to and there's some things that we don't need to return back to. There's some practices, approaches and ways of doing that now when we sit with the moment realize that didn't work as well. So I appreciate that point. So we have another question. When Felecia alluded to this earlier, when we think about who higher education was originally designed for white, wealthy clergy, cisgender men and how demographics have shifted over time. How have colleges sort of evolved or not evolved to meet the needs of the growing diverse student population and what work remains for us to do?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

I think that there's lots of work that remains and we know that representation and context matters. I think, you couple in this pit crew to talk about institutions that are largely thought of as Special Pops colleges relative to minority serving institutions, community colleges, those being contexts that are often kind of cloaked in the veneer of invisibility until which there's some kind of interest convergence. But that said, I think that there's ways in which institutions have not right sized their rhetoric with their realities and have not done as a colleague. Michael Basson talks about stepping beyond your statements. And so it's a two step or side step, but it's really not where we've seen substantive and sustainable and in scalable ways, the type of impact on student learning outcomes that we would like racially equitable assessment of learning and outcomes. So I think that overall, to your point Royel, we know the realities of our changing demography.

We know the campuses, two and four year and alike, and Special Pops colleges of all stripes are more culturally pluralistic than they've been in times past. But even with these shifting demographics across educational tenures, we've not seen what we need. And it's quite paradoxical that we've not seen fully what is needed to really speak to and challenge white patriarchal, homogenous, hegemonic spaces. So representation as well as contexts matters. But I would also add a footnote to say matters to some, we are in the midst of arguably culture wars where folks are being audited. How many references to race and ethnicity are in a particular syllabus? Oh, don't try to construct the equity minded syllabus to the extent that you have identified programs that are targeting particular groups because we would love to have more Black men in the classroom. So let's launch a Call Me MiSTER or let's have this that all of these things are seen as a means of un-American, as seen as a means of anti-education, right?

So I'm not even going to the anti-racist and the CRT and the paradoxes there in terms of all the stuff that's remained unchanged when we talk about dominant group, mainstream whitewashed and the traditional canon of white norms. But I won't be too long in the tooth, I probably have already. Yes, there's lots of work that we need and I know this is the association for the study higher ed, but as we think about the context that what we're seeing is not siloed and we have to think also about what's happening with P12 into these post-secondary pathways. Because again, we have an instructional core that is majority white, middle class females and American professorate, that again is largely white but male. And that incongruence with who we know our students are in terms of the pipeline and who's showing up or should be showing up in greater numbers to our door seals. We got work to do.

Royel Johnson:

So I want to just amplify something you said because I think it's like a tweetable moment where you said we haven't right sized our rhetoric with the realities. And it made me think about D-L Stewart's work around language of appeasement that institution leaders engage with students in response to protests and so forth in this language of appeasement without changing the structural conditions that necessitate their sort of intervention. I just wanted to amplify that point. We haven't right sized our rhetoric with the realities of college students.

Felecia Commodore:

And I wanted to touch a little bit on something you said and present this question as well. And you talked about how the institutions, we were talking about today, the MSIs and the, I think you called them Special Pop institutions, which I liked, that they're often cloaked in this invisibility. And I thought that was really important because we actually know that community colleges, MSIs, HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, these institutions have been providing access and fostering success to underserved and marginalized, minoritized groups for, I mean some centuries just for a very long time. But often they don't get a lot of attention for the work that they do. And so I did want to hear from you all as scholars around these institutions, what do you think or why do you think these particular institutions and institutional types have been able to serve these communities well and consistently do so?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

The educational process, kind of keeping with the theme, if it's to be humanized, if we're thinking about how to help folk again come into the full fold of participation, bring their whole selves so they can grow so they can flourish. A central focus has to be that identity saliency to some extent. And so I think one of the ways and Gina's work really speaks to this in terms of her model around serving this, it is the extent to which these institutions don't need to necessarily restructure because they're meeting people where they are and centering them as mattering. Not saying, why can't these students be more like those

students? Or making it questionable that can't [inaudible 00:22:07]. Understanding the antithesis of their philosophy of education is still rooted in the eliteness of academia and not about a central concern of education, centering the person in their totality.

