Katy Oliveira ([00:07](#)):

Welcome to Next Practices Data-informed Strategies to shape the future of higher ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institutions. I'm your host, Katy Olivera.

Ruth Reinhart ([00:28](#)):

From the onset, we found some partners in instruction who wanted to be part of this work, and we asked them, what do you want the alerts to be like? We didn't want to dictate that for them. So I think just having that conversation with them and saying, help us build what will help you all in the classroom. What are you seeing? You're the experts in the classroom. What would be beneficial? What alert would you want us to help you with? And so they actually are instructional colleagues actually built out the academic alert, and so I think because we did that, they really bought into it and they really helped their colleagues understand the importance of it.

Katy Oliveira ([01:10](#)):

In this episode, I'm talking with Dr. Ruth is Why Har Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Support Services at Austin Community College in Austin, Texas. In this episode, we discuss how a ACC has built a proactive and holistic approach to student success using analytics and integrated student success case management tools for its over 35,000 students across 11 campuses. But before we dive in, take a moment to subscribe to the show to stay up to date in the latest and data informed practices for student success. Welcome to Next Practices. Ruth, I'm so happy you're here.

Ruth Reinhart ([01:51](#)):

Thanks for having me. I'm excited to share our story from a CC and our work with Civitas Learning platform and all that has helped our students.

Katy Oliveira ([01:58](#)):

I want to start by having you tell me about Austin Community College, how it serves its mission and your role as part of that work.

Ruth Reinhart ([02:06](#)):

Sure. So I serve as Associate Vice Chancellor Student support services here at Austin Community College. We are a huge college. We have 11 campuses. We joke around that we are the size of Connecticut, that is our service area, so we serve lots of students in our area. The work that we do really propels student success. We really partner a lot with our community partners, our industry partners to help students become successful in their different workspaces and really prepare them for the needs of our community.

Katy Oliveira ([02:41](#)):

I know a ACC is I think one of the largest community colleges in the nation, or is it the largest?

Ruth Reinhart ([02:47](#)):

We are not the largest, but we are one of the top. I think we're in the top 10. Yeah, I think Dallas and Houston might be a little bit over us, but yeah, we're one of those, yeah,

Katy Oliveira (02:57):

One of the really big ones, and I'm sure that you, I know because in Austin I have the pleasure of living with Austin. So Austin Community College is my home community college and have worked with many students who have gone through the system and know that you serve a very broad, diverse cross section of our city, and with that comes its own set of unique challenges. So I wonder what are some of the biggest student success challenges that you and your team are seeing and working to solve?

Ruth Reinhart (03:26):

So I think for us, while we do have a diverse student population and try to serve all those communities in our catchment area, I think the challenge we really are having, Katy is really trying to capture those students who are first generation students or who have never experienced college are underrepresented population of students, African-American and Hispanic students or Latino students. Even though the Latinos are the majority in this country, they are still lagging in seeking educational opportunities and we really are trying diligently to reach those students so they can prosper in this educational opportunity that we offer at ACC. And the other thing that we're doing that's new, we are offering free tuition started in fall 2024. So we're really excited about that. We think that we'll really help with our mission of open access to all students. So we're really excited about that opportunity and really helping those communities come to ACC so they can really empower and change the trajectory of their lives and end of our community.

Katy Oliveira (04:31):

Yeah, that's wonderful. I did see in my own local newspaper that you had expanded your open access mission by making tuition free, so that's really exciting. Are you seeing any early indicators that is increasing enrollment or feedback from the community around that new policy?

Ruth Reinhart (04:50):

So just to be clear, it hasn't been a board approved. We do have a new president Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, and that is his vision for us to really capture those students. They're not going anywhere, they're not going to the university or they're not going anywhere. So we really are just trying to capture those students. It will be effective in fall of 2024 if the board does approve it in March, but we're hoping that we will see some returns on that, on these efforts for open access to our students.

Katy Oliveira (05:15):

Fantastic. I know that your institution has done a lot of work to help students. You do enroll in ACC to be as successful as possible, and I want to spend a little bit of time there if you mind sharing what your strategic vision is for the students who do come to your school as far as supporting them through their experience so that they can be successful and reach those goals.

