

TRANSCRIPT

The Thought Leader's Viewpoint Episode 3

(Introduction): Governors State University School of Extended Learning presents The Thought Leader's Viewpoint.

Felicia Townsend: I am Felicia Townsend from Governors State University School of Extended Learning. Joining me today is Deborah Bordelon, the provost and vice president of academic affairs at Governors State University. Today we are going to discuss the impact that faculty development has on assisting the student to successfully achieve their academic goals.

Provost Bordelon, thank you for joining me today.

Deborah Bordelon: Thank you so much Felicia. I am so glad that we're having this chance to chat.

Felicia: In your view, how does a faculty's participation in professional development influence student learning and achievement?

Provost Bordelon: Well you know I think it's important to keep in mind that we are all learners. Whether you're a faculty member or student in the classroom, we are constantly learning how to be better educators and how to be better students. So the professional development that faculty are engaged in really enhances their ability to reach out to students and to provide quality learning experiences in the classroom.

So when a faculty member is actively engaged in either their professional associations or on campus in workshops and learning communities, all of that information, networking and collaboration with their peers and colleagues really enhances their teaching ability, and their ability to engage students in the learning process.

There's always something new that we can learn and there's something new we can try in the classroom and it's also important to those networks because sometimes you might try something and it may not work the way that you thought it might but you learn from that experience as well. I think professional development opportunities give our faculty the opportunity to share what works, what doesn't, and to learn from each other on strategies and ways to enhance the learning and success of our students in the classroom.

Felicia: Can you share a few examples of what you think are effective faculty engagement practices that promote student learning at GSU?

Provost Bordelon: Absolutely. First off, we have a phenomenal faculty and I'm always so impressed when I'm visiting classrooms and I see what's going on in our classrooms here at GSU. Some of the things that I think really promote student engagement is when faculty are able to have students engaged in the discussions and getting them actively involved in the materials through small group activities. A faculty member may present information and pose a question. Instead of having a student answer that question alone, they work in a group of three or four other students to brainstorm; to look at ideas; and different ways of addressing that question. That's one activity that I've seen and that I have been impressed with.

Also, getting students to understand that in the classroom they have to be able to transform that knowledge and to be able to ... make it their own. Faculty members who are able to get students engaged in the material, to get them to personalize it and see how does this relate to what I'm doing in other classes. How does this relate to my professional goals as I'm going through this program of study? That enhances the learning experience. So I've seen faculty members engage students in presentations in the classroom; doing small group activities; involved in research activities along with the faculty members or in small groups. That has allowed the student to take that information, apply it, and really make it their own.

Felicia: What do you think are some of the barriers that faculty might encounter as they are meeting the needs of a diverse student population?

Provost Bordelon: This is a great question. In fact today we had a campus wide symposium looking at how do we address the needs? How do we become a more inclusive and equitable campus? I think some of the barriers that may come up are faculty may not be aware of some of the challenges that our students are facing and, as a result, a student may not be performing as well in a class but there may be multiple factors around that. Today we were talking about strategies and ways that we can become more aware of the strengths our students are bringing to the classroom as well as some of the challenges that they are facing. I see a barrier as an opportunity and this is another opportunity for professional development.

We had a group of students today share what they would like for our faculty and staff to know as far as meeting their needs and helping them achieve their academic goals. That was so powerful because they talked a lot about listening and having the faculty that they are working with ask questions about their lives and how are they doing in class. By doing that, faculty are better able to meet their needs because they're more in touch. They're more aware of what's going on, not only on the academic side but taking a more holistic perspective.

Felicia: Provost Bordelon you bring up such a good point because research shows that when a student is engaged with the faculty, in terms of that type of interaction, they are more likely to stay at the institution. So I am happy to hear that the students were able to express that they would like to see more of a strong interaction with faculty members. I think this is critical.

Provost Bordelon: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. I think you hit upon a very important point; it's important as a retention measure to have that connection because when you feel connected to a community via a community in the classroom or the university community, you have that support network there. So that's going to help you ... to take advantage of the resources available on campus to help you achieve your academic goals. You don't feel isolated or alone. You have someone. You have a group that is going to be there and help support you in academic success.

Felicia: What do you see as both positive and negative impacts that a faculty's actions can have on a student's perception of the academic environment?

