

Becoming Community Podcast. Season one. Episode two. Sarah Gewirtz and Drs. Karen Ericson, Jean Keller and Kyhl Lyndgaard.

[Music]

Sarah Gewirtz: Welcome to season one of our podcast series Becoming Community. My name is Sarah Gewirtz and I am the information literacy librarian for Alcuin and Clemens library and in this series we will talk about how the Mellon grants are helping the CSB/SJU community to be more inclusive. Season 1 of our series will focus on the first twin Mellon grants which were awarded to CSB and SJU and were administered between 2015 to 2017. During the season we will talk to faculty and staff who have been involved with the Mellon grants to find out what they did, what their next steps might be, and what their work means for the CSB/SJU community. In our second episode of the series we will hear from Karen Erickson, former academic dean and current professor of French, Jean Keller, professor of philosophy, and Kyhl Lyndgaard current interim director of the Integrations Curriculum and Director of First Year Seminar, FYS. Each of these individuals were key in moving the Mellon forward. Thank you for joining me this afternoon. I appreciate all of you taking time out of your busy schedules to speak with me. Karen what was your role with the grant? What was the strategic importance to the institutions of these grants and why at this time?

Karen Erickson: My role was to facilitate the work of the grant between the two presidents and Jean and Kyhl who were the leads for the work of the grant. Because I was academic dean at the time I had information about funding sources that might support the work of the grant that would not be funded immediately through the grant. And the strategic importance to the institutions came from several directions: one was the increase in American students of color who were attending our schools and we were getting some early signs that perhaps the faculty and staff could use some help in learning how to broaden our techniques of reaching different groups of students and without running the risk stereotyping students or assuming that all one group of students would have similar issues which is not the case - and we knew that -- but how do we create a more nuanced, effective, responsive approach to all of the students coming to our schools and these Mellon grants came along as an opportunity. It was a relatively short grant and a relatively small amount of money but it allowed us to experiment with a model for faculty development that might be expanded over the course of future years. So it was a very exciting opportunity to come early on and allowed us to find some things that might work for us and for our students. I wanted to add that we knew that there were certain limitations of the grant as conceived. This came from the design of the grant, the call for grant proposals and advice that the presidents received from the grant funder to keep it as restricted as possible since the timing was short. And so we opted to go with humanities faculty and FYS faculty only because we felt that that was away to start and respond to the need of the grant to focus on the value of the liberal arts and achieve something tangible with a group of students to show that they were that we were better

able to meet their needs after the grant than before and it provided us this option of a model of development that could be expanded. So one of the limits of the grant was the fact that it focused on a certain group of faculty and the fact that towards the end of the grant other faculty were wishing they could be part of it was part of the success of the grant.

Sarah Gewirtz: How did this work change how faculty approached their teaching and their students? What feedback did you get from the faculty? Jean?

Jean Keller: I think it affected how faculty approach teaching in a lot of different ways, so it's a little hard to summarize. One is I think it really encouraged faculty to be creative, to think about how do you move your assignments beyond the exams and the papers to doing other kinds of learning and other kinds of assessments that will engage a wider variety of students. So I think of doing assignments that required students to go outside of the classroom, sometimes into the community or into the St. John's woods for example, doing podcasting in class, doing literature circles which is something Kyhl has used a lot, circles of understanding in the room, in the classroom, so a lot of different kind of modalities. Even though the grant didn't really focus on changing the curriculum per se -- it was more focused on how do we change our teaching methods -- a number of faculty really started to work already at making sure that they had more inclusive readings and materials that they were using in the classroom, trying to find a lot of different ways to include students in the class, for example changing some of the language in the syllabus. A lot of times syllabi sound more defensive: if you don't do this you will experience this penalty but trying to change some of the language so it's open, and it's inclusive, it's exciting, it's engaging, it hooks students in who want to participate. Yeah I could say more but I'm going to let Kyhl speak and then I can add if, you know, there's more things to say after that.

Kyhl Lyndgaard: Sure so as Jean was saying all faculty participants were asked to make certain changes in their classes and document those changes and it was up to them, what sorts of changes they made or revisions. So for some that took the form of a new discussion method or modality of assignments, for others new texts that examined issues of identity were adopted. One thing that that we saw though was that even a relatively small and discreet change -- or seemingly small change -- would often make a huge difference, and would carry over to the rest of that class and the rest of the semester. One faculty member very memorably pulled me aside at the end of the semester and said to me Kyhl, I'm on fire for this class. This grant has made such a difference in how I approach my students and I've never been more excited to teach. That was just such a reward for me to hear and to realize that this grant made it such a tangible difference for faculty and for the students in all of those courses.