Ruth Reinhart (05:37):

We have really focused our efforts on really being more strategic with our students that we are serving. Of course, we have over 70,000 students, so that is a lot of students that we have to take care of. So we've done a couple of things. We have our success coaches who are really tied to our coordinating board, cohort board, which are really, that is what defines our graduation rate. So a couple of years ago we were at 7%. We are now at 23% because we're just being more intentional with our efforts to ensure students are getting the advising they need and getting the support they need to be successful and to complete in three years now. Then we have all of our part-time students that are here and that takes 'em

about six to seven years to complete. We're not forgetting about those students. So we are being more intentional with those students as well.

(06:27):

We are really strategic in our efforts through the Civitas Learning platform about student engagement and opportunities. We case manage all of our students now. So there are metrics that we have for our team members, things that they have to do to ensure engagement with students. We do know that when students engage with their advisor, we do see an increase in persistence and completion. So we know that does work. So we are using those strategies, not only my team but also my colleagues team in our accelerators third learning labs. We keep all that data and we look, we see how students are doing and we do notice and we see the data and it does demonstrate that students who utilize those services do better and persist and complete. So those are all data points that we really use. We also, in the last year, we have implemented a Domo dashboard which gives us live data for our advisors so they can see who they haven't seen. So that way they use our Civitas Learning platform to reach out to those students. We will able to see who withdrew from classes and things of that nature. So just being really proactive in our efforts to ensure students are getting the support they need in real time.

Katy Oliveira (07:42):

What is your advising model? If you're doing a case management system? I know at community college there can be a wide range of advising models because you're serving such a high volume of students with so many different kinds of college experiences, students who are taking courses just over the summer from students who are seeking a certification, the students who are looking to transfer to a four year institution. How are you managing advising for the students? Are they required to see advisors? Do they have an assigned advisor?

Ruth Reinhart (08:12):

Every single student at ACC is assigned to someone, so they are not required to see their advisor. However, we have KPIs that require our advisors to reach out to students at least half of their caseload. They have to reach out to their student and do some preadvising with them so they can send them their information regarding what they need to register for the next semester and things of that nature. Our instructional colleagues have done some different strategic scheduling initiatives, so now a student can see the schedule for the next three years. So that way we can kind of plan with the student moving forward what their schedules will look like for the next three years, see all the schedule out. So that's something new that just got implemented actually in the spring, so we're really excited about that. So while we don't have mandatory advising, I think the efforts that we're doing with our KPIs is really driving for students to see their assigned advisor. Just like you mentioned, we are huge and I think the thing that Covid taught us really is how can we support students where they are? We can see students virtually. They don't have to come into the office. We can see students wherever they are at the time that they need.

(09:18):

While they're not required, as I mentioned, we just want them to see somebody so they're assigned to someone, but they can see anybody that is convenient for them that seems to be working and our advisors are thinking they're not really seeing the person they're supposed to be seeing. But the data does show in our demo dashboard that actually 75% of our students are actually seeing their assigned advisor, which is good. It helps us to really develop a relationship with students so we can support them

holistically and develop that relationship that is meaningful and they'll come back and see their advisor. So that's really good. I think that those are kind of things that we've done. We do have a whole online team of advisors that are kind of our generalist who can answer just general questions for students and they will help students that they support them on the weekends and in the evenings. So we're just trying to be there for students when students need us because we know our students are not traditional students. They have eight to five jobs, they have children and things of that nature. So we just are really just trying to meet the student where they are and really support them in that manner.

Katy Oliveira ([10:19](#)):

Are you using the Civitas Learning capabilities and tools as part of that work? If you're not requiring students, the students that the advisors are reaching out to, are they able to prioritize that based on the data that they're seeing to understand who might be at more risk and who may benefit more from support versus those students might be better or more self-sufficient, kind of navigate it on their own, they're able to prioritize their time to make sure the students are a little higher risk, may get more holistic or more proactive support. Is that how you're approaching it?

