(male announcer) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Trasoff) Hello. I am Nina Trasoff, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. We have a really interesting program today devoted to Developmental Education and the unique role it plays in helping people succeed, not just in college, but in life. My guest and colleague/