# Creating An Equitable Environment For Our Students with Kelly Fowler, VP of Instruction Episode 180

00:00:00 **Kelly**

We're looking really just to build the DEISA+ Council that's truly cultivating an inclusive and equitable and enriching educational environment for our students, fostering student success and helping all of us thrive in this diverse and interconnected world.

00:00:21 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:22 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:26 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:43 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion-

00:00:47 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:51 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pomona. Psychology major, English major ...

00:00:58 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:01:00 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:07 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:10 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:13 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:24 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:29 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:31 **Christina**

Keeping connected to the why that sits at the core of the many organizations and efforts created to support the success of students is essential.

00:01:45 **Christina**

As our host, Tania Anders has a reflective discussion with Kelly Fowler, Vice President of Instruction, Kelly reminds us of this as well as to remember to humanize our efforts by acknowledging and incorporating our own unique experiences as we collaborate. Here is Tania's conversation with Kelly Fowler.

00:02:10 **Tania**

Welcome dear listeners to the Mount San Antonio College Podcast. My name is Tania Anders, your host for today's episode. My guest is Kelly Fowler, our campus's Vice President of Instruction. As one can imagine, Kelly has a packed schedule and is engaged in many, many ways on our campus.

00:02:26 **Tania**

Today, I am excited to talk to Kelly about her role as a campus leader in supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, anti-racism, and accessibility, or for short, DEISA efforts at Mt. SAC.

00:02:40 **Tania**

Hi, Kelly.

00:02:43 **Kelly**

Good morning. Thank you.

00:02:45 **Tania**

Good morning, yes, thank you for taking the time and for being here, I know you're a very busy person. So, first off, if you could please be so kind to introduce yourself to our listeners.

00:02:56 **Kelly**

I even want to start and take a step back and think about, we're talking a lot about DEISA today and I know we'll talk a little bit more about that later. But I want to put some context into what we're talking about today to think about a time where your voice was heard and acted upon and celebrated and how wonderful that felt.

00:03:18 **Kelly**

And on the other end of that, to think about a time where your voice was minimized or ignored, or you felt completely invisible altogether.

00:03:29 **Kelly**

And all of these experiences collectively help us with our own lived experiences that we bring to Mt. SAC, and how we can use this diversity and our lived experiences to leverage, to ensure our students and our employees and everyone at Mt. SAC that we have experiences that are positive, engaging, and meaningful.

00:03:53 **Kelly**

And I bring that up because we talk a lot and we're going to talk about the Instructional leadership team in a couple of minutes, about our why.

00:04:03 **Kelly**

And that really is the why for our motivation and our inspiration, and all of this dates back to ... you asked me to introduce myself and I'm Kelly, the Vice President of Instruction, to my southern roots. This is my 17th year in California, and I grew up in the western part of North Carolina. Moved here from Charlotte, and being part of a southern culture brings a lot.

00:04:31 **Kelly**

Hospitality, you hear all these things; friendliness, strong sense of tradition, a rich culinary perhaps, I don't know if it's always a healthy culinary, but definitely rich.

00:04:42 **Kelly**

But also, deep family values, events from Marty Bar in Louisiana to the Kentucky Derby, which celebrates that culinary and music, and the arts and all of that. And what I found in California living here, are all those same things are reflected here.

00:05:02 **Tania**

Well, that's really nice, I completely agree. It's so beautiful to have this diversity on our campus and in California especially, people come here from all over the place, and we're all bringing fun things.

00:05:16 **Tania**

Sometimes, I take surface roads to drive to LA and then you come through the different towns and you can just see the change in some towns are more Hispanic influenced, some more Asian, and it's amazing. We have great diversity here, and our campus definitely reflects that too.

00:05:35 **Kelly**

And our rich history from the Gold Rush Legacy to the surfing and kind of beach culture we have more in LA, so in between. So, it is incredible for sure.

00:05:46 **Tania**

It really is. That's why we're all here, right?

00:05:48 **Kelly**

Right.