Ruth Reinhart ([10:54](#)):

We do. So we do do that because we use all the predictive scores in the Civitas learning platform to help us do that so advisors can pay more attention to those students who might not be doing as well in their classes and things of that nature. We also launched Academic Alert about two years ago, and that has been really helpful with our faculty members in alerting us when there are issues in the classroom. It could be performance, it could be their missing classes and things of that nature. So that has helped. I think the other thing that we have implemented is we do the college student inventory with all of our students. It's optional, but it's not required. But what we find is we are able to provide students with the resources before school starts so they have everything that they need in place so they can be successful If it's childcare, if it's food insecurities and things of that nature, we try to support them in that manner early on so that doesn't become a barrier for them to retain and complete the semester.

Katy Oliveira ([11:53](#)):

Yeah, I know just from my conversations with partners and institutions across the country, that shifting to this kind of model where you have a caseload, especially at community colleges and you're managing that caseload based on need versus who shows up at the door and raises their hand, you're still balancing who shows up at the door and raises their hand with the students who may not raise their hand and come in that that can be kind of tricky, especially for advisors who in the past may have felt like they're very busy because they have full calendars and full waiting rooms, but the students filling up those calendars and waiting rooms are always the students who actually need the most help. They're usually the students who are good self advocators. Can you walk me through how, I'm assuming that in another time ACC may have done things in a different way and that you over time have moved to this model. This being in my background, being in advising know that history of advising and this case management model hasn't always been the norm, especially at open access institutions. So how have y'all made that transition over time and shifted your culture to this approach?

Ruth Reinhart ([13:05](#)):

So it's been about five years. So we started this shift. It was very transactional and we really wanted it to be more relational with our students. So we really engaged in a lot of work with InsideTrack with the coaching model, and that was our first step. I think Guided Pathways as well kind of put us on the

trajectory of not making our advisors generalists and making them area of study advisors. We have 10 areas of study and so that becomes their specialization. So all that work about five years ago really started our trajectory to changing how we're doing advising. We used to have a walk-in model. I will say that when I started at a CCA long time ago, it was a walk-in model and as you're talking about waiting rooms that were full lines out the door, we don't see that anymore because with this case management model, I think of the proactivity of engaging with students when they need us kind of cuts down that.

(13:58):

I mean, we always have some students that come in and walk in and that's okay, but we also, we get meaningful reports. We get reports of students who have withdrawn the academic alert. We didn't have all those in place before. And while I think when you are doing this change management, people are pushing back because, oh my God, how am I going to manage this? And so it really has changed how we support students because we're doing it in a real time when they need us. And you're right, there's a lot of students who advocate self-advocate for themselves. They know how to do all those things, and those aren't the ones that we're really worried about. We're really worried about those others who aren't doing as well. So I think by using the tools that we have, it really helps us as the advisors are trained, you should be looking at this, your data in your dashboard, your Civitas for all the ones assigned to you, and the ones that are not showing are low probability of being successful, those are the ones you need to reach out.

(14:56):

So we develop communication plans for them. So they already have the templates and then they can kind of reach out to the student pretty quickly. We are launching as well texting, which we think is better than the email. I think sometimes students, they get inundated with emails. So we're just really trying to be where students are in terms of what technology is really going to connect with students. So I think that's important. I think the other thing as well is in the past people have felt that student affairs or advising, it's always been their responsibility and nobody else's responsibility. And we have really partnered, our executive dean of advising has really partnered with our instructional colleagues. They are really coming on board wanting to do more for students. So we have more faculty advising happening now, which is great. They're in this Civitas Learning platform, they're getting training on how to use that so that way when they go in, they see a holistic picture of the student because we always tell them, you have the student more than we do.

(15:55):

We don't require mandatory advising. So anything you can provide for us is more helpful for us to be proactive with the student. And I think it's really important for us to develop those relationships with our instructional colleagues because we have to work together in order to make this journey for our students successful. And so I just think over the last five to six years, we've really shifted from being very transactional to relational. And that has really made an impact on our completions and students persisting in completing. So I think it's been a journey and it hasn't gone without its bumps and without its people pushing back. But I think in the long run, people who have been here for a long time have really seen the shift in our student behavior. Our waiting rooms are not the way they used to be 18 years ago where there was lines out the door that doesn't exist anymore just because we're being more proactive and providing more holistic advising support.

