

Transcript for Conversations @ KAFM: CMUnow: January 2020

Katlin Birdsall: Remarkable accomplishments are happening everyday on the Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College campuses. From faculty instruction and research, to student projects and community involvement. CMUnow is a monthly segment on the KAFM community affairs hour, where we interview faculty, athletic coaches, and students to keep you up to date on all things CMU and WCCC. I'm Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we'll have two guests on the show today. And our first guest is Western Colorado Community College Director of Student Services, Kelly Reuss. Welcome to the show!

Kelly Reuss: Hi, thanks for having me.

David Ludlam: Thanks for being on.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah, thanks for making the time to come down and chat with us and fill our KAFM listeners in on what's happening over at WCCC.

Kelly Reuss: Yes, I love to talk about what we're doing.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well let's jump right in, so, I know you've worked at both CMU and WCCC since starting out I think about 2015, and you've worked in that time at the CMU testing center on the team that introduced the integrated student services model at CMU. And you're now the director of our student services at WCCC. So, it seems like the focus of your work has always been on directly helping students succeed kind of outside of the classroom. So, what has driven you to work so closely with students? Kind of, getting the show started with getting to know you a little bit better.

Kelly Reuss: Yeah, so I am a student. I am now a graduate, but I took about ten years off from when I graduated high school, from when I finally decided to go back and get my education. And I had started out a couple of times and just didn't follow through, didn't make it through. And, looking back I can see that there is a few different reasons for me personally why that didn't happen. And, a lot of that is because I didn't ask the right questions, I didn't know who to go to for help. And so, once I did kind of figure out the process, it was really important for me to then help other people. Especially within our community, to be able to achieve those dreams, and go on to the next level. You know, whatever that is, understanding that it's a huge range of different goals that we have for students in our community. Whether those are our high school students, traditional aged college students, or adult learning students that are going back like me you know, taking their gap decade.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm.

Kelly Reuss: So, yeah helping out students and just being a first response person available to those students who, I'm actually working one-on-one with them and talking to them and just

helping answer their questions. It reminds me of where I started out and, wishing I had somebody or had been wise enough to ask the questions that I had. I'm sure there was people there for it, but that has definitely driven me throughout my work.

Katlin Birdsall: Nice.

David Ludlam: So, it sounds like that, the challenges that you faced are what makes you good in what you do in terms of being able to connect with students in an authentic way, one-on-one and help them through the process?

Kelly Reuss: I like to think so. And I think that you know, we have tons of different types of students and different people that we serve at WCCC and CMU. And, you know and I'm just one person with one story and I think that what's a really great strength of our university, the community college staff and faculty is that if one person isn't the right person for you, there's tons of other people that are the right person that have kind of a similar background no matter what your background is. But, absolutely I definitely feel like I can connect with some students. A lot of times I've talked to some students and they're like "Oh you know, I'm 27 now and I'm not sure about coming back". And I'm like, "Nope, you should do it, this time is going to pass. If you have a dream, and education is the step to get you there, do it. Do it."

David Ludlam: So, Kelly, I think for people, for listeners that don't necessarily know a whole lot about higher education they might hear your title that includes quote, "Student Services", and that sounds like a catch all phrase. But, it means something specific, and I think that we've kind of already kind of covered that in that you work with students one-on-one. But, what does that look like? What kind of things do you help them with? What kind of processes do you help them with? And what does that look like when you're actually kind of on a day-to-day basis?

Kelly Reuss: Yeah, so Katlin mentioned that it was part of the team, that brought in the integrated services model that we call IRIS at CMU and WCCC. But for me, I am super excited to have been a part of that, and part of what I was charged to do as I came over to the WCCC was to provide integrated service. So, what that means is I think a lot of people who have any kind of college experience can kind of relate to this feeling of, so if you want specific help with let's say, financial aid. You're going to go to the financial aid office, and you'll stand in that line. And then you'll come to maybe then you need to register so you're going to go to maybe your advisor or the registrar's office and you'll stand in that line. And I think that that's a pretty typical experience for many college students. The thing that CMU and WCCC does differently with their integrated services is that we serve students in registration, financial aid, help students with their student accounts, and really advising them through their whole college career. And so, for me, being able to just have a place where someone can go and say, "I'm having a problem". And, I also find that students don't always know, "where's the right person that I'm supposed to go to?" And that in itself is kind of scary and paralyzing for students. And so, for me it's you know, people can come to me and say, "I'm having a problem, here's what's happening." And then, we're able to work backwards one-on-one with those students and say,