So I think that's one of the reasons and not to be complete rah-rah cheerleader of community colleges. Because I am both a cheerleader, but I'm also a critical friend because also thinking that there's community colleges that are organized in such a way and again, I'm going to pass the mic be like mic check, mic check 1, 2, 1, 2, to Gina. Damn, Gina. To talk about always messing with Gina like that together kind of vibe things where when get together in this half time, I'll be like damn, Gina [inaudible 00:23:18]

Felecia Commodore:

It's ok. I get a "Bye, Felecia" every other day. So-

Gina Garcia:

Yes, like I said, get in line everybody say, right?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Right, let me pass this. Let's re-style this right quick. But again, I'll be her hype man. I have long admired her work and cite her work. But it speak to and calls us to do some introspection. And I think this podcast is an opportunity for folks to also examine values, attitudes, beliefs around these different factors and the quality of relationships and mattering and serving this that particular institutional types have that predominantly or historically white spaces don't. So now let me, what is it, my next guest? There's no introduction but Dr. Garcia, you won't some?

Gina Garcia:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

Pass the mic.

Gina Garcia:

Share that mic. Yeah, I mean have so many thoughts and I too think about how I serve as both a friend and a critical friend. I also critique but not for the sake of tearing down HSIs or minority serving institutions or HBCs or community colleges. The institutions that are in the scheme of higher ed or the least desirables for a lot of reasons I've written about the racialization of higher ed and why when there's more people of color in a space there for some reason become the undesirables, right? Well, we know why the reason is, right? The racialization process, it reinforces that. And we see that happening with community colleges as well as high end rollers of students of color, Black students, Latinx students for sure. So I do show up in the same sort of way of, we got to be critical. We need to hold institutions accountable for serving the populations that are enrolling in them while also understanding that they're really trying.

I work with HSIs, I have the honor of working with institutions regularly, almost daily, weekly with institutions that are trying really hard. And I get upset and I get offended when people are like, HSIs are just Hispanic enrolling, they're not doing anything. And I'm like, "It's easy for you to say that when you're not actually working with a predominantly population of color, predominantly low income population,



undocumented." We got students showing up with mixed status families, bilingual students, students that are still working through what the educational system hasn't supported them in those sort of ways. So it's easy to critique when you're not in it, actually trying to figure out how do you serve students that are highly diverse. So yeah, I think as far as, even with the last question which I'm thinking about how we're responded but not, yeah I'm an optimist. I think we're trying to respond to the much more diverse populations that have entered higher ed. But some days I do want to just sort blow up the old model, I'm like, that's a part of it, right?

Royel Johnson:

Blow it up. Can we add the sound effect?

Gina Garcia:

Yeah, add it right? The old models doesn't work. That's why we continue to see inequities, right? Because we trying to force students into an assimilation pattern with a process that worked before like that. Or maybe it didn't, I don't know, maybe higher ed was never good for anybody. I think about that sometimes. I'm like who has higher ed ever served?

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, we had that question. Is higher ed not working or is it working the way it was supposed to, right?

Gina Garcia:

Yeah, exactly. Always.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

It is working how it was designed.

Gina Garcia:

How it was designed.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

And for who it was designed for.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

Gina Garcia:

Exactly. And so if that's not the population there anymore, because who really fits that model over who originally higher ed started, hardly anybody is like, "Do we start over?" I think how do we fully start over? Because what we're trying to do is we're trying to change things one at a time and change takes a long time and none of us are ever going to see it in our lifetime at that pace. The pace we're going because we're trying to change one little thing. All right, we did that. All right, let's change, let's try a new thing. So I remain optimistic and I think we're trying really hard and I think we can learn a lot from minority serving institutions. I think we can learn a lot from community colleges because when the population is there, you have no choice but to do something different.

Felecia Commodore:

That's it.

Gina Garcia:

Versus trying to like, okay, we got to make the students be different. It's like, okay, we got to figure out how to serve these students that are here because these are our students. And folks I get to work with regularly at HSIs, they acknowledge that. And that, to your point, Eboni, yeah. They're like, "No, this is our students. This is who we serve. This is who enrolls. They're from the community. They're from the region. And that's who we're serving and that's who we intended to serve. So how do we do it better?" Versus we wish we had students that get into Harvard. It's like why? These students bring a tremendous amount of community cultural wealth to campuses and the campuses, the faster they can realize that and lean into that, the faster they're able to actually serve the students.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

And that's the key part, right? Because I think what happens is you have well intentioned, dominant group, faculty, staff, administrators, whatever. They want to err on the side of applying these color evasive race avoidant. Oh, we do equity work. I want to ensure equity. I am dedicated to diversity. But they can't face race. To Gina's point, if you are in a MSI where again it is about racially minoritized students who you're going to have to reckon with that, with students cultural values that are so often neglected. Because frequently, if you're with a majority member faculty, there is more apt to be lack of cultural awareness. Or even when you're well intended that you can be a student of color and routinely interface with faculty and staff that just are not culturally proficient.