Katy Oliveira (16:51):

It's really remarkable how holistic advising or proactive advising and being able to just have a caseload management model can so reduce the kinds of lines and wait lists. I mean, I've been in situations in my previous life as an advisor where I was an advisor at the University of Houston downtown, which is an open access institution where we essentially had, it was like almost, I hate to say this, but being at the DMV where we had a lobby full of people and we had a monitor and your number came up and you went through a cubicle and you saw an advisor, and we really only had time to help with scheduling advice. We weren't able to provide holistic support. And so I've been there with a lobby full of students who just need to get their question answered. And I think it's just amazing and remarkable that you could create ease workload, create efficiency, and sort of even provide a better experience for students, quite frankly. But by having that shift in how services are delivered, quite remarkable.

Ruth Reinhart (17:47):

Yeah, it's not perfect still, right? We still have lots of work to do, but I think overall for student experience, it's much better than what it used to be. And I think the advisors, new advisors don't know any better. I hate to say it, but those of us who've been here forever, we really do see the difference in terms of customer service. And actually we see lower advising errors and things of that nature because you are in a specialization and you know exactly your area of study and you can be able to support that student. So I think that case management, when we introduced it, I think people feel your micromanagement because we can see their demo dashboards, we can see who they've seen, who they haven't seen, who have they might reached out to. And it's not about micromanaging, it's really about accountability and what we owe the student because we want them to be successful. And so it is our responsibility as an institution to provide that service for a student. So I just think the holistic, the coaching, all that has really made a difference for us as an institution.

Katy Oliveira (18:46):

You mentioned two things that I want to dig a little bit deeper into. One is that you have some faculty doing this work, and the other is of course the outcomes that you're seeing. But I want to start with faculty. I recently went to our Texas Leadership Institute in San Antonio with our partners, and you had some representatives there. They were representatives from all over Texas and even outside of Texas, as well as just my conversations I've had with guests on the podcast and how to get faculty on board with using submitting alerts that are high quality and not just passing the buck to an advisor, getting faculty to do proactive outreach, getting faculty to take notes, getting faculty to use a platform, a student success management platform at all. I know tricky, tricky sticking point at a lot of institutions in a place where a lot of people are looking for advice and looking for tactics and tricks to make that happen. Can you share what that looks like and how you introduce this to faculty and how you're getting faculty to participate in this work?

Ruth Reinhart (19:52):

The important thing for us as an institution from the onset, we found some partners in instruction who wanted to be part of this work, and we asked them, what do you want the alerts to be like? We didn't want to dictate that for them. So I think just having that conversation with them and saying, help us build what will help you all in the classroom. What are you seeing? You're the experts in the classroom, what would be beneficial? What alerts would you want us to help you with? And so actually our instructional colleagues actually built out the academic alert. And so I think because we did that, they really bought into it and they really helped their colleagues understand the importance of it. Now, we don't have a hundred percent participation in it. We don't, I mean, that's just the honest truth, but I think by having

the instruction take the lead on it and us supporting them kind of being the supporting role, people really made a difference.

(20:47):

And so we have some really good power users with that. So that would be my recommendation is just having them lead that work, what is going to help them in the classroom is very practical and it makes them feel empowered and that we are partnering with them. We're not telling you what to do. We want you to tell us what's going to help you. And I think that really made a difference for us. I really do. And then I think reminding them of the academic alert, our OIRA does do reporting for us regarding who's using it, who's not using it, and then how do department chairs giving that to the department chairs, and then how do you encourage your instructional colleagues in your areas to use this? And so we do ongoing training on Academic alert. We partner with our teaching and learning division regarding developing videos, however we needed to do that to help them.

(21:39):

So I think it's just a lot of partnerships and I think that's unusual for us with instruction and student affairs. And I think that has been really helpful for us and we just kind of keep doing it. And just so you'll know with this free tuition, we needed to focus on three items for the student journey, and that is one of them is how do we enhance our academic alert system so more faculty are using it. So like I said, we still have a lot of work to do and I think by how do we enhance what we have to help better support students? So that's one of the goals that we're going to have for 2024 is really having more faculty use that. So it's a work in progress, but I think just partnering with them, helping develop it was really critical for us at this institution.

Katy Oliveira (22:30):

Beyond Academic alerts, you have faculty who are using it in an advising capacity or that are using it, adding notes or looking at proactive outreach or using it to pull any kind of other reporting or data.