Sarah Gewirtz: Karen, did you have anything to add?

Karen Erickson: I think that the work of the grant also helped us institutionally. I'm going back to wearing the hat of Academic Dean at the time -- that we learned there were some limitations in our approach to faculty development and that some of the limitations of the way we gave out funds or the way we perhaps didn't consider more innovative ways of including faculty-student collaborations, that this grant helped us see some of the blind spots in our funding model.

Sarah Gewirtz: How did this work affect our students of color? What feedback did you hear from students? I'll start with Kyhl.

Kyhl Lyndgaard: Sure well I'd like to mention that we had an external reviewer for this grant from the University of Texas El Paso, and that reviewer and his team conducted focus groups and surveys of students both before and after the grant. And even though it was a short and limited grant in terms of size and scope, the reviewer was nonetheless able to measure significant improvements in how students of color saw their faculty. We saw the same thing in questions added to the end of the semester course surveys, and namely students who were in class with the Mellon grant faculty saw those faculty as more approachable and more willing to listen. That data aside we also know students turnover quickly. We have you know a quarter of students graduate every year, numbers of students are away from campus for study abroad or other opportunities, and so we do need to be consistent about informing students of course goals, including syllabus statements of inclusion as Jean referenced earlier. We need to continually model and inform students that we're doing this work. It needs to be done on an ongoing basis and it's really not a matter of PR; it's making a statement as a faculty and as an institution that this is important, that this matters to us.

Karen Erickson: I might add that it, not in a direct way, but it participated in changes in our overall campus climate providing opportunities for collaboration with staff and with students and with the general community. Some of the activities, some of the speakers that we had come to campus, and an expectation that faculty development would send faculty off to conferences for their own benefit, but they had an obligation because of this grant to come back to campus and share the information they have learned --that broadening of our audience for our development dollars, I think helped us see that whatever we're doing on the individual front should have a connection to the community. And I think that has prepared the way to the second Mellon, being much more community systematic, institutional -- so these individual moments of awareness or enlightenment or excitement or growth or understanding led to an awareness that we needed to do more and different work at a system-wide.

Sarah Gewirtz: In the online publication *Headwaters* published 2017, I read the article "A Brief Taxonomy of Inclusive Pedagogy" in which

Jean and Kyhl write -- which I am going to paraphrase -- to be truly inclusive courses must sing in regards to both the content covered and the classroom pedagogies utilized with students. How did you come up with that description and how have you made your own courses sing? Jean?

Jean Keller: So we got that language from David Concepcion who was our first workshop leader, who came for two days the first May at the very beginning of the grant and we both really liked that language. It was really a great way to kind of think about our teaching. Part of what I talked about already is going from the syllabus -- the punitive if you don't do this you know you get this kind of a penalty language --to something that's more engaging. He had us also think about what are some of the verbs that we might use in our class and how do we expand the list of verbs. He talked about an assignment he had his students going out and they were -- it was an environmental studies course -- and what were all those great verbs of what they were doing: they were hacking down the weeds and pulling those weeds yeah it just -- anyhow he just had us all just brainstorm all the wild crazy kind of verbs we might use and how do we think about our course learning goals, our syllabus, our assignments with a broader list than read, analyze, discuss, write, and so that was part of the singing but part of it too is how do you get students intrinsic motivation? How do you show them that what you're doing the classroom that it matters, that it matters for them in their lives, that it matters for the broader community, the community that they come from, and that that's part of making it sing.

Sarah Gewirtz: Kyhl?

Kyhl Lyndgaard: Sure, I want to suggest that students arrive on day one of every semester here with very open minds and I always think about that moment when I think about making a course sing. I try to think about how can we be truly dynamic and flexible teachers using the best methods and texts to reach the entire class and not to favor any one subgroup of students. We need to do that through varied pedagogy and texts to make sure that that better learning is there for all and that improves student outcomes across the boards, across the board with no exceptions. One example I thought I would bring in is the first-year seminar class that I teach is subtitled cooking the books and so I find that using a topic like food through readings and discussions allows my students to bring in aspects of their culture starting on day one even if they don't know each other well at the beginning and that's worked in ways that hasn't necessarily with every topic I've assigned. And since we're recording a podcast right now I'll add we experimented with podcasting in that course, and that was a way for me to emphasize the composition process and skills in a new mode and through teamwork in a way that I found to be very productive and it brought out the abilities of students who had skill and aptitude for podcasting in ways that sometimes surprised them

Sarah Gewirtz: Karen how are you now making your courses sing?

