

[00:00:00] Bonni: Today on episode number 272 of the Teaching In Higher Ed podcast, I welcome Viji Sathy and Kelly Hogan back to the show, this time to share about inclusified evaluation of our teaching.

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[00:00:24] Bonni: Hello and welcome to this episode of Teaching In Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak. This is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches, so we can have more peace in our lives, and be even more present for our students.

On today's episode of Teaching In Higher Ed, I'm so pleased to be able to welcome back to the show, Viji Sathy and Kelly Hogan. Viji is a Teaching Associate Professor Program Evaluator of Chancellor's Science Scholars at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her specialty is in the area of statistics. She teaches at quite a bit. She's been on the show in the past with Kelly to speak about her experiences doing that. They together launched inclusifiED.net.

One other thing to know about her before we begin the episode is, she was born in India, but grew up in a small town in North Carolina, and is a proud recipient of public education, K through PhD in North Carolina.

Kelly Hogan is a teaching professor of biology and Associate Dean of Instructional Innovation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Since 2004, Kelly's been teaching 400 seat classes on campus, using interactive teaching methods and technologies. Again, she's been on the show previously to speak about how her awareness became awakened around inclusive teaching. Then she began her work with Dr. Viji Sathy. A little personal note about Kelly, she and her husband enjoyed teaching together in summer study abroad programs. Because they exposed their two children to new countries at the same time.

Viji and Kelly, welcome back to Teaching In Higher Ed.

[00:02:30] **Viji:** Thanks.

[00:02:31] **Kelly:** Thanks for having us.

[00:02:32] **Bonni:** You both have been busy since we talked just over a year ago. Tell us what you have been up to.

[00:02:37] **Viji:** Sure. We have been traveling around the country. We had a lot of invitations to speak to different campuses about inclusive teaching. Although we would have loved to have gone everywhere, we couldn't fit it into our schedules. We did go to a few places. In fact, we logged about 30,000 miles this past year, and we've just enjoyed talking with folks across the country around student success and how we can be more mindful and intentional in our teaching practices. It's been a fun year for us.

[00:03:09] **Bonni:** Today we get to talk about the subject of course evaluations. It has come up many times on the podcast, but two times, specifically, we have looked at the research on course evaluations. As I think back to that episode, it was quite some time ago, I will be linking to it in the show notes, because I actually think today's conversation will link so well with it. A lot of that conversation was around the bias that comes out in course evaluations and how they are, in many cases, flawed instruments. I know you'll be talking about that today as well.

Then I shared, it was actually behind the scenes. I don't talk much about this, but every once in a while, there's an interview that just doesn't end up happening. There's a hole and I've been successful at airing a podcast episode every week for five years now. I would say, a little compulsive about keeping that streak going. Every once in a while, I'll grab my husband and say, "Okay, we got to record an episode. What's the topic going to be?" It's one of those episodes. It was about my course evaluations.

I thought it was going to be very head kind of knowledge, where I would share about the process I go through. I ended up getting emotional about the course evaluation. Specifically, because I care so much that it was it was hard to digest just one of the pieces of feedback. I'm sure both of you can relate to, you have 99% awesome course evaluations. Then there's the one that really stings and unfortunately, some of us let that live in our head longer than it might.

Today's such a nice extension to those past two episodes. We're going to look at three themes today. We're going to talk even more about what's wrong with having too strong and emphasis on our course evaluations. We're going to get practical then and talk about what we can do to assess our own teaching effectiveness. If not a strong emphasis on course evaluations, then what. The last

thing we'll look at, although I'm sure we might have some fun tangents along the way, is going to be what can universities do to support teaching effectiveness? I know you have some really good ideas for us there. Let's start with then, what's wrong with having a strong emphasis on course evaluations? Where can that go wrong for us?

[00:05:18] Kelly Hogan: We've been talking a lot about this. Let's just ignore the nature and the content of the end of course evaluations for the moment, and just consider the fact that many institutions are using end of course evaluations as a primary way of evaluating teaching effectiveness. Consider the parallel in our own teaching. If the only way we evaluated our students was once at the end of the semester, with only one mode. I don't think most of us would agree that that's a good way to evaluate learning for our students yet, turn that back around. That's what we're doing when we evaluate teaching this way. It's really a poor design, and it really lacks a lot of structure.

