

## **Pedagogue Bonus: Two-Year Colleges (w/Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt)**

Pedagogue podcast

*Transcript*

Welcome to Pedagogue Bonus, a short episode that covers a single topic or question. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this bonus episode, I talk with Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt about two-year colleges. Carolyn is one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. She's always so warm and kind and welcoming. She's an absolute joy to be around.

Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt teaches English, primarily developmental and first-year writing, at Yakima Valley College in Washington State. Carolyn has been teaching at the community college for more than two decades. Prior to that, she taught middle school and high school. At YVC, Carolyn is actively involved in her campus's equity initiatives. Her teaching and scholarly interests focus primarily on developmental and first-year writing and placement and assessment. Carolyn has served as TYCA Chair and CCCC Chair and has published pieces in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Writing Program Administration*, among others.

Carolyn, thanks so much for joining us.

*SW: So I want to talk to you about teaching at a two-year college – and I want to start by acknowledging that each institution is different, each one is unique so we have to localize our conversations. I was hoping, though, that this conversation would be beneficial to those who don't know much about the two-year college system and are interested in learning more about two-year colleges and teaching at two-year colleges. For example, I'm thinking about the graduate student who hasn't read much research because their program hasn't focused on two-year colleges. Or maybe the person who just got a job at a two-year college but doesn't have any experience teaching in that setting. I'm interested then, Carolyn, in knowing how you would prepare someone to teach at a two-year college, or what resources or pedagogical strategies you would recommend?*

CC-D: Obviously, it's helpful to understand the two-year college space that you're interested in when you go to apply for jobs and make sure you understand the culture, because they're not all the same as is true of any institution. I think they get homogenized more than they really are, and so they vary quite a bit. But, in general, the things that are common is most two-year colleges have open admissions. And so you do need to understand appropriate practices and effective practices for working with adult learners. I would hope anyone in our field would, but I mean in two-year colleges particularly, you're working with minoritized populations. So you need to not only understand what are effective practices for minoritized populations, but you also need to be invested in that. You need to want to work towards equity and social justice, or we're not really doing anyone a service.

You need to kind of understand that your role is not necessarily preparing folks for the university or college. That's certainly an option, and that should be an option available to all students. But

you're part of a community that's working with students of all different ilk, and so our workforce is our largest single program. It's pretty comparable, arts and sciences and workforce, but workforce is always a little bit larger. And we have some bachelor's programs in workforce, actually. And it's not necessarily that you're catering but you do, students need differently. You might have to be a little bit more pragmatic, and I think it's really focusing on learning, and less concerned about your particular content or whatever, and more about what are the learning things that you're trying to get them to do and how can we do that?

I think really not only understanding how adults learn, but understanding who your students are. And so, I think 83% I looked up at our college are first-generation. So they don't have any language of college, and they don't have any of the support systems, and they never did. So, you can't go in expecting that they know things that they don't. You have to teach everyone like they want to be here, but they don't know what they don't know. So you have to teach it. No one else is teaching it. They're not going to get it anywhere else. They don't even know to look at it. They just bring in interesting perspectives and attitudes like, "Yeah, that is weird. Yeah." But I think so many people, we tend to be people who were set up to go to college.

College professors tend to be people who came from fairly privileged, whatever... I mean, might be modestly so, but I mean, you came from literate backgrounds more often than not, you came because you were a good student, more often than not. You came because the K-12 system served you well, whether you liked it or not. And out there is not you. They're different than you. And so you can't, the things that worked for you or the things that you internalized and never knew, are not who your students are. So really understanding how to work with novices.

I think for folks at a graduate school, I think you really need to understand that scholarship is going to be on your own time more often than not. And that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, but it's going to be not rewarded in the same way, and certainly not supported in the same way, but there are ways to make it work. And so collaborations, thinking about various ways you might publish or put your information out there, thinking about how to focus in on your classroom as a space and use that. Because it's very rich, and there's a lot to do. But you do have to think about scholarship differently if you're at a two-year college.

What other advice would I give? I guess, I think back to, I worked with Christie [Toth] and Pat [Sullivan] on an article recently. I think it was published in this last year, but I felt like we wrote it for years. But I think it just came out last year, where we had talked about trying to transform the discipline to maybe ways that two-year colleges could transform the discipline because of what we could bring to the table with our teacher-scholar activism, and ways the discipline might want to transform to consider where half the teaching is being done for first year composition, which is where the primary research is.

And so, but in that we talked about the kind of transdisciplinary nature that I think a lot of folks in graduate school I think, get pretty honed in on the discipline. And there's reasons for that. It was very hard for composition-writing studies to establish itself as a discipline. And so we cling to that, and the disciplinary knowledge is important, but at the two-year college, you're going to need to take things from education, you're going to need to take things from developmental

studies, you're going to need to take things from disability studies, you're going to need to take things from a lot of spaces.

And you're also going to be, you're all doing kind of this gen ed. So you're also going to be working with your colleagues across disciplines more directly than just the writing across the disciplines program. So, I think coming in with that kind of mindset that this is, I like it, it's very collaborative, but you're not going to get to just sit in your office and work on your stuff. So, you are always going to be working for the good of the whole, and you're always going to need a lot of resources beyond the discipline in order to do that well.