Karen Erickson: I think before I answer that question as a faculty member, although I am delighted to be back in the classroom, I want to say just that one more word about having that role as academic dean and being aware that *Headwaters* publication had been on hiatus and bringing it back in part to provide an opportunity, a forum for faculty to talk about their own transformation and the Mellon grant, was a win-win. It got a faculty publication going again, it allowed us to, Kyhl and Jean to invite the presidents to take part in a way that I don't know had happened often if at all before, and allowed us to anchor in a in a tangible form that is actually available through the DigitalCommons thanks to the library staff and the skill that you bring to the table, it allowed the reach of the Mellon grant to go much further. And for me I think it made me rethink what am I doing when I ask students to read a text? Why this text by this person by another person? I'm currently teaching a class on women and power and francophone culture and it virtually every aspect of my course is different because of the things that we learned.

Sarah Gewirtz: In the same article, you mentioned the panel what CSB/SJU students of color want the faculty to know, as well as focus groups with students. Jean and Kyhl, how did students help you rethink the grants and ultimately make progress toward your goals?

Jean Keller: I think that the biggest thing that I took away from that panel discussion was just students' honesty and their passion and their ability and willingness to take a risk. I can't imagine being a student, let alone a student of color feeling marginalized on campus and speaking to that whole group of faculty. I was just so in awe of our students and so I think the biggest thing from that panel was really that the students kept us honest. That students were willing to put themselves out there like that, it talked to me it talked to the importance of this work and that we had to keep pushing ourselves and keep pushing the faculty and not let up, and take risks and go out there because our our students were so clear that they were taking risks every single day. And one student in particular talked to that point, talking about needing us as faculty and other majority students at Saint Ben's - Saint John's to be willing to go outside of our comfort zones and just making it so clear that they have to go outside their comfort zone every single day. And yeah so I feel like they really kept us honest, and kept us grounded, and kept us on task.

Kyhl Lyndgaard: I'll simply add that I agree with everything Jean was saying but it was truly motivational to see the way that students were able to talk about the importance of this work. It kept me coming back every day excited to work on it and the students also reminded me of my own identity and background and that was something that became increasingly important I think as they as the Mellon grant went on. We realized that a lot of the work that we needed to do was not so much purely pedagogical, it was self-reflective, it was learning to interrogate our own experiences and identity as faculty,

and that was really something that to me was sparked by talking to students and seeing them grapple with those issues and realizing that I hadn't necessarily been asked to do the same.

Sarah Gewirtz: Karen do you have anything to add?

Karen Erickson: I would just add that the panel of students helped us see how valuable student input would be, not merely as participants in our courses, but as participants, co-participants, collaborators in our work of transformation on campus. And we learned from that that as we began the work of designing a new general education core curriculum that we needed to have student voices as we looked at these issues. What needs to be in our common expectation of all students? And so the Mellon grant came at a wonderful time to help us invite students into that conversation.

Sarah Gewirtz: What did you learn from the Mellon grant? Karen?

Karen Erickson: I think we learned that presidential leadership is essential but that it requires collaboration from every single group on campus --from students to staff to faculty to retirees to monastic members all the way up to the boards -- that this is only going to work if everybody is involved. And on the other side, that we can't wait till we have the perfect situation and lots of grant money, we start with the small stuff because as Kyhl said that small change can make a huge difference. So we begin where we are, but we move forward -- that change is absolutely required and it's not going to be easy. The other thing I think I learned was that we might fail. Faculty work really hard to get a PhD, probably don't love failing; presidents, I expect, don't love failing, I think, board members, students-- we don't like to fail but that failure would be a piece of this process along the way. And one of the students I spoke with, I said you know we may fail some as we try to make things better, and he said go ahead, fail away. So I think we have to become comfortable with that discomfort of not yet knowing exactly what we should do.

Sarah Gewirtz: Jean?