Royel Johnson:

No racial literacy.

Felecia Commodore:

And then I think, Gina, you said the word assimilation. And I think that's the thing. Part of the humanizing of these students, especially in these institutions that have these critical mass of racially minoritized or marginalized students, is that assimilation actually acts to make them invisible and to actually acts to erase them and so we don't have to be culturally aware, we don't have to educate ourselves, we don't have to acknowledge, as you said, that they're there and that these are the students we have and we have to create a system that serves the students that we have. And so I think that's really interesting in that I think we have co-opted kind of the belonging and inclusion language. And really what we're doing is trying to assimilate students into invisibility.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Or actually is de-culturalize.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Gina Garcia:

Yeah, because that's the only way you can assimilate is you have to leave everything at the door and become as white and male and Christian and whatever those dominant framings are as you can be

because if that's the structure, that's what you have to assimilate to. So you have to leave everything at the door. People don't want to leave their selves at the door. Who wants to leave ourselves at the door?

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, exactly. And I think that's the beauty of and in thinking about your work about HSI serving this and thinking of institutions like Tribal Colleges and HBCUs and really that there is a commitment from institutions to seeing who the students are and acknowledging that and affirming that and how important that-

Royel Johnson:

Absolutely, we have an institutional responsibility to see our students and their fullness for sure. So I imagine that there are a lot of graduate students and early career scholars who will be looking for this conversation and wanting to hear from you all. I'm wondering, what recommendations do you have for them for engaging in this work in ways that are humanizing? What are the kinds of questions they ought to be thinking about and grappling with in light of the, of state of research on these institutions?

Gina Garcia:

I mean, I can jump in and say that I would love people to do more structural work.

Royel Johnson:

Yes.

Gina Garcia:

Organizational work.

Royel Johnson:

Shout out to the orgs, guys.

Felecia Commodore:

I just did a cartwheel. Not really, but yes.

Gina Garcia:

I knew you were going to say that. Because we are in that same space of, I mean we need all the student level work, we do. We absolutely do. And there's tons of it and it's all important and I learn from it every day. But for me, I'm like, if we want to change an institution, we got to structurally figure it out. And that's complicated because we all know university colleges and universities are highly complex organizations. And so to transform them, to change them is very complex. You got to think about all the layers of everything. Who are we hiring? Who are our suppliers? Are they committed to diversity? Who are the people that we're getting grants, big grants from? Private foundations we're working with, who are the people who endorse us? Who are alumni? All of that matters.

If we're really going to have a true humanizing to call the thing humanizing or a social justice focus, those folks, those folks matter every layer of the institution. So I would say the more organizational level we could get, I think it matters. And like I said, we need all layers. We need analysis at all layers, but we need to interrogate the organizations that we want to change, which many of us show up with that

desire to change the institution for the better to actually serve students to actually humanize students and students of color, minoritized students in particular.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Yeah, I was just thinking about, as Gina was talking and the question you posed, Felecia, that piece that and Royel brought up D-L earlier, but D-L Stewart's, it was the ASHE Presidential address actually, the spanning and unsettling, it was a political scholarship piece. So I started thinking about that and it was processing and as Gina was talking with the question you posed about what would we suggest to grad students? And I would say much of the same. I think that for those that are, all of us are in the process of becoming right. And so I think that it's a matter of understanding that you're never there.

That this is fluid, it's iterative, it is ongoing and dynamic work that we're all engaged in and that we take steps, not a step, but we take steps toward elevating our own equity consciousness in that you can't necessarily consider the work you're doing to be critical scholarship or to have some equity consciousness if you are not also boldly promoting culturally responsive practices and talking about how to advance race equity as well. So I think that for me is we got to be unapologetic about doing work that produces anti-racist structures and asset based environments and seeing the whole personhood of an individual and the collective culture of students. So that's something I would want all of us grad students, but all of us to do. And then I guess I would also say that it's not lost on me that we're still always seemingly in a place where we don't have a shared vocabulary.