“Okay, so there’s a couple of things happening here”. And not only that we’ve identified what the problem is, but we can take care of it here in one place as opposed to sending you to that next place to stand in line. We don’t do that. So, for me, I have a history in hospitality, so It’s almost like a service focused base. For student services that is definitely where my mindset is always. It’s going to be, “How is this student’s problem that they’re experiencing, how can we help solve that and how is that going to impact maybe some of these other spaces in their student life?” So, kind of understanding those factors and knowing who those additional resources are. I like to do that work for the student and then reach out and say, “Here’s what this person said”, and give them that holistic service. And so, for me, student services is really emphasizing service to our students.

David Ludlam: Okay.

Katlin Birdsall: Well, you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs and our first guest today is Western Colorado Community College Director of Student Services, Kelly Reuss. So, we’ve already kind of touched base on how WCCC serves a wide array of students. Everyone from high school students, to traditional aged college students, and adult students and adult learners. But, can you maybe talk to us a little bit about the breadth of programs at WCCC? Because I would envision that each one of those types of students have a very different path in front of them. So, can you just talk a little bit about how WCCC maybe serves those students and any student success stories that come to mind?

Kelly Reuss: Absolutely. So WCCC, a lot of our programs, the majority of our programs are hands-on. They are the technical programs of CMU so it’s still a CMU... Students that go to WCCC when they graduate they are going to get their transcript and their diploma from CMU. So, I think some people are confused about that a little bit. But, on our campus, we have a huge range of different types of programs and majors that students are in. We’ve got early childhood education, we’ve got digital filmmaking, we’ve got manufacturing jobs. Programs like welding and machining. So, you can see that there’s a pretty large space of types of students and interests that we cover. So, within those, I would say that... I’m sorry, go back and say it again, I’m wandering here.

David Ludlam: Well, I have an extension to Katlin’s question. I think you can answer.

Kelly Reuss: Put me back on track please!

David Ludlam: So, you know, there’s a lot of high school students in the Grand Valley who, while they are in high school are also taking classes that give them college credit. It’s called concurrent enrollment.

Kelly Reuss: Yes.

David Ludlam: But, you think about, with how busy people are and the schedules that families are facing, why would high school kids want to take concurrent enrollment and earn college credit while they’re still in high school. What’s that all about? Tell us about that program.

Kelly Reuss: Sure, so once I came on to WCCC was the first time I was really understanding as much about concurrent enrollment. And, concurrent enrollment is a fabulous opportunity. I'm so sad that I didn't have that opportunity when I was in high school. But, just like David was saying, it is an opportunity for students to get both college credit and complete their high school requirements at the same time. So that's where that term concurrent is coming from. Right now, we are kind of in the middle of this really exciting time on campus. And, what we always refer to as sophomore tours. And so, right now, as we speak we have one of the valley's high school's sophomore group of sophomore students. Every sophomore in District 51 will come through WCCC and see what programs are set up. And these are designed specifically for high school students. They go along with the District 51 schedule. We have bus service from each of the four main high schools to get students from their main high school over to our campus. And, so they're doing programs that are going to build foundations for multiple long-term goals that they may have. But again, we are going to be looking at a lot of technical things. We are looking at, we've got students that are going to go into STEM that may be ultimately looking to become engineers. We've got students that are going to go into culinary, or maybe their going to go into hospitality management ultimately. We have some new programs this year. One is specifically for agriculture and one is for early childhood education to allow high school students to kind of get a jump start on some of those long-term interests that they have. All of these credits, again, they are earned credits. If, when the student completes the class they've got the credits on their transcript. And that can go to WCCC, CMU or any other place that they want to go. And in fact, we have a hundred... I want to say a hundred and seventy. I'm not 100% sure on that but about a hundred and seventy students last year earned technical certificates before they graduated high school. And so, they had that credit on their name as they were going through. Now, that's the one that happens on CMU, excuse me, WCCC's campus. However, concurrent enrollment can encompass several opportunities. We have students that are taking what we call essential learning classes, and people might know them as gen-ed type classes. So, your English, your Math, maybe a US History. Students have the opportunity to take those classes, again, for college credit that's also going to work towards their high school graduation requirements. Get those done at the same time with a huge cost saving to them. The district pays for the tuition for these courses, so families and the students are not paying for the classes they are taking.