Provost Bordelon: Well I think it ties into what we were just discussing. If a student feels connected then that's a positive impact on the student's perception of the academic environment. If a student feels that a faculty member or advisor or a staff member really cares about them that's going to have a positive impact on the academic environment. On the flip side, if a student feels that no one is there for them, or if no one cares if they come to class or not, or if they're being successful, or if they're struggling no one is recognizing that or providing help, then that is going to have a negative impact on the student's success as well as the student's view of the academic environment in the classroom as well as the university as a whole.

Felicia: Can you share a few examples of current and possible future faculty development initiatives that will foster a student's learning?

Provost Bordelon: Well I think today's campus-wide symposium was a prime example of a faculty development initiative that brought people together to talk about what are your core values? and what are initiatives ... and actions that you can put into place that can help students succeed in the classroom as well as across their program of study?

I think having those types of activities where you're bringing people together from various disciplines, from various units across the university to have those conversations on what do we need to do, is extremely important.

I also think having learning communities with smaller groups of faculty that get together to talk about various pedagogical strategies, various ideas that they have for their classrooms in a much more intimate and small group fashion where ... you can build that sense of community but it may be five or six people getting together. Then there are workshops and other things that are available to faculty and to staff to look at the latest technology available to faculty to reach out to students.

We have GSU Star which is a way that faculty can reach out to our freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to either give them kudos when they're doing things that faculty wants to recognize but also if they're struggling a bit to reach out and say, hey I care about you. These are resources that are available to you. I just want to touch base to make sure everything is okay or I noticed you haven't been in class, can I help in any way or please come see me so we can talk about how we can get you back on track.

I think in looking at those initiatives, faculty who are engaged in the workshops, the learning communities, using the technology and other strategies to reach out to students enables them to be a much more effective educator. It builds those relationships with the students. So in the classroom it's much more than I'm just the instructor coming in or the professor coming in to teach but we're here as learners. We're here to work together and have that sense of community in the classroom.

Felicia: Can you suggest a few possible activities that can enhance the professional development experience for a faculty member?

Provost Bordelon: When you're looking at enhancing the professional development experience, I think it's important for faculty to reach out to their colleagues and encourage them to participate in the professional development

activities as well. It's one of those things where we have some faculty who will participate on a regular basis and some that don't as often. But I think if we have peer-to-peer, faculty member-to-faculty member reaching out and engaging their colleagues in the professional development activities it builds momentum and it builds the collegiality in that program or across programs as people are coming together to share ideas.

I know one of the barriers is time, but we're looking at ways that we can build it in where we can maximize the number of faculty who are participating in these activities. I think it's something that, as educators, we need to rejuvenate. We need to share ideas. We need to get excited because sometimes when you don't change things up you can get in a rut and that's just human nature.

I think it's important to every now and again to step out of your comfort zone and hear new ideas, and to get engaged, and to see what other people on campus are doing because as I shared with you before, I've seen some phenomenal things going on in the classroom, phenomenal educators engaging students... we want to make sure that faculty across the board are aware of what their peers are doing and they can also share what they're doing. I think that is something that moves the university forward and it also benefits the students and the faculty.

Felicia: Talk to me about what inspires you in your role as Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs of Governors State University?

Provost Bordelon: I think what inspires me the most is seeing the phenomenal work that is being done by our faculty, by our staff, and the engagement of our students across the campus. I love to walk the halls. Whenever I get a chance I like to be out and about. I like to visit with students when I see them studying. I like to see teachers in the classroom engaging their students. That inspires me greatly because I see that intensity and passion that our faculty have for their discipline but also that commitment to student learning.

I have a wonderful opportunity to work with faculty on committees and with the faculty senate and other venues. To be able to have the exchange of ideas and looking at ways that we can enhance the learning experience of our students and the commitment that our faculty have, here at Governors State, to student success inspires me every day.

So when I'm able to be out and about and to interact with faculty and with

students, it's just uplifting. I'm energized. I'm just so proud of what's going on here and seeing the mission and the vision of Governors State actualized in the classrooms it's just a wonderful, wonderful experience. So as Provost, being able to work with all of the colleges and with student affairs, I am just honored and humbled, many times, just to see how wonderful and committed our faculty and staff are to our students.

Felicia: It has been such a pleasure talking with you Provost Bordelon. Thank you for sharing your insights.

(Closing) If you want to learn more about the programs and services offered through the School of Extended Learning, please visit govst.edu/oce, that's govst.edu/oce.

(Music)