00:05:50 **Tania**

So, since your arrival at Mt. SAC, which wasn't too long ago, you just mentioned you've been in California for a while, but you've been at Mt. SAC since 2021. And since that arrival, you've engaged the institutional leadership team with numerous DEISA-related topics. So, let's start with some basics.

00:06:06 **Tania**

Can you just please one more time, remind our listeners what the acronym DEISA stands for, and then also, maybe introduce us to who the members of the institutional leadership team are that you're working with on these DEISA efforts.

00:06:20 **Kelly**

Of course, and DEISA, and I know you described it earlier and we're going to talk a little bit about the DEISA Council I think at the end of today.

00:06:27 **Kelly**

The word DEISA (thank you to Dr. Mica Stewart-Thomas), help us identify that word that stands for the D for diversity, E for equity, inclusion, social justice, and the A, we have accessibility and anti-racism, but we also have all of those anti-isms.

00:06:48 **Kelly**

So, we've been talking in the DEISA Council about changing that to DEISA+. So, as we identify other really important words to add to DEISA, we know what's there and part of that acronym DEISA+. So, I'll refer it to DEISA+ today because that way it's very inclusive of all of those.

00:07:11 **Kelly**

But I want to talk a little bit too about our incredible Instructional leadership team. And it is a rather large team. It covers seven instructional divisions, which almost all of those has a dean and an associate dean paired with that.

00:07:29 **Kelly**

Within the office of Instruction, of course there's me, the Vice President, but we also have an Associate Vice President, a Dean of Instruction. We have an Associate Dean of Career Education and Workforce Development. We have an Assistant Dean of Accreditation and Planning, but we also have the Director of Research and Institutional Effectiveness. We also have the Director of Grants.

00:07:56 **Kelly**

So, altogether, collectively, it's about, I don't know, 20 or 21 people, leaders, instructional leaders who make up that instructional leadership team. And we meet regularly, we meet once a week in the morning and we partner with different people across campus, whether it's the academic senate, come in once a month.

00:08:17 **Kelly**

We also have the faculty association, we also have student services come in so that we're building these partnerships across the campus, trying to break those silos. And we also have guests come in and just help us all learn about everything that's happening at Mt. SAC.

00:08:34 **Kelly**

But I do want to say one of the priorities for the instructional leadership team is DEISA+. And that's not only agendized on every agenda, but we always make time to do the work around DEISA. And we have been doing that since I came on board back in 2021.

00:08:54 **Tania**

That's really wonderful to hear that you meet once a week because I know our campus is very, very large and one of the conversations that keeps coming up, is how do we ensure communication and cross pollination and information flow, and that seems to be a really, really good model. So, that's wonderful.

00:09:14 **Tania**

So, as a result of your work with the leadership team, how do you see the culture of our campus shifting towards a stronger equity focus in instruction in particular?

00:09:28 **Kelly**

I think this is a great question to talk about the cultural shift happening at Mt. SAC, and just what I have been part of over the last two years, and thinking about those original goals, I can see that it was truly focused on not only integrating DEISA+ into every aspect of our decision making, but building a solid foundation to create that culture shift on our campus.

00:09:57 **Kelly**

And for the instructional leadership team, we are instructional leaders and we're role models for Instruction, which was another really important aspect to us to creating not only a DEISA culture, and helping with the campus, but with our team, because we wanted to experience that learning process, that self-reflection process of DEISA+ so that we could be teachers and role models of that work, outside of the instructional leadership team.

00:10:33 **Kelly**

In regard to the campus culture, I do see that it's changing in a positive way, and I have just seen so much work and dedication and commitment to DEISA over the last two years more than any other campus that I have worked with.

00:10:50 **Kelly**

And although that cultural change is gradual and unfolds over time, which any big significant cultural change does, we are seeing that profound impact at our campus and especially, our students. And we see how it's reshaping attitudes and beliefs and behavior.

00:11:12 **Kelly**

And I do feel like a big part of that change is our dedication, but through that professional development piece, that is so important at Mt. SAC for everyone for the entire campus.

00:11:21 **Kelly**

We have those endless opportunities. And I know you're involved with FLEX and do a lot with FLEX. And it's really about that building a more inclusive and welcoming environment where everyone feels validated and represented and supported. And of course, our first and foremost goal is our students.