[00:06:01] Viji Sathy: Yes. It's a version of a high-stakes assessment. When we think about teaching our students, we wouldn't give them just one exam at the end of the semester, like Kelly was saying. Doing that with disadvantaged certain students. When we talk about our work with inclusive teaching, we're saying, we want structure built into the way we teach, not just in the course design and facilitation. Thinking about a parallel version of what does structure look like. When we don't have structure in place, certain people are disadvantaged. If we think about that parallel here, which instructors might be disadvantaged by focusing on just one measure at one time?

Research points to specific groups, for example, women, people of color, but also the types of courses. I mean, I read an article recently about teaching a quantitative course can be hazardous to your health. It was essentially along the lines of the types of courses we teach, whether the rigor or maybe we're using innovative methods and how they learn that students could impact their perceptions of the course. If we don't have a more structured way to think about how to use that information, we might be disadvantaging certain instructors.

[00:07:12] Bonni: I'm remembering Episode 214, as you're sharing that. That was with Lori Martin, Steven Finley and Biko Mandela Gray. The episode title is on Not Affirming Our Values, and each one of them shared some stories about how this really comes up for them in the courses they teach. Then also just their embodied identities. It was really, really powerful. I thought would be a good episode for people to go back and revisit if they're still questioning in their mind that there really is a disparity between the people who might be impacted by this. Are there any other examples that you're thinking of where-- You can think of a type of a

class that someone taught that really had a big impact on them? Or the person's own ethnic or racial or sexual identity, anything like that that you're thinking of that really can make this a hard or inaccurate measure?

[00:08:08] Viji Sathy: Well, I know we've had some informal conversations among our colleagues. We're a group of women teaching in STEM. We talked a good bit about the kinds of things we see in our course evaluations. We wonder if our male colleagues are seeing similar types of comments. I know that Kelly and I, for example, we partnered up with another colleague, Jean DeSaix to write a piece around gender comments and course evaluations and thinking about our attire.

Sometimes we'll get comments in the student evaluations teaching related to our attire, and that can be a positive thing. Usually it is, but just thinking about what are irrelevant pieces of feedback that we get in course evaluations, and what standards are we being held to? I think about, for example, if you're a caring teacher, if you're a female and you're caring teacher, it might be expected of you. You might receive average or better than average value of course evaluations. If you're a male and you're a caring teacher, then that might be seen as exceptional, and receive high course evaluation.

There are certain things that we feel that at least in our conversations that we have some questions about how things are landing with students. We think students should have a voice. Absolutely, they should have a voice. How we interpret that information, and how that information is used, is really important for us to be thinking about as an institution.

[00:09:27] Bonni: The episode with Betsy Barry that I will be linking to in the show notes as well. She talked about this. I haven't looked to see if it's been kept up but she talked about this individual who had done a bunch of research about the comments. This would be qualitative comments made on Rate My Professors, a very astute website. Talk about gendered, just the words that were used in such different ways. I think Karen is a good example how that can be so different, depending on one's gender, so that'll be a good episode again if people want to go revisit and learn even more about this.

I want us to get practical now, so what can we do as instructors then, if not having this strong emphasis? By the way, neither one of you is saying to ignore them completely. We just want a richer dataset. What should we be doing in addition to looking at course evaluations to assess our teaching effectiveness?

[00:10:26] Kelly: Well first I just want to also make the point that the idea is to-- that in some ways we're stuck with them, but that there can be a much richer portfolio of how we think about teaching effectiveness. There's some really great studies

and research going on by different groups right now about what are those other pieces. For example, the Bay View Alliance is made up of a variety of institutions, and they're doing a grant-funded project called TEval right now, and they're really thinking about all the pieces that go into measuring teaching effectiveness, not just course evaluation.

That has really informed a lot of what we've been thinking about looking at their rubrics and what are the pieces of evidence that an instructor could put into their dossier to think about these things. We were also lucky enough to go to a meeting funded by the Association of American Universities, AAU, where we were able to hear one of the leaders in this area, Dea Greenhoot, and she really gave us some interesting activities in terms of thinking about, how do you move beyond course evaluations and what kinds of things might be in a dossier where you're looking at your own teaching effectiveness?