Royel Johnson:

Shared language yeah.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

We don't have common language around so what is equity mindedness or what is race consciousness or critical theory and practices? Or I think that I would also say, let's have folks kind of think about that, to revisit that. And then I guess speaking to the theme of this broadcast, thinking about humanistic models of education, but thinking outside the box with respect to that because I think there's lots of missed opportunities, that many folks, particularly scholars in training will have if they don't kind of take a deeper dive or delve deeper into different institutional types.

Because some of the most relevant needs and some of the most responsive institutions are not the so-called pedigree ones, right? And so if you want to be humanistic in the way that you enter a space and the kind of work that you do, I think that there's a humanistic thrust that we all can embody. And I think that's also one of the attractions for me is why I kind of leaned in and was put a fork in me, I'm done with regard to becoming a community college scholar. I mean that whole nickname of the people's colleges or democracy's doors, it was something that felt very organic in terms of the origin story of community colleges that they wanted to not be reserved just for the few, but really kind of helped us with the massification of hiring.

Royel Johnson:

One quick follow up, I was going to ask you all, what does it mean for researchers to meaningfully partner with practitioners given their important role at these institutions? I think lots of researchers enter the field with the sort of colonial stance and they're have these questions that they want to ask that are not always even grounded in the practical sort of realities of those who are working on the ground. So what does it mean for researchers to partner with practitioners at these institution in ways that are humanizing?

Felecia Commodore:

And I'll add into that, how do they do that? Not only in ways that are humanizing, but in ways that acknowledge the histories of the ways these institutions have been exploited and weaponized. It had research weaponized against them as well.

Gina Garcia:

Absolutely. I can jump in. I have had the honor of working with an institution for the past couple years in a research practice partnership. And that's changed my whole perspective on just research in general. I want every future project to be a research practice partnership. Now I will say it takes a lot of time and energy and in focus you do spend a ton of time with a site that you're really committed to, as you should. To your point about going in extracting knowledge and leaving and never giving back to the institution in any sort of way is that, it's egregious for us to think about research like that. That we go in, we extract knowledge, we go, we write a bunch of articles and books and book chapters or poetry, whatever you want to write, about the institution and never go back, never give back, never sort make it any sort of no reciprocity at all.

I think in working so closely with this institution for the past couple years, I have learned more than I ever thought I could learn as a researcher. Like the day to day, just things and interactions and the personal connections. I mean, folks become your friends, they become your collaborators, they become the piece of people you gossip with when stuff is happening, there's texts going on and all that sort of stuff like that, that's a whole nother level of relationship. Also [inaudible 00:40:57] knowledge and producing knowledge together. I think one of the most exciting parts of doing that kind of work is actually writing with your partners and giving presentations, which I have found the opportunity to do with my partners is both publish and give presentations at conferences and different institutes we've been invited to do work with. I think it's important because we know research doesn't happen, or knowledge creation doesn't happen in one moment, but it's a long term endeavor.

So I think it's definitely my favorite kind of research is to work side by side with institutions and give back in ways that you don't want anything. I actually gave a presentation at the institution a few months ago and the person who invited me asked me to, they said, "Oh, I assume you're W9s on file." So they could pay me a small honorarium. And I said, "Actually no, I've never been paid by the institution ever. I've been working with y'all for the past years because I really am interested in working with y'all because it's we're doing research, we're collecting data, we're producing knowledge, all that sort of stuff." And even when I said that, I was like, "Wow," yeah, I've done a lot of work, a lot of presentations, a lot of things with them and never for money. That wasn't what it was about.

It was actually about changing the institution, not even about producing knowledge, but we actually went at the project of how do we make this institution better? How do we enact serving this at this institution, right? Because it was very much about enacting, serving this. So yeah, that project continues to go. It's never going to stop, I think because once you build relationships with institutions, they trust you, they believe in you, they want to continue to work with you because you're helping. You're not going in as a harmful researcher and leaving out the back door. So I think it's humanizing, right? It's a humanizing process as far as research. Research has to be humanizing as well, because it is, it's also very dehumanizing oftentimes.

Felecia Commodore:

So it sounds like the R in research is relationship, right?