Ruth Reinhart (22:44):

I will share, and I'm going to use an old Civitas term, we had degree map, and it's just those little things of we had degree map and we are turning that off March one. So just having that communication and we sent out a big communication to them that we're not going to have degree Map anymore. We're going to inspire as part of the Civitas learning platform. And so just that communication with them and letting them know that, but we are saying, you can have access to this platform, but you have to be trained. We're not going to let you go in there. And just so there's different levels of access. So they really are interested. And we do have a lot who go in there and put notes in there now that they really understand the system and what it can do so they can get a holistic picture of their students. So they do go through training. It's a 90 minute training that we've developed internally through our work with Civitas. So we have two trainers that's all they do is trained faculty and student affairs folks on how to use the system and give 'em access and things of that nature. So it just really shows partnership and helping them understand the tools that we use on our side of the house and how it helps support them in their work with their students in the classroom.

Katy Oliveira ([23:54](#)):

Yeah, I've got to imagine that this has always a challenge for faculty, but at the end of the day, these kinds of interfaces and practices help them. It helps students be successful in their classes, so there's a benefit in it for them. There's something in it for them at the end of the day.

Ruth Reinhart ([24:10](#)):

Yeah, there is. And I think little by little they're understanding that Katie, and it's just taken a while. I think it's just a shift in culture and it's going to get better, but I think it's just been our relationship and working with them and showing them the benefits of this platform and how it can help them. It's funny. And the thing is, I was on a call today this morning and somebody was saying that they use your phone to text. And I'm like, okay, you shouldn't be using your phone to text. We do have a platform that allows you to text do you an access. We can give you access and give you training. They're like, oh my God, really? And so there's a lot. We are a huge institution, and communication is always a challenge for us. But I think once you alert them of some capabilities, they are open to learn because it actually helps them. So you are correct. They really do see the benefit of really leaning on us for advice and how to use a platform and how can I get better to support my students in my classroom. So it's just a changing culture and it takes time. This has happened overnight and we are just glad that we are doing that more and more.

Katy Oliveira ([25:13](#)):

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Katy Oliveira ([25:50](#)):

You also mentioned that you're seeing a lot of positive outcome because of the shift in the work that you're doing. And I know we talked, outcomes can be really broad. We love to hear improved persistence and retention and completion graduation rates, but those are the holy grail, if you will, of student success work. But I also think that workload efficiencies and better coordination and communication can be really important outcomes as well. Do you mind sharing a little bit more about the kind of outcomes that you're seeing both big and small?

Ruth Reinhart ([26:21](#)):

So yes, we are seeing more efficiencies in our workloads. One of the things our partners who are in advising have said, we have too many things, too many platforms. And so by using Civitas Learning platform and condensing it into one, it makes it a little bit easier for them. So they can text, they can email from the platform and they can even send mass emails to them. And then we do use another platform to do strategic interventions with students and things of that nature. So it helps in that capacity. They don't feel like they have to do one at a time, and it gets all kind of documented in the cita learning platform. So it does help with that kind of thing. And then the other thing is in terms of persistence, we have seen an increase in persistence in terms of persistence from fall to fall and fall to spring.

(27:13):

And I think it's only because we do those communications in a mass. We do a mass email to them. And so then we can even dig down deep into the data and say, okay, of everybody that I sent on my caseload that I sent this notification to, these people have already signed appointments with me. These people have already registered. So we dig down deep into that. So we use Domos, so we are able to really pull down who has registered, who has not registered, who have you contacted, who have you not contacted? And so we can prioritize in that way. And it has become more efficient because before we were kind of guessing who and what was coming and things of that nature. So this really helps them to really focus on who they need to be focusing on and everything is documented in one platform.

(27:59):

So I just feel like for our teams, it has been a little daunting that while it might feel like we're being big brotherish, but it really provides them the information they need to be excellent at their job and to be more efficient. And we have seen better outcomes for our students, but even for staff, we really have, they appreciate that we got rid of a calendar and now we use the calendar within Civitas learning platform. That's one less thing. And so they just appreciate, we hear them, we hear their concerns, and we really want to streamline their work so it doesn't seem so cumbersome. So we're really trying to work on just streamlining all those things. And I will say that I was talking about the strategic schedule. So in the past we used to just roll over our schedule, it didn't matter. But now we use data to inform where we should be building our schedule and where we need classes.