[00:11:46] Viji: I remember one exercise, in particular, we were all sitting around the table, and she asked us to brainstorm all the activities related to teaching, everything we do and in preparation for teaching a course. What I was struck by is, people were offering answers after we had brainstormed individually, very last - it was almost an afterthought was the face to face time we have with our students. Things like setting up the course website, selecting the readings, making the assignments, the homework systems that we create. There was so much of that sort of architecture of the course, that course structure and design that we were thinking of, and it's sort of an almost invisible in some ways to students. Because they're just doing the course, they're not even seeing that as part of your efforts and work. It was really eye-opening to see that that's almost last on our list all the time, yet it takes such a sort of prominent portion of the student evaluations of teaching.

[00:12:43] Kelly: Some other ways that we've been thinking about this include, for example, at our institution, we're allowed to add questions to the standard course evaluation. Instructor added questions, but of course, anybody could do this by adding their own questions in a separate survey as well. For example, one semester I was getting started with exploring assigning students to groups within this large 400-person lecture hall so that they had permanent partners to discuss the topics with.

When I first introduced this to students, there was a lot of eye-rolling and I thought, "Oh, they're going to hate this," but you give it time and at the end of the semester you survey the students, and I ask them about what they liked about being in groups, the strengths, and the benefits and things that could be improved. I was shocked because they really learned a lot about working with

others and there were very few negative comments, and the ones that were negative were really helpful to me. That's not something that my institution said we should survey, but it aligned with what I was trying that semester and it was really encouraging to me.

[00:13:54] Viji: I think another thing that we often think about too is, again, when we're teaching, for example, with group work, we would like to make sure that they're structured around group work, so that you're teaching students how to work effectively in groups if you're doing a lot of group work. In the same ways, we should think about students evaluations of teaching in the same way, how can we teach students how to give good feedback? What does that feedback look? How do we model it? The prime time to model it is in the mid-semester. If you do a mid-semester evaluation, you can choose the nature of the questions you want to ask and give them some guidance about what good feedback looks like.

This is an example of something that I often do in my courses because I don't think students get a lot of training around giving feedback. It's really helpful to just demystify it a bit, but also to think pointedly about the question. A question I might ask my students are like, what aspects of the course? I can list all of the aspects that I've created for them, the videos, the in-class exercises. I'm reminding them through the question all of the things that they became part of the design of the course. What aspects are you finding helpful about this and what might need to be changed?

Then when you think about the prompt that way, it's not about me as the instructor, it's about the course and the learning experience, and so you're focusing them on that. Then I don't just stop with asking them, I debrief with them, I share with them what the feedback looks like, and I even show them that there's a large number of positive comments, but there are also a small number of critical comments usually so that they understand on my end, it is confusing to parse out when you get mixed feedback. How do you weight things? It's a way to again just sort of pull the curtain back for them to show them that this is not an easy process taking in this feedback and moving forward, but as much as we can be transparent and not just in our teaching, but in how we evaluate teaching, it'll be very helpful for everyone.

[00:15:43] Bonni: You talked about the mid-class feedback which I have used on many occasions, and I just think we all should be doing it. This is a prescription I think we all should be taking because it really does make such a difference. I know both of you, your regular collection of feedback is, every class section what

you're doing to measure learning, any comments do you want to make about that in the connection here?

[00:16:06] Viji: Yes, absolutely. There's that one aspect of just how did the students perceive that things were going. How do we actually know that they're learning what we intend for them to learn? How do we do this on a global scale? Maybe thinking about for example learning gains over the course of the semester, so in both of our courses, we administer essentially a pre-test and then we implement it a little bit differently. We have some version of a post-test and we assess what does learning look like for the students in that semester? What kinds of things do they improve on? Which concepts did we make some headway on compared to previous semesters? That's a really useful way for me to think about not just learning gains overall in the course of a semester but by subgroups, as well as longitudinally. If I'm making changes over several semesters to the way I approach a topic, can I move the needle on a few questions related to those topics?

[00:16:59] Kelly: I think what's important to note about what Viji just said is that, many times we run into our own colleagues that are doing some version of this and aren't putting it in their dossier for, reappointment, tenure or promotion, whatever, they're not thinking about this as evidence. This is how you control your narrative around your own teaching effectiveness. I'm seeing dossiers that don't even have syllabi in them, and there's some beautiful syllabi out there that clearly show the kind of teacher you are with your goals stated clearly for every single day that you're going to meet with your students. To not put that in is such a shame to show all the time that you've taken to care and to plan for your students.