David Ludlam: So, the concurrent enrollment is free?

Kelly Reuss: So, some types of concurrent enrollment. We call one "early scholars". So those are students that are actually going to go to CMU and take CMU courses. They have course fees that they are responsible for but the tuition is paid.

David Ludlam: Wow.

Kelly Reuss: Some of our other programs don't require any payment of course fees. Some may require that you purchase a book. It kind of depends on the different program that you're

doing. One of the great things about our program and what we do is that we have a very strong connection to the District 51 team that's interested but not sure how to get started.

Katlin Birdsall: Well that is a lot of I think wonderful information and I think it's a valuable resource for our community. And with that, we are already at the end of our time today with you. So, if our listeners are interested maybe whether it's maybe they've got a high schooler at home that they are interested in concurrent enrollment. Or maybe they want to come back and take classes as an adult student learner, kind of what's the contact information or where should they head for more information?

Kelly Reuss: Well, I always recommend reaching out to my department, Student Services at Western Colorado Community College. Or the IRIS department at CMU. Again, if you have a question, we are great people to ask about those questions. But also, please feel free to look at our website. We've kind of updated the concurrent enrollment website to give more information about that subject. But, there's also any program information about WCCC-specific information on the WCCC website. And the CMU website is always a wealth of information as well.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, and that CMU website is coloradomesa.edu or you can also go to wccc.coloradomesa.edu for information on WCCC. Well, Kelly thank you so much for coming on the show today. We really appreciate it.

David Ludlam: Good to have you.

Kelly Reuss: Thanks for having me.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well don't go anywhere because we are going to take a short break and we will be right back with the Department Head of Teacher Education, Dr. Blake Bickham.

SEGMENT BREAK

Katlin Birdsall: Welcome back to CMUnow, a monthly show where we talk about the remarkable things happening at Colorado Mesa University and Western Colorado Community College. We'd like to welcome our second guest today, Department Head of Teacher Education, Dr. Blake Bickham. Welcome to the show!

Dr. Blake Bickham: Hi, how's it going?

Katlin Birdsall: Good.

David Ludlam: Thanks for being here.

Dr. Blake Bickham: Thank you.

David Ludlam: Well hey I wanted to jump right in and ask you about your teaching experience. I noticed that you have taught at the graduate level, as well as the high school level, but interestingly you've also taught overseas. Specifically, Uzbekistan and Mexico, which seems to

be sort of, you know, vastly different teaching environments. Tell us a little bit about how you arrived at each of those locations and how that has helped make you a better professor at CMU.

Dr. Blake Bickham: Okay sure. Well, one of the things that I always say to people when they're interested in teaching or thinking about becoming teachers is that teaching has literally taken me all over the world. So, it's just a great profession and career and a great way to impact people's lives. And, I got into teaching really through a passion for English and literature. That's what got me into teaching and then, just really loving making connections with students and then just enjoying teaching is what has kept me in teaching so... specifically, you know, I grew up in Texas near Houston, and when I was finishing a master's degree in English, I got a job in Miami, Florida, which is, not some place that I would have planned on living or thought about living. And, moved to Miami, and taught high school there. And after 5 years of teaching high school English, my wife and I decided to join the peace core. So, we kind of wanted to have one last hoorah I guess, before settling down with family and so on. And, so we joined the peace core. We said, "We will go anywhere, and we are both English teachers". So, we signed on to be English teachers and we were sent to Uzbekistan. Central Asia, former soviet country. Had been independent for about ten years when we were there, and I taught at the university level, teaching students who were essentially English majors. And, a lot of those students thought they would become translators or something like that. But most of them ultimately would just end up as teachers. And so, it was my first taste of teacher education was working over there. And after that experience, we moved back to Houston, and I had a job teaching English to international students. I was still teaching English. And, through the University of Houston I had the opportunity to teach employees of an oil & gas company in Mexico who were wanting to gain stronger English skills so they could attend graduate school at the University of Houston. That was a very different kind of one-off one-week experience versus a peace core immersion in Uzbek and Uzbek culture so...