(28:51):

So we have a lot of data. We're really using it in a strategic manner. So we're doing that. That's a little bit better. And we're even thinking about enabling the scheduler because we talked about, and we had, but it's again, that communication with instruction. We told them about scheduler and we told the committee about this platform within cita learning platform, and they're like, can we have a demo? So we joined a demo with them and they were really excited about it and they wanted to be part of their work group moving forward. But it's just having that engagement with instruction and having me part of that conversation and understanding how this, again, tool will help build their schedule, what the goals are, and it'll help students to develop their schedules and things of that nature, of course, and really work around our student schedules who are chaotic, they're work children, everything else that they have in their lives. And so they see the value of it. So I think it's just a lot of those things that we know these tools really help students persist and not say, I can't do this because we are really trying to be really efficient with our time and we respect students' times and things of that nature. So I think all those together really have made a difference for us.

Katy Oliveira (30:01):

Do you know over the trajectory of the work that you've been doing to help students in this more proactive way? I know that there's been dip because and shift in anomalies because of covid, but do you have a trajectory in your retention that you're seeing that you're able to point to yet? Or is that still something that you're kind of looking more micro semester? Persistence is improving.

Ruth Reinhart (30:24):

We're seeing it semester per semester that it's improving. I think that the challenge, and I'm sure many institutions are seeing this, is students that went through high school and during C are really struggling just because the way they were learning. And so we're just really trying to see how we can help those

students be more successful. And I know a lot of institutions are struggling with that as well. So hopefully we're just really looking at semester by semester, and then of course we'll see what comes up if we get this free tuition where that helps us in terms of our enrollment. But I think for us in Texas, I'm sure a lot of schools with all the changes and the funding, it's not about the entering, it's about the completions and things. So we're really focusing on the microcredentials to stackable credentials, those kinds of things to kind of get students the skills they need to get a better paying job.

(31:15):

And it's hard, right? Because right now we're hearing all those things about is higher ed really worth it? And so I think this is another reason why we really want to do this free tuition is to really help students understand that your education is something that'll go with you for longer right now. I mean, you could go somewhere and make $22 an hour. It's that instant gratification that I think a lot of our students are seeing, but we have to really show them the value of their education or their lifetime. And so just how do we teach them that the value of education and how it can really change the trajectory of your life.

Katy Oliveira (31:51):

Yeah. You read my mind. I was going to ask you how House Bill eight was impacting your work, but you started to share that that's a shift in Texas' funding model that for community colleges that the funding is based on completion. Do you mind just talking a little bit more about how you're thinking about that? I know it's early and a lot of institutions are still trying to sort through that, but how are you'all thinking about that at this time? So

Ruth Reinhart (32:16):

We really are looking at even being strategic with that in terms of, I mean, our graduated cohort is always important, but even for all those students who come part-time and things of that nature, we are looking at the high wage certificates. And so really one strategy we're looking at now already we're starting to look at that is those students who are seeking a degree within those programs, can we award them a certificate first? So that'll come towards a completion for us. So looking at that is one strategy for us, and then what kind of outreaches will we do to those students? And so just being really strategic in how we help students attain certificates along the way before they get their degree. Not saying that their degree isn't important, but they can earn a credential because life happens along the way. And so if they have something they've completed, they at least have a credential that'll help them along the way, and it'll help the institution as well.

(33:07):

I think the other thing too is we do have really great transfer rates, and one thing that we do struggle with at ACC is reverse transfer. And so just being really more proactive with reverse transfers and things of that nature to help us help with our completions, to increase our completions, but we don't have an automated way. We have to work with our four year institutions, our partners, and that's sometimes a challenge. And even for students, how do we educate students about reverse transfer? What does that mean? They don't understand that and things of that nature. So I think we just have, it's a lot of education on our part to students, and so we're starting to do a little bit more work in that space. We're happy you're transferring, but we know they're somewhere else. And so just kind of developing a strategy of reaching out to those students who have left and letting them know, can you send us back your transcript so we can award you your associate's degree or your certificate? And so we're just trying to be really more strategic with those efforts to help along that way.