[00:17:43] Bonni: Viji, you mentioned dividing up by subgroups, would you speak a little bit more about that practice that you do and how it's been helpful?

[00:17:50] Viji: Sure. It's something that both of us have looked at institutionally and thinking about building mechanisms for more faculty to be able to mine their data related to learning. For example, we've been working with several different units on our campus to build something that's called My Course Analytics Dashboard. It's MCAD, it's an acronym. We finished piloting it and we'll be rolling it out for the entire university and in the fall. The idea is that we know what our course grade distributions are at the end of the semester, that's something that we have easy access to. What we don't often have easy access to are the demographics associated with students.

What we wanted to do was with the help of our institutional research office, is to have a dashboard that instructors can go and look at gender differences in their

grade distributions. They can go and look at first-generation college student grade differences. Not just the grade differences but also just the proportion of those individuals in their classrooms when the semester is concluded.

It's a way to really help-- I think at least that's our hope, that faculty will get to know their students through these kinds of dashboards. Who are they serving in their classrooms? What kinds of-- maybe there needs to be changes to the types of materials that they're providing to their student's readings, exercises. Also, for example, you're teaching a course and you notice that there is a gender differential in your grade distribution and very few, for example, females are earning A's in your course. Why might that be? That's what the next question is, is what can we do in our teaching practice to maybe address that particular question?

We won't know if we don't look. That's what we're trying to do is provide even more opportunities for people to engage with data, that may be a little less stinging, but possibly could be as stinging, but little less stinging that sometimes those individual comments can be.

[00:19:41] Bonni: I know that you mentioned the MCAD as one of the initiatives that you're working with the universities at the broader level than just individual faculty. What are the other things that you're seeing other universities do to support teaching effectiveness?

[00:19:55] Kelly: Well, one thing that I think is inconsistent across universities and even departments within the same university, is helping people look at some of these other ways of measuring teaching effectiveness. One of those obvious and big ways is peer observation. It may be that you get one observation right before some high-stakes assessment, whether it's reappointment or promotion. That's what we would call Summative Assessment in our own teaching.

What I think a lot of places are not doing well, and yet some are doing it beautifully, is the idea of formative assessment. What we really need to be seeing, our programs and policies in place where we have to have routine peer observations, multiple observers, and these need to be low-stakes, but they need to align with what that high-stakes summative assessment is going to be.

A great way to do that is to build a rubric that gets used during these formative assessments, but is the same kind of rubric that will be use later on for the higher-stakes. Unfortunately, there's so much variation, and a lot of places are not using rubrics, a lot of places aren't using peer observers that are well trained in observing different kinds of teaching. That's one place that we've seen some universities doing it well, but something we'd like to see be done more consistently and better.

[00:21:23] Viji: Yes, and I would say too the idea that I've been so heartened by the discussions we've had all around campuses in support of student success, and thinking about the kinds of diversity we have in our classroom and how to embrace that diversity in our classroom. I'd like to see us have the same type of attitude towards our faculty, to be really thinking about the fact that we all come in with different levels, knowledge, skills, and we're working on it, we're a work in progress, and that teaching is developmental. I would love for us to have that same mindset with our faculty, that there can be growth in teaching, and that we can support one another in teaching, and doing so effectively.

[00:22:06] Bonni: I think that's so powerful. It's one of the things I always say at the start of every show. That's one thing that really hasn't changed in five years, is starting with this idea of having conversations about teaching being both an art and a science. I think a lot of this show ends up being-- well, maybe not, I don't know what the percentage would be, but a lot of emphasis on the science, which to me means it's developmental. You can get better at this stuff and you also can gauge how effective these would be in different kinds of classes and different circumstances, that kind of thing. I think there's still a piece of it that's an art that is nuanced and you can't necessarily quantify. I'm not sure what are the percentages on that, but yes.

[00:22:45] Kelly: I think another thing that universities can do that the individual can't control is what is required to go into a dossier to show your teaching effectiveness. If a department says you only need one observation once in five years, that's different than a department saying, "We need to see two evaluations from every semester, peer observations, I should say." Those kinds of messages really show the value that we place on teaching.