David Ludlam: So, you were able to teach in a place where freedom was relatively new, less than ten years new. As a humanities guy who has studied the evolution of freedom in some ways, did that experience... has that made you a better professor at CMU in terms of being able to impart the importance of humanities into the students and to the community?

Dr. Blake Bickham: I think in general it just, teaching in a different environment like that is about flexibility and I'm teaching teachers so it's different maybe than the other programs. I'm modeling for them what they will be doing. I guess we are all doing that as professors but, all of this experience, teaching in different environments, teaching different students, teaching and adapting to different environments and places is what teaching is all about. And working with individual students who are different and coming from different places. And so that was just a particularly, not exaggerated but I guess a particularly different experience. Kind of a dramatically different experience. Teaching students that were from a completely different culture.

David Ludlam: Yeah. Sure.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm. Well you are listening to CMU now on KAFM community affairs, and our second guest today is Department Head of Teacher Education, Dr. Blake Bickham. So, you were able to travel the world, have kind of as you said a last hoorah before settling down. But, what brought you to CMU and Grand Junction? I'd be curious to hear that story.

Dr. Blake Bickham: Well, I went back to school and earned my doctorate degree from the University of Houston, and focused on teacher education. And, that experience actually in Uzbekistan is a big reason why. That I had that experience there both working with students of Uzbekistan but also other peace core volunteers who have maybe never taught before. And I thought, "You know, I'd like to maybe make a different kind of impact with teaching". And that was to teach teachers, and there was a job here in Grand Junction. We moved here in 2007. We were still Mesa State at that point.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm.

Dr. Blake Bickham: But, for most of my time here I was here to coordinate our secondary education program and work with the students who were going to be middle school or high school teachers.

Katlin Birdsall: Great.

David Ludlam: Dr. Bickham, anybody that's following the headlines these days has probably heard references to this teacher shortage, which, I think most states are experiencing, and at the national level. Do you see kind of what you're doing here at CMU as contributing to alleviating that shortage? And how do we get there? What are we doing at CMU to help ease that teacher shortage in the country?

Dr. Blake Bickham: Well, I hope we are, obviously we are making an impact in just continuing to do our good work and to graduate teachers. The, I would say that at CMU the best news is that we haven't felt the shortage with our enrollments too much. Some other institutions have also seen a decline in enrollment in teacher education. So not only a shortage of teachers but a shortage of people who want to be teachers. And luckily, we haven't been impacted by that too much at Colorado Mesa University. We've been able to continue to attract students. We've stayed relatively flat when others have gone down. We've continued sort of at our same pace of about 75 to 100 teachers a year. And we are, one of the ways that we've done that is we have a graduate program. That's a post-baccalaureate program that attracts people who are maybe second, third career or maybe just finished their bachelor's and then realized, "Well maybe teaching is a good option for me". And so, we have a graduate program that is a traditional licensed program but is for people that already have bachelor's degrees. And they can get a certificate with us, start teaching, and then continue in with twelve more hours and get a master's degree. And so, I feel like that's been a big reason that we have been able to stay at that steady number.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm. That's great. And I know that with our center for teacher education that it is one of our more popular departments. And like you said, you haven't seen a decline in enrollment which is great to hear. And I know that within your department you've got everything from the certificates to degrees at the undergraduate level at the initial teacher licensure level, the graduate level. So, can you maybe talk to us about a few of the more popular programs? Or one that you think may be really important for our community to hear about.