Katy Oliveira ([34:05](#)):

Yeah, it's tricky, and I'm sure a lot of folks are still trying to think through which way that they can support students that can play, but that makes a lot of sense to have sort of a multi-pronged approach to this because you have students that are doing so many different things and are entering your institution for so many different reasons and often don't even know what they're still trying to figure out what they want. Yeah.

Ruth Reinhart ([34:26](#)):

Well, they don't understand our language in higher ed, right? We hire ED everything, and they don't understand. They come in, I mean, I know you shared you were a first generation student and so am, and so how do they navigate all that? That's all new to them. It's a whole new language. They don't understand it. So I think as their partners, we have to do a better job at educating them on what that means because they don't know the questions to ask. So it's our responsibility to help them guide through all our education bureaucracy. So I just think we have a lot to do to get better, to do that, to support students.

Katy Oliveira ([34:57](#)):

Well, we have covered a lot of ground, and I'm very thankful for your time, but I want to give you an opportunity if there's anything that I should have asked you or any lessons, other lessons learned that you'd like to share with leaders in similar situations, I want to give you space to share that.

Ruth Reinhart ([35:12](#)):

I think for us, it's really about that partnership with instruction has been really, really important to us. I think our relationship with OIRA is really important to us. They are the ones that really help us with caseload assignments because those are not easy to do when you're as institution, as large as us, and we have different sessions. We have an eight week session, we have a 12 week session, we have a 14 week session, we have 16 week sessions. And so we're always assigning students. So that is a big job. And so if you really want to go to a caseload management, you have to really have protocols on how those assignments will be done and things of that nature. But it's really, we do it in collaboration with our OIRA folks, and that's really important. That has made it really successful. And we always have to shift.

([35:58](#)):

I say you just have to be willing to be flexible because we could have a model this moment of how we're going to do assignments, and then we have to come back to the table and say, okay, caseloads are really high in this AOS, how can we adjust? So I think just being flexible that you're going to have to come back and you're going to have to readjust how you do those assignments sometimes because it's not a perfect science. And I think if you just have to be open-minded that you're going to have to do that if your numbers increase in one area of study, because we've had to do that every semester, we have to come back and say, okay, are we going to do this? And so I just think being honest with your colleagues and letting them know that this is the why, because we want to be equitable to our advisors because we don't want them to have caseloads that are 500.

([36:46](#)):

They have really reasonable caseloads. No, because we have about 95 advisors, success coaches that do this work, but we just know that we have to come back sometimes and we have to have some shifts in how we do assignments just because of the loads. And so just that partnership with OIRA and things of

that nature, and then even partnerships with instruction. Instruction is really in terms of we want to advise our students. We don't want them y'all to advise them. And just being respectful of that is good. That's good. If you want to advise your students, go ahead. We are okay with that. And I think it's just having them knowing who to contact when they want to do that and make that shift is important as well.

Katy Oliveira ([37:27](#)):

It's OIRA, your institutional research office.
Ruth Reinhart ([37:30](#)):
Yes. I'm sorry. Yes, they are. That's

Katy Oliveira ([37:32](#)):

Okay. Yeah. And I think what you're saying is really important. Partnership student success takes a village. And so working together and collaborating, coordinating student success across institution and moving beyond student success, being the business of academic affairs or advising is really critical point that you raise and something that we're seeing more and more across our partner institution. Yep.

Ruth Reinhart ([37:55](#)):

It's fun. I love my job. I do this because I was a first generation student and I had to navigate all this by myself. And so that's why I'm so passionate about the work that we do for our students. And just seeing students graduate is amazing how we can change their lives. And so that's why I do what I do, and my team is totally committed to this work. Even though it's challenging sometimes. They know in the long run, we're making a difference for our students.

Katy Oliveira ([38:19](#)):

Yeah, it's really, it's beautiful. I love that. That's the same reason I got into it. Ruth, thank you so much for coming on Next Practices. I'm so glad to have you on the show.

Ruth Reinhart ([38:28](#)):

Thanks, Katy. Have a great day. I appreciate it.

Katy Oliveira ([38:33](#)):

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