00:11:39 **Kelly**

But what I see about at Mt. SAC is everyone, to have that goal for everyone to feel that way, and a sense of belonging.

00:11:48 **Kelly**

And what I've seen over the last couple of years is the pandemic has really accelerated this work in a lot of ways. You would've thought maybe it would've had the opposite impact, but it's actually helped increase that flexibility within our policies and our procedures that we have implemented over the last couple of years.

00:12:09 **Kelly**

Like even with leveraging technology like the Zero Textbook Cost or open educational resources, and the awareness of mental health, and all of those are so much more important now, but we may not have focused on those as much if it weren't for the pandemic.

00:12:26 **Kelly**

It necessitated that reevaluation of our policies and practices through that equity lens. Even the technology piece, ensuring we had a laptop loaner program so students who didn't have access to technology had that access.

00:12:41 **Kelly**

And now, we really are striving to build that campus culture that actively works at dismantling that systemic barriers, and fostering equitable opportunities for all of our students in our entire campus, which has just been incredible to watch and to also be a part of.

00:13:00 **Tania**

Yeah, for sure, you came here at the right time to help kickstart those efforts. So, you already mentioned a lot of amazing things that are happening. So, I'm curious now, what are some key goals that you have for your team and for the campus as a whole in regards to DEISA+ work moving forward?

00:13:21 **Kelly**

Well, even when I first came on board, that was an important part of the instructional leadership team. And as we have engaged in this work, not only identifying DEISA as a core value of the team, along with integrity, collaboration, student focused - those three goals that we have worked around the DEISA+ work first is ... and we talk a lot about this Tania and other aspects too, but providing the space and time for our team to listen and to learn and to live DEISA+. I talked a little bit, it is on every ILT agenda.

00:14:00 **Kelly**

The other place that we focus on DEISA+ is in our study sessions. And we'll do a two to three-day study session in the summer, during the winter, maybe a day in the fall and the spring semester, sometimes we'll go off campus. A lot of times now, we'll use Heritage Hall because it's such a beautiful place. But we focus on DEISA+ at every one of those.

00:14:25 **Kelly**

And I'll talk a little bit more about that in just a second because one of the things that we leverage during those study sessions or a retreat, is every semester, our team has what we call a common read. And we often share these books too with the academic senate, like the Book of Joy and Let's Talk about Race.

00:14:44 **Kelly**

And one of the books that we read, the Book of Joy, has had the biggest impact on our team. And just to give a little insight to the Book of Joy, which of course, is by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, are they talk about qualities of the heart and qualities of the mind, and there are eight.

00:15:06 **Kelly**

And they are perspective, humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity. And we have leveraged these eight qualities not only into our professional world, but also our personal lives. But the one that really resonated with the team that we come back to over and over again, not only all eight, but the very first one of perspective.

00:15:34 **Kelly**

Because as we were talking about at the beginning, we all come in with different lived experiences, which brings a different perspective. And that's one of the wonderful things about the instructional leadership team is that we have such a diverse lived experiences that are coming and having these discussions and dialogue, and helping us all learn and as we listen to those conversations so that we can truly live DEISA+, and have some common understanding about that work, so as we move forward.

00:16:06 **Kelly**

One of our other books that we read is Let's Talk About Race and (Other Hard Things) by Nancy Dome. And within this book is what she calls the RIR Protocol. And we invited her to one of our study sessions for a two-day session on that RIR Protocol, and it stands for Recognize It, Interrupt It and Repair It.

00:16:34 **Kelly**

And this is just helping with oftentimes those difficult conversations that we engage in in any kind of work, but oftentimes, sometimes, in DEISA+ work that we're prepared and we have some tools to help us.

00:16:46 **Kelly**

We also had Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud, I think she was one of the speakers at FLEX maybe last year or the year before. And she is a contributor and a partner with us almost now at every study session that we have in some capacity.

00:17:04 **Kelly**

And she has also really taught us not only to listen and to learn and to live DEISA+, but how do we take action. That's the stage that the instructional leadership team is in now, is we've done a lot of listening, we've done a lot of learning, and now, we're trying to live through DEISA by going through action.