Gina Garcia:

Yes.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

And bidirectional.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Bidirectional relationships, I think. And over the years with the work I've done, we really work hard at making sure that there's connections between our institutions and ways of value add for them. It's not about being transactional and extractive, but it's about how do we, again, a bidirectional way, increase understanding? How do we help and uplift and amplify so that much of the time when we're asked to come in, can you help us change entrenched mindsets around this? We're having some issues with that, which can be in terms of value orientation, deficit laden, but it is really more so for me is, well, what are some of the promising practices? How do we think about the sequencing of what's happening? How do we place priority on and fine tune certain things? And I think that as you think through the relationship piece of it, when you can also put your money where your mouth is.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, yes.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Then that is helpful because then it shows support where as you all are thinking about building out a proposal, think about how are you going to find reciprocal pieces that embedded and go exclusively to that partnering institution. Not where it's just, "Hey, here's a little, I'm going to make a rain for a monkey and monkey [inaudible 00:45:08]. But I think sometimes if you can and again, it varies depending on the project, the funder or what have you, but I think that there's some things now as well where, to your point, certain populations have felt as if folks come in, they get what they need, but then nothing's been presented with them in the way of some information that help them reestablish something or draw their attention to how to be better.

And so we have to make sure we work hard at that. One of the other things I would suggest is folks should or try to be versed in some of the essentials of critical participatory action research. If they're wanting to couple with practitioners and do work that's more democratic and collaborative, that's something that they really want to make sure that they attend to and not just some ways that are more out of the scientific method and more narrow and not necessarily engendering or elevating that partnership.

Felecia Commodore:

So the E that's after the R is economic equity, right? And that we are-

Royel Johnson:

R is for relationships. E is for?

Felecia Commodore:

Economic equity.

Royel Johnson:

There we go.

Felecia Commodore:

Make sure that we make it rain the way it should-

Royel Johnson:

And not just for yourself.

Felecia Commodore:

And not just for yourself.

Gina Garcia:

I'm going to need you to carry out the whole thing.

Felecia Commodore:

Now this is a lot of work now. [inaudible 00:46:54] I'm going to call Eboni in so we can have a poetry, we can get it going.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

But we need to get some def poetry, slams, jams. Actually, maybe that's another piece of it when we talk about relationship building. Thinking about your scholarship in ways that is not, again, coloring outside the lines and outside the frame. So each of you have done work, the three of you that I'm on with have done work where is very introspective. The reflexivity is felt unknown, the trustworthiness, the credibility, but the extent to which you partner to do the counter storytelling. You partner to use critical participatory research and do action research that can perhaps encompass photo voice, could use something around scholarly personal narratives, could think about some other types of frames. I know one of the things I've been spending some time thinking more about and it's been on the shelf, is looking at the role of theory and research in relationship to poetry. So it's a whole theory of poetry. There's a whole way in which we can think about from an aesthetic, from a rhythmic way, from symbolism, right? What's happening with folks' experiences and trying to tap into what matters to them.

Felecia Commodore:

Well, we all told you this is going to be a great conversation. And so we really think both Dr. Garcia and Dr. Zamani-Gallagher for Come here. I'm a big fan, girl. So, I really enjoyed this conversation and we'll be sharing some of the work with you all around that. You can look at some of the things they shared as well as some of their really great, important, impactful work also. But before we let you go, we did want to ask one more question and it's a two part. So real quickly, how are you finding and are creating joy these days? And then what is something you think most ASHE members might want to know about you?

Gina Garcia:

I can jump in and my joy, I mean, I'm going to make it about joy related to my work because I find joy in my personal life too. But this summer has been really cool moment for me to think about research

production and research sharing in a different way than the normative ways in which we deliver research. Something I've been thinking about a lot. So I am recording my own podcast, so I was happy to be a guest this time and learn. So I'm super excited. It's called Qué Pasa, HSIs? So I'll plug it now. It'll come out HSI week. And that's just been so much fun to like, I'm talking to practitioners who primarily practitioners, also some HSI researchers, but a lot of practitioners who are on the ground doing, serving this, who we don't always value that knowledge. We think it has to come from research and it's like actually from practice, it's actually happening.

There's so much for us to learn from the people who are on the ground doing it every day and maybe don't have time to open the books we've written or journal the article we've written or whatever it may be. But they're doing it. They're enacting it every single day. So that's been fun to think about different ways to deliver knowledge. I launched a newsletter that'll align with it. So it's going to be a whole series all around this branding, I guess we'll call it, called Qué Pasa, HSIs? What's up, HSIs? Or What's happening, HSIs? That will be other alternative ways of delivering knowledge that aren't the normative ways. So yeah, that's bringing me a lot of joy, I like finding work. It's work, obviously it's research, it's knowledge production, but it's so much more fun than the writing journal articles and responding to reviewer two and going the whole process. It's like it's not that and it's cool and it's a lot of fun. So I'll stop there.