[00:23:15] Bonni: One of my colleagues who's been on this show before, her name is Sylvia Kane. We're in the process right now of a big revamp to our promotion and tenure process at our institution. One of the things that she keeps emphasizing is what you just shared about the importance of classroom observation. She keeps really emphasizing the importance of that's a confidential process that you don't want to have it where the same people who are available to help you grow in your own teaching, help you develop in these areas are also going to be the people reporting you and putting this in your file and that's on your permanent record, that those two things are in direct conflict.

I will say that that's been hard for some in our institution to grapple with, but to me, I'm cheering her along. This is hard work. The work of growing our teaching is hard work. I don't know how you do it if you aren't doing it in a safe way where you feel

like you can experiment and try things and fail and get back up again and try again.

[00:24:14] Viji: Yes. Having the experts who understands what you're working on, it goes back to Kelly's comment about the alignment. It's really just about the alignment, and it would be helpful for the people observing to know what does the next stage look like, what are they going to be looking for, and how can they coach you to reach whatever milestones you might have for yourself or that your unit might have for you. Thinking through this as, again, a developmental process, and we'll never get there. Whenever there is, it's always going to be moving, but just what are you working on now and how are you showing that you're making progress towards your goals.

[00:24:50] Kelly: Along those lines, developmentally, most of us came to teaching without a lot of experience and education around how teaching works. The same is true about measuring learning. Viji is one of the few people that actually has a degree in how to measure and evaluate learning, but the rest of us have to figure it out. One thing that institutions can do is to really provide a lot more structure and workshopping around designing pre and post measures. They're going to be different in every class. I've done a workshop recently with my colleague, Brian Hudson, who's in our office for institutional research and assessment.

We provided an incentive for faculty to come, to bring their objectives with them, and to sit and workshop with us the kinds of questions that are fairly jargon-free, that they could ask students at the beginning of the semester, and then follow through again at the end of the semester. Whether it's a humanities course or a STEM course, we were there to walk them through and say, "What is most important? Is this, really, by the end of the year, what you wanted your students to learn?" It was fun to watch faculty have these eye-opening moments where assessment wasn't such a dirty word.

[00:26:05] Bonni: I know you both are aware that I am a huge advocate for assessment and enjoy reading a lot and experimenting and thinking very deeply about it. However, I have historically had and probably still do today talking to you, a very visceral reaction to pre and post measures. I think you just helped me clarify that a little bit as to why. I see them often being applied in very transactional ways. Well, here you get a average of 67%, and here, you got an average of 82%. We check the box. Look how much people learned. That's not learning. It's the actual work that went into composing the instrument in the first place. That is the actual measuring of learning. I don't know if this is making sense, too much emphasis placed on the scores versus the content of the actual instrument being used. Is this making sense?

[00:26:56] Kelly: Yes. I think what you're getting at is that an instructor really intentionally designed their course around it. Let's say it had 10 questions on that instrument, those are the 10 big things you want to teach your students. It's aligned with your entire course. By making that instrument, you're declaring, "This is what is most important to me, and I want the students to learn it." At the end, you get some measure as to, "Generally, students did better on this than this. Maybe I'll want to refocus the way I teach this skill or this piece of content."

[00:27:29] Bonni: That's so often not how I see them being used. I see it about the score instead of what the content was, instead of that part that could actually shape your teaching or shape or thinking about what went well too.

[00:27:41] Viji: Yes, it's analogous to the midterm feedback. Because oftentimes, there's sort of the weight of what comes with student evaluations of teaching and how it gets used, but it doesn't exist for midterm evaluations because we think of them as somewhat private, but if we actually assign value to those assessments and make them our own, then we can get what we want out of them, but what we're advocating for is that people build a case for effective teaching. That case may look different for different individuals based on what their values are.

[00:28:11] Bonni: Well, this is the point in the show where we each get to give our recommendations. I just have a couple today. The question that I probably get asked more than any other is how do I start a podcast? I have a couple of resources I'm going to be pointing people to now because they have done a far better job than I ever did in the past in answering this question. The first is a group of people put together a 45-minute workshop that also turned into an online book about, it's called, *And We're Live! A Rough Guide on Academic Podcasting*. I want to make sure I get everybody involved, named because I didn't in my initial tweet about this resource.