00:17:23 **Kelly**

The second goal of those three is, and we talked about this a little bit earlier, but supporting professional development in DEISA+. And not only about the listening and the learning, but that living part. Because we understand that the importance is to truly prioritize those professional development opportunities to help empower us, and not only in our understanding but also, our practice of DEISA+.

00:17:54 **Kelly**

And so, one of those related to faculty and the important role that faculty play in DEISA+ is the associate vice president working with her and the curriculum team hosting the Triple R Retreat that we had earlier this year. The review, reflect, and revise, the equity curriculum convening.

00:18:16 **Kelly**

And this is so important because incorporating diverse voices and authors and content across disciplines to ensure students are exposed to a broad range of knowledge and perspectives, leveraging again, our diverse experiences.

00:18:33 **Kelly**

And so, Dr. Regina Stanback Stroud was a presenter at the Triple R Retreat, and discussed how do we incorporate DEISA+ principles into course design, encouraging critical thinking, cultural competence, and how do we provide that ongoing support and fostering a culture of continuous learning.

00:18:55 **Kelly**

And so, that's just one of many of these professional development that are across campus and for everyone, not just for our professors and our faculty, but for our classified professionals, for our administrators, even our students, how we're all engaged in this work to become effective change agents and champions of DEISA+.

00:19:18 **Kelly**

The third piece, which kind of pulls the first two goals together is cultivating an inclusive campus culture. And we talked a little bit about the culture earlier. And the instructional leadership team, we really take on that responsibility to fostering an inclusive climate, and supporting an inclusive campus climate that does value and respect the diverse identities of our faculty and our classified professionals, and our administrators, and our students because that is who is at our campus, is that diversity in our students.

00:19:55 **Kelly**

And this takes promoting that dialogue, collaboration, engagement among many groups, different groups within our college community like I talked about earlier with the instructional leadership team, and providing things like a safe space for this dialogue, and promoting equity in our faculty hiring processes.

00:20:17 **Kelly**

We're doing a lot of work around those processes, and not only the hiring, but once they're hired and ensuring that there is that support team after the hiring process, and just helping so that we do have equitable resources and support services for all of our students.

00:20:36 **Kelly**

And the instructional leadership team through those three goals are really looking to celebrate our diversity and embrace inclusiveness so that we can provide those equitable educational opportunities for our students. So, not only do they thrive professionally, but also personally.

00:21:00 **Tania**

I appreciate you sharing all this and it really is amazing what instructional leadership team is doing, but I also really appreciate that it goes beyond that to you have to involve the broader campus community, like having that Triple R Retreat, where everyone was invited to apply and to go and attend that.

00:21:19 **Tania**

And to be honest, from my perspective, it is good to have those retreats where you go away to a space where you can focus for two or three full days on a topic and really reflect while you're there, and see how you can use those things.

00:21:36 **Tania**

So, I think it is important that that conversation happens at all the levels and certainly, what you are doing with your team. We also have a DEISA+ Council now on our campus, and you've been part of that since its inception, so it's still a fairly new council.

00:21:55 **Tania**

So, can you tell us a little bit about how that council came about and when was it even formed, and who's represented on that council, and what the council hopes to tackle in the upcoming years?

00:22:11 **Kelly**

That's a great question. And you know, Dr. Scroggins, President Scroggins, this was his idea to have a DEISA council. And one of the things in going through the accreditation process and some of these other processes is recognizing there's a lot of DEISA work going on campus, and it's going through multiple committees and his vision, I would say would be help to pull all those together.

00:22:38 **Kelly**

That we don't want to stop that work from happening, but how can we collectively have an entity to look at all of this work? So, we're moving forward together with the same momentum in leveraging the momentum of all the different work in the different committees who's working on DEISA.

00:22:55 **Kelly**

I know that Dr. Scroggins brought together a core team, I think of the academic senate and a couple of managers to look at the DEISA Council, to create a draft that went to PAC, that went to the President's Advisory Council (PAC), I think about a year ago to bring that forward and to hammer out the purpose and the function, and the membership of the committee.