Jean Keller: I really like that by the way, and I think that connects to the going outside your comfort zone right? That faculty are so used to teaching to our strengths, but I think that our strengths will match the strengths of some of our students but not all of our students. So we have to get comfortable teaching in and out of our own comfort zone because we're asking our students to be in and out of their comfort zone and sometimes we are going to fail. And you know failure is great way to learn and good for us to be able to model that for our students too, as they learn more about how to become learners. A couple things that come to mind. I think: one thing I learned, although our grant really focused on different pedagogical techniques, that inclusivity is really about more than just a collection of techniques that you can pull out. I was just at a conference last week and they were talking about how students are

really good at reading not just the text and what you think you're saying and doing and communicating but all those other things around and so if you maybe have the inclusive techniques, syllabus, readings etc but you're not being attentive to the students as individuals, if you are always distracted, if you're --that they're going to pick up on that. So really just thinking about how inclusivity, it's more than any specific technique, it's being present to your students, to all of your students and it's also making sure you're not just recognizing and mentoring students who think the way that you do. So I thought that was a challenge. One thing that really was thought-provoking for me is when we had Alicia Chavez and Suzan Longerbeam come to campus -- they wrote the book *Teaching Across Cultural Strengths*, they just really in that workshop and in that book made explicit to me something I kind of knew that I hadn't kind of brought it to the fore, that really my educational background it's a really kind of Western European, individuated, rationalistic approach and so by training, by my own cultural background, that that has really influenced what I do in the classroom and the kind of ways in which I expect students to demonstrate their knowledge. And what they've learned and they really pushed me to kind of think about my teaching techniques as what I have been taught to value is not just how philosophy is done but how Western philosophy is done and that I really, to be inclusive, I need to think about more collaborative kind of work or helping students see how this thinking it's not just abstract thinking but it connects to real-world problems and it connects to communities. And so for me that was again in the area of personal growth -- still something I'm working on but really fascinating and important.

Sarah Gewirtz: Kyhl?

Kyhl Lyndgaard: Jean and Karen gave great answers. One thing I'll add is that the Mellon grant began with this idea of being grounded in pedagogy and technique, it became clear that the work of inclusiveness on campus was something that students experience in all aspects of their education. So it's not just their classroom experience, it's their residential experience, it's their community experience, and the same goes for faculty and staff on campus and neighbors to the college communities. So I'm very excited that there's a follow-up grant called *Becoming Community* because that to me really embodies the biggest lesson from the Mellon grant which is that this is a process and it continues.

Sarah Gewirtz: How did this work impact the CSB/SJU community? What changes have you seen? Kyhl?

Kyhl Lyndgaard: Well the work came at an important time right? We saw a lot of changes over the last two or three years in the political climate of the country and the CSB/SJU community is part of that national conversation and to me it made us more resilient and more thoughtful in how we talk about these larger issues on our in our own community on our own campus.

Sarah Gewirtz: Jean?

Jean Keller: I really want to echo that, that seems really important. It's become a harder atmosphere in many ways and I feel like even on the faculty discussion list -- if something happens it feels like then it's more likely that somebody will post something in the faculty discussion list 'hey this just happened how do you talk about that in your class'- -- so having some of those informal conversations and I have to say also before this grant I really didn't know who were the faculty with interest or expertise in some of these areas and so now I feel like, wow how many people were involved in this grant like 60 faculty and so now I feel like I can I see those folks and we can have those informal conversations that are really helpful and supportive and meaningful. I also want to point to our new common curriculum in the cultural and social difference requirement: that seems like that is, I want to say, first and foremost a result of student activists on campus insisting that that happened, and in academic affairs hearing that but also folks from the Mellon grant who were involved in that being able to say -- pick up make sure that concern did not get lost. So I think that was also something too, it helped have a critical mass of support for that requirement.

Karen Erickson: It helped us see that we needed to offer opportunities for all faculty because all faculty, virtually all faculty, teach our first-year students, and if we're talking about radically changing the way we welcome people to our community all faculty needed some kind of opportunity for growth. I think it also helped us see that it's not just in the first year that students need to be welcomed and that the work of welcoming and expanding the circle of people included and providing opportunities for people to have a voice and a place at the table, and that is ongoing work through all the different stages of the students education. And then we need to expand our own planning and our own opportunities for further development for students beyond that first year. And I think some of the changes are in the curriculum, they're also in faculty development, and possibly in these collaborations -- we worked on the First Year Experience initiative, for example, and seeing that can't be just the first-year seminar or a first year course -- it has to be every way we meet first-year students. Well likewise it doesn't end when they become sophomores. What are the particular difficulties that our second-year students will be facing, third-year students, there are different challenges as students move through their own education, and how can we be more responsive and more attentive?

