

NP 41 - How Shared Leadership Turns Student Success Into Institutional Impact

Student success rarely belongs to just one office or one team. The real challenge is getting people across an institution to work toward the same goals while still bringing their own expertise and perspective to the table. When that happens, individual efforts can become something much bigger. Today's guest, Tara Stopfel Warden, knows that challenge well. Tara is Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Cincinnati. Her work includes retention strategy, academic advising, new student orientation, dual enrollment, and student success technology.

Much of her role involves coordinating work across the university without having direct authority over the people doing it. That experience has made collaboration a central part of how she approaches student success. In our conversation, we discuss how a group of advising leaders that began meeting informally grew into an important voice for student success across the university. We also talk about what can go wrong when students receive too many early-alert messages, or when those messages make them feel like they don't belong.

Tara shares why advisors should be involved when universities choose the technology they'll be expected to use every day. We also look at AI and where it can be useful, particularly when it takes administrative work off an advisor's plate and gives them more time with students. Throughout the conversation, we return to the idea that better decisions often come from bringing the right people into the discussion.

Show Notes:

[02:32] Tara Stopfel Warden shares her role at the University of Cincinnati and the student success initiatives she helps lead.

[04:08] Why leading at a decentralized university often depends more on influence than authority.

[07:50] How an informal group of advising leaders grew into a trusted resource for solving student challenges across the university.

[09:51] Giving every college and advising center a voice in student success decisions.

[12:03] Using shared leadership roundtables to bring different perspectives together around the Bearcat Promise initiative.

[14:12] How ideation labs helped UC involve students and staff in developing its student portal.

[18:14] What UC learned about early-alert messaging and why well-intentioned outreach can sometimes hurt student retention.

[20:28] Why coordinating outreach across departments matters when multiple teams are communicating with the same student.

[23:52] What universities can get wrong when technology decisions are made without input from the people who will use the systems.

[26:13] Why Tara wanted advisors themselves to help determine which student success platform UC adopted.

[28:17] How AI is helping advisors spend less time on administrative work and more time working directly with students.

[31:01] What Tara believes higher education is still getting wrong about student success.

[32:42] Why collective action and shared leadership can create stronger support for institutional change.

Links and Resources:

[Civitas Learning](#)

[Tara Stopfel Warden - LinkedIn](#)

[University of Cincinnati](#)