Felecia Commodore:

Sounds great. And last but not least, Dr. Zamani, how are you finding joy these days?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Ooh, I hate to be Daphne, Dream Dasher. Oh, man. I'm in search of it. It is elusive in some regards, but I think part of it is I'm in a place right now of transition and resetting and reframing. So for me, much of, I guess my joy factor right now is that urbanity, peace can be felt. I'm not in a college town in Central Illinois. I am in a metropolitan area. I mean, [inaudible 00:52:38] this is not the south side of Chi, I'm in the 412, not the 312. [inaudible 00:52:48] It's like lit.

The 412, I'm having a little bit of a wheezy moment. I'm kind of moving on up. I mean, because at least I can find joy in seeing more us folk having other things that are outside of my work. So while I take joy in my work, I also am very clear on that. I'm entering my third act. I am trying to retire in 10 years and in a place of doing some vision boarding and thinking about what I want this last leg to look like and how I never thought at this stage, I've been a full professor 12 years, I didn't think that I would be grinding and hustling this hard. When you're on the front end of it, you think, "Oh, well, when I finish my dissertation and I graduate and I get on the TNT. Then, ooh, I got P and T and now I'm associate. Ooh." And then it's like there's always.

Royel Johnson:

Something else. Chasing the carrot.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Some hurdle you're clearing. And I wasn't a track star. I was a bench warmer, [inaudible 00:54:14] your girl was tired but I'm still trying to find joy in what is this next act and what is the right next step, not just for me individually, but for us as a family. And so I mentioned poetry earlier and that's something I've always enjoyed. And so on this third act, I'm really trying to figure out ways to be very intentional, explicit and act that within my research. Because it's been compartmentalized, it's something that I do in terms of, I love reading, say like Sonya Sanchez and other poets, particularly those from Black Power



Movement and the arts movement and cultural critics. And I like writing my own poetry, but I've not had time to really do that. I mean, there's dust on that book because I'm too busy writing a grant proposal or something else related to academia.

But I'm going, "Okay, I could figure out how to make these things meet." So doing stuff around scholarly personal narratives or other ways of storytelling. And then recently being reinvigorated through some of the work of my student, Jerine Manette. And I can't even wait till she wraps up her dissertation as she's engaged in using poetic inquiry and thinking about ways in which we can foster arts-based research practices. But for me, again, I am finding joy in taking a little bit of time to-

Royel Johnson:

You deserve-

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Revisit what I used to find so much joy in terms of reading poetry, writing poetry, looked up some open mics nights and poetry that's got out here in the Pittsburgh area. [inaudible 00:56:17] So I want to try to utilize poetry within my research process in a direct and very effective way in this next stage.

Royel Johnson:

We wish that for you.

Felecia Commodore:

When you're in Pittsburgh, keep an eye out for MC Zamani-Gallaher. [inaudible 00:56:42]

Royel Johnson:

Right.

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

My name when I get on the mic is Black Honey-

Royel Johnson:

It's who?

Eboni Zamani-Gallaher:

Coming to the stage, Black Honey.

Felecia Commodore:

Black honey. I love it.

Royel Johnson:

This conversation was everything that we imagined and thought it would be when we invited you all. Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in joining our round table conversation for the series.

Felecia Commodore:

Thank you to our guests, Dr. Gina A. Garcia and Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher for joining us today in dropping all of their knowledge and nuggets of wisdom on us regarding the role of MSIs and community colleges and serving underserved communities in higher education. At the end of each conversation, we'd 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 Get Like Me by Nelly featuring Nicki Minaj and Pharrell, because the reality is the rest of higher education is just catching up to the work that these schools have already been doing to support student success.

Nellie:

All y'all wanna get like me. Surrounded by that look like these. They know it, you know it, you know it, you know it. Do it again. All my... I'm so sick so they throwing up keys. You know it, you know it, you know it, you know it.

Felecia Commodore:

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 we've had so far have been rich and thought provoking and folks we're just getting started.

Royel 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 humanizing higher education. Until next week I'm Royel.

Felecia Commodore:

I'm Felecia.

Royel Johnson:

Until next time, keep it human.

Felecia Commodore:

Keep it human.