Ryan Straight is one of the people who led in this endeavor. Angela Gunder, John Stewart, Kelvin Thompson, Carmen King de Ramirez, and Jonathan Pizzo. Have a look at the *And We're Live! A Rough Guide on Academic Podcasting*. It's everything from the art and science of being good at podcasting, what equipment to use, sound equipment, software, all the way to the actual programmatic elements. Before you dive too deep into it, I wanted to reference Dave, my husband's tweet where somebody on Twitter was asking what kind of equipment we would recommend. He said, "I echo what Fernando said. A USB mic and GarageBand or something like Audacity is a great place to start. You can always upgrade later."

Here's the really important part. Much harder than equipment is consistency of producing a show. Be sure you're ready for that type of commitment before spending tons on gear. Podcasting is very much like swing dancing, believe it or not, I used to do a type of swing dance called the Lindy Hop in my '20s and people would come out and see me dance with friends and they would be like, "Oh my gosh. This is amazing. I'm going to do a Lindy Hop. I'm going to be just like all of you." Then they would go to one lesson. It was really, really hard and they looked awkward, and they never wanted to do it again, so podcasting is one of those things that's really, really hard to do and takes a lot of effort.

Then once you get into, it is absolutely a joy, but it is not an easy process, so I would suggest that before people dive too much into thinking that this is the way to spend their time and energy to really think about the consistency. I think about people actually like you, Kelly and Viji that you're getting the word out about the work that you're doing in lots of different ways and able to leverage people like me, who will have you on anytime you want. That kind of thing, I think is smarter for people, a better use of your time, unless you're really ready to go all the way in on something. That would be my recommendation is just to think if this is really going to be your thing because it does take a ton of work that people often don't realize. All right, Viji, what do you have to recommend today?

[00:30:57] Viji: I wanted to share some recommendations around office hours. I wanted to share the idea that office hours should look different than they have been looking. I think the common way people approach office hours is to have a set of hours in a given week that they're meeting with students. I feel like that has not really worked well for me, so I wanted to offer my strategy with meeting students. One was I was talking to students and learning about what keeps them from coming to office hours. In those discussions, I was realizing there were a lot of barriers around understanding what office hours were, what they were supposed to be about, how often you should do them, so I realized, again, that when we talk about our inclusive teaching, I needed to give more structure to my office hours.

I share with my students a little infographic around the types of office hours I have. They're different, depending on the time of the semester. In the beginning, it's a five-minute-- There are series of blocks of time with five-minute meetings that students sign up for. It's simply an introduction, face to face, get to know each other. We talk, oftentimes not at all about content because it's only the one week into the semester or two weeks into the semester, so it's a really easy way for a student to come in and chat and feel like they don't need to have a question about the content.

Then as we move through the semester, we might have what are more traditional office hours where they could be review sessions around exams, but also just open times to just meet and talk about their career options and coursework and things that they might have questions about. Then as we move into the end of the semester, I tend to have a lot of what I call co-working office hours. I'll find a common space on campus, and I'll say, "I'll be sitting here with snacks. Come by. We can work together if you've got-- All of my courses involve end of semester projects. Basically, I can consult with them on their projects during that time, or if they just want to sit and study for another exam, that's fine. I've had students come in to sit quietly and work.

Just thinking about what's going to work for your set of students. Ask them what they want and adjust your office hours to meet those needs because they're not going to understand unless you lay it out for them what it's about. I found at least varying the types of office hours settings and locations has allowed more students to come in. My favorite is the bring a friend format, which they can bring a friend. I actually had one recently who brought a friend who wasn't even in our course that wasn't even on my mind when I thought the bring a friend was like bringing the person you've been talking with in class, but they brought someone outside the class just because they love the course so much and that they wanted that student to meet me and talk about statistics, so I love that too, but just the idea that we need to expand our ideas around these traditional concepts that we've had in teaching.

[00:33:38] Bonni: I love that. I've seen you tweet about it a couple of times. I love that. I've had multiple chances really to reflect on how I approach it too because really you're breaking down barriers there. That's wonderful. I love the bring a friend. [laughs] Kelly, what do you have to recommend for us today?

[00:33:55] Kelly: I'm going to recommend something that has drastically changed some of my workload around writing letters of recommendation.