Sarah Gewirtz? Going forward what advice would you give the entire CSB/SJU community? What can our community continue to do and start trying to do as we move forward? Kyhl?

Kyhl Lyndgaard: The point about making a small change and not being reticent about making a change just because it's small -- we know

that that can make a huge difference. And not being afraid to fail. I think that the community moving forward has a better understanding of that and we've kind of identified all of our allies and just how much this matters to people here.

Sarah Gewertz: Jean?

Jean Keller: To piggyback off of what Kyhl just said -- and Thank You Kyle, I liked that -- I would just say that students notice who does and who doesn't show up. That was really clear in the conversations we had with students, especially when it comes to events that have to do that are multi-cultural events or have to do with racism or whiteness. The students of color notice when they are the only ones in the room, if there aren't white students in the room, if there are or not faculty and staff who care enough to show up. I think that's important: stepping outside of your comfort zone includes sometimes just showing up and showing your support and becoming part of the conversation. I also wanted to say something just really practical with the second Mellon grant in play now, that there is this wonderful practitioner certificate program with many opportunities there for ongoing education around issues of inclusion and diversity and I really encourage people to participate.

Karen Erickson: In building on what Jean and Kyhl have said, I think we can use the Benedictine grounding of these institutions with a key central idea of listening to inspire us to listen in different ways and listen even when we're hearing things that are painful or hearing about where we still do not have a successful welcome. I have been working on that. I encourage people to work on their own ability to listen through conflict, to listen through misunderstanding, to listen in more skilled and deep profoundly challenging ways, and listen longer.

Sarah Gewertz: Do any of you have any book recommendations for our listening audience to help them work toward inclusivity for everyone?

Kyhl Lyndgaard: One of the speakers that came to campus during the Mellon grant was Robyn D'Angelo. Either of her books on white identity are really quite useful for majority students or for faculty and staff that haven't felt the need to interrogate their own identity, and to me that's a useful book recommendation.

Jean Keller: I already mentioned this book by Alicia Chavez and Susan Longerbeam, *Teaching Across Cultural Strengths*. I thought that was a really intriguing book. There's also a book I learned about through Anna Mercedes, who is one of the leaders of the second Mellon grant, which is called *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* and that's a nice combination of theoretical and really practical things to do in the classroom.

Karen Erickson: I have a recommendation of a book by Michael Eric Dyson: *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*. This is one

of the things I did as a follow-up to the Mellon -- I joined a book group that read this, and he has many many concrete suggestions as well as a profoundly challenging message for people of a majority white culture, and there also are wonderful readings, essential readings in *The Other Side of Racism White Privilege*. There're just so many wonderful people who are working in this field and to be able to look at the ways that we unconsciously perpetuate systems of oppression is necessary, and will require a kind of assistance and maybe a book group is a good idea if you're diving into a challenge like this for the first time.

Sarah Gewirtz: Again I would like to thank Karen Erikson, Jean Keller, and Kyhl Lyndgaard for taking time out of their busy schedule to participate in the Becoming Community podcast. To find the article mentioned in episode 2 by Jean Keller and Kyhl Lyndgaard and titled "A Brief Taxonomy of Inclusive Pedagogy: What Faculty Can Do Differently to Teach More Inclusively," vol 30 pages 64 through 79 2017, visit DigitalCommons dot csbsju dot edu. The following recommended books mentioned in this episode can be found at Alcuin and Clemens libraries: *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robyn D'Angelo; *What It Means To Be White: Developing a White Racial Literacy* by Robyn D'Angelo; *Teaching Across Cultural Strengths: a Guide to Balancing Integrated and Individual Cultural Frameworks in College Teaching* by Alicia Chavez, Susan Diana Longerbeam, Joseph L White; *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* by Marian Adams, LeAnn Bell, Pat Griffin; *Tears we Cannot Stop: a Sermon to White America* by Michael Eric Dyson.

Producer, writer, and editor is Sarah Gewirtz. This podcast is possible due to the support of Becoming Community, a grant awarded to the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University by the Andrew W Mellon foundation. Thank you to the Becoming Community team Amanda Macht Jantzer, Brandyn Woodard and Anna Mercedes for their support. A special thanks to Cindy Gonzalez for her support and help. Podcast recording was done on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at College of Saint Benedict Clemens library.

[Music]