Dr. Blake Bickham: Well, the program I was just discussing is a different kind of program because it's for people that are thinking about being teachers but they already have a degree. So, I think that's a good place to start. And, we have an elementary version of that. So, if someone wanted to be an elementary teacher. If they wanted to work in a middle or a high school we have programs for English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Spanish, and then we also have a P.E. option for those.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm.

Dr. Blake Bickham: So, that's one good place to start. And, those are graduate programs. Those programs really reflect and mirror what we do at the undergraduate program as well. So, for current students or people that are seeking a bachelor's degree, we have those pathways to early childhood, elementary, secondary, and P.E., Music, Art, are all pretty common.

Katlin Birdsall: Mhmm.

Dr. Blake Bickham: For current educators we have graduate programs for principal license. So, if someone was interested in becoming a principal, we have a license program for that. And, we also have, going back to teacher shortages, there's always a very high need to special education. And we have a graduate program for special education that leads to that license as well.

Katlin Birdsall: Great!

David Ludlam: So, I'm almost certain that right now, there is a listener in their car, who at one time or another in their life has contemplated going back and getting an advanced degree. But, making that leap in the face of, you know, other things in life can be intimidating. But I think, you know, as you've kind of conveyed today, teaching is a calling and what would you say to that person who might be thinking about wanting to advance their career, wanting to go back to school and get an advanced degree, you know, what would you say to that person who is thinking about it?

Dr. Blake Bickham: I would say to give us a call. I think it's always good to talk to find out what the realities of the program are rather than maybe imagining what they might be. Talk to us, talk to someone in our department about the program, about what the commitment is. If you're a current educator and you're trying to take that next step towards another endorsement or to get that master's degree, that's what we are built for. We have summer, the

courses are summer-heavy and then also weekend-heavy. So, they are built for teachers, they are built for people who have full-time teaching jobs, those graduate programs. So, I think it's just to give us a phone call or send us an email, and try to get a one-on-one conversation with one of our faculty members.

David Ludlam: Well, I want to put you on the spot here. We often hear about sort of the humanities, being in sort of a decline. As a humanities guy, can you make the case for why English and Anthropology and History in teaching, why these things are important?

Dr. Blake Bickham: Well, for me it's about people and relationships, and that's what teaching is about. We talk to our students that they come into our program specifically, they are majoring in those other fields. So, even the Math and Science people, they are majoring in that field and then they're coming to teaching because they want to make an impact, they want to build relationships. And so, it's really about communication and relationships, and people telling their stories and having a story for their life. And so, I think that that's, like I said what has kept me in it and I think that's what keeps people in teaching is that human side, that connection to other people. We have had people come back from a lot of different kind of jobs to become teachers because they weren't getting that people connection that they needed.

David Ludlam: Well said.

Katlin Birdsall: Great. Well, if any of our listeners are interested in reaching out for more information, can you give us kind of a quick run down of maybe a phone number, or a website or kind of how they should get a hold of you?

Dr. Blake Bickham: That would be great yeah.

Katlin Birdsall: Yeah.

Dr. Blake Bickham: I'll start with a phone number. (970) 248 – 1618 and if you can leave a message there or you'll get a chance to talk to one of our admin and they'll be able to get you connected depending what your interest it to the right person to talk to. We also have an email: gradprograms@coloradomesa.edu so that's g-r-a-d-p-r-o-g-r-a-m-s at coloradomesa.edu. or if you just want to just go look around on our website: coloradomesa.edu/teachered will get you to our homepage and you can navigate on the left side our different programs.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well thank you so much again for Dr. Bickham for coming in and giving us a rundown on the center for teacher education and taking the time out of your busy schedule.

David Ludlam: Thank you.

Dr. Blake Bickham: Yeah, thank you! Thanks for having me.

Katlin Birdsall: Great, well this segment airs on the second Tuesday of each month on KAFM community radio. You can also listen to a podcast of today's show at kafmradio.org. I'm your

host Katlin Birdsall along with my co-host David Ludlam, and we'll be back next month for another edition of CMUnow on the community affairs hour.

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