[00:34:04] Bonni: Ooh. So excited. [chuckles]

[00:34:08] Kelly: I teach a lot of students and I get asked to write a lot of letters. Generally, many of them are for med school, but often there are study abroad internships, dental school, and so on. Like all good teaching tips, we learn them from somebody else. My lifetime and educational mentor, Dr. Jean Desaix gave me the idea which she'll tell you she stole from someone else is a letter of rec form that you write that students have to fill in for you. Of course, you can customize it however you want, but the kinds of things that are online that are adapted from the one that she had originally given to me.

I first ask for their name and nicknames, the pronoun they like to use so I use the right pronoun throughout the letter, certain demographics about them. I like to see a photo just because we teach so many students. That's helpful for me, so they insert that. They have to tell me some of the interactions we've had that have been meaningful. They have to tell me about the biggest impact something has had on their thoughts about diversity and people different from them so that I've got some talking points.

Then lately, I've been leaning on the core competencies that come from MCAS which is the medical association that has faculty recommenders discuss interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies. If I structure it this way, it works for the students I'm writing med school letters for, but they're actually really great competencies. I just paste all of that in, so the students read what I'm asked to be writing about, so they give me little anecdotes around how they have met some of these competencies in my class or outside of my class.

I also like to ask if they got any struggles or anything that I can do to help write a better letter. This way, their structure around it, it takes some of the bias out of writing letters of rec, where when we don't have a lot of structure, and we don't know how to write a letter for a student that can lead to bad things.

I also don't want a resume from students. That doesn't help me write a letter. I also don't want students to write the letter for me. I really want to write this letter, and I want to write the best letter I can for them. Once they filled in this form, I open it. I'm used to my own form. I can write a letter so much faster because I could cut and paste certain anecdotes that they've written for me, put them in my own words, and I've got a beautiful letter in the format I want it in.

[00:36:36] Bonni: I've done a similar thing like that, although I'm not teaching quite as much as I used to, so I don't get as many requests as you do, Kelly, but it really did help streamline it but it also helped, I was able to educate them a little bit about letters of reference because sometimes they just didn't really realize it. I would include things like-- It might sound a little self-serving, but I promise it really was in the spirit of educating them, but that you really should send a thank you note after you've asked someone for a letter of recommendation. Again, this is not for me, but they're probably going to ask other people too, and they might not have ever learned that social norm before.

The other thing I included-- Gosh, I wish I could remember where I got this from but was the permission to share information about them in this form because even though they're requesting a letter, but just say like a checkbox, are you allowing me to share the grade that you received in my class? Are you allowing me to

share this? You should check with your institution because this could vary in terms of the laws around things like this, but I did find it helpful just that they acknowledged that they're giving me permission to share X, Y, or Z of information was helpful for me too. That's great recommendations. I'm not going to get anything done the rest of the day. I'm just going to keep following them and writing the show notes. This is so fun. Kelly, have you included an example of a letter of rec anywhere that people could go see?

[00:37:54] Kelly: Yes, I'll make sure that you have a link for it.

[00:37:57] Bonni: Oh, wonderful. It is so great to be reconnected with each of you. I feel like we just need to just do this. We'll just put it on the calendar and have you come back. You can tell us how your frequent-flyer miles are looking and the work that you've been doing. You've really been such an inspiration to me and my teaching. I think of you each so often. I wonder if there could be any way where you could know every time that that happens, what you've meant to me. I noticed so many people that listen to this podcast too, so just thank you from the bottom my heart for the work that you do. It's making such a difference, not just in your students' lives, but you're cascading that work around the world. It's so fun to see and to be some small part of.

[00:38:31] Kelly: Thank you.

[00:38:36] Bonni: Thanks once again to Viji Sathy and Kelly Hogan for joining me on episode number 272. They have so many fabulous links on today's show notes. If you go to teachinginhighered.com/272, you can access those resources. If you don't want to have to remember to do that, feel free to subscribe to my weekly update where I send out last weeks or the most recent episodes' show notes along with a teaching or productivity article written by me. You can subscribe at teachinginhighered.com. It'll also send you the latest EdTech Guide with 19 Tools to assist you in amplifying your teaching and productivity. Again, that's teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. See you soon. See you for the next episode. Bye, everyone.

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