00:23:20 **Kelly**

And so, that launched last fall, and I am so honored that I co-chair that with Dr. Mica Stewart Thomas, who is the guru of all thing DEISA+. So, we're very honored to have her wisdom and her openness to share her wisdom with us in the DEISA Council. But we also co-chair with Gizelle Ponzillo.

00:23:40 **Kelly**

And so, the three of us co-chair a group that has managers, that has student services, it has classified professionals, and of course, faculty representation on this committee. And so, this spring we finally were able to pull the membership together, get all the representation from the different groups together, and we've had two meetings thus far.

00:24:05 **Kelly**

And so, at this point, really just trying to identify our path forward, and with Dr. Mica looking at again, listening and learning and living DEISA+. And so, there's some operational aspects of the DEISA Council like reviewing reports and survey data, and other data.

00:24:27 **Kelly**

How do we integrate these different campus initiatives together so that we have a comprehensive DEISA+ effort and message, but also, looking how do we articulate DEISA+ into our strategic planning, into the pie process, into outcomes, and making sure we're collecting that information, and having one spot to have all of these resources and information for easy access to DEISA+, that the DEISA Council is trying to work around, and making sure that we are giving those quarterly updates to PAC, and to the campus.

00:25:06 **Kelly**

So, we're seeing that work that the DEISA Council is really helping to coordinate and collaborate with all of those efforts around campus. And just in our dialogue that we've had at the DEISA Council is really making sure we're promoting inclusion and creating that environment where we all thrive and we leverage our diverse lived experiences and background.

00:25:33 **Kelly**

Making sure that we're enhancing and supporting the learning experiences of our students, and quite honestly, all of us too, as we learn about DEISA+. And how do we address things like bias and those types of things in our policies, and our procedures too.

00:25:53 **Kelly**

And having the DEISA Council leverage this knowledge that we're in a learning phase and doing phase all at the same time. And how can we contribute to, like we talked about the hiring of diverse faculty, but across the board ensuring that we have strong policies and practices and recruiting and retaining diverse faculty, classified professionals, administrators as we support our students.

00:26:16 **Kelly**

And so, we're looking really just to build the DEISA+ Council that's truly cultivating and inclusive and equitable and enriching educational environment for our students, fostering students' success and helping all of us thrive in this diverse and interconnected world.

00:26:36 **Tania**

I think what Dr. Scroggins recognized, well, oh, two years, I think we had one of our first retreats where we all came together where it was like, what we're missing is the communication on our campus because so much work is happening, and I really appreciate him recognizing this as one area where so many people are doing so many amazing things. Well, we need to have one place where that all comes together.

00:27:01 **Tania**

And so, it sounds like this council is exactly that. It has the representation from across campus and I think one of the definitely key goals this council will have, is to share that information broadly then.

00:27:23 **Tania**

Not everybody has the time to attend lots and lots of meetings. And so, it's important that we have then a mechanism that all of the campus community knows what's all the amazing work that's happening.

00:27:31 **Kelly**

Agreed.

00:27:31 **Tania**

So, a wonderful new council that we have, and again, appreciate you being part of all of these efforts. So, we're close to the end of our conversation here today, but I was just wondering if there's anything else that maybe you would like to add or talk about that we haven't touched on so far?

00:27:52 **Kelly**

Well, I'm just honored to be here and I'm honored to be a part of it. And I know the last two years have also given me that opportunity to self-reflect, and to review and revise as I take on this journey, this DEISA+ journey too with the instructional leadership team, but also the campus.

00:28:11 **Kelly**

And at the end of the day, we really are all aiming and striving to build that inclusive environment for our campus and for our students, where we all feel valued and supported and a sense of belonging at Mt. SAC, and all of this incredible work is it's working, and it's incredible to be a part of it.

00:28:34 **Kelly**

And I'm just so excited about our future in DEISA+ and how much more we'll accomplish in the next years to come. So, thank you for having me today.

00:28:46 **Tania**

No, thank you so much for your time, Kelly. I really, really greatly appreciate it.

00:28:51 **Kelly**

Thank you.

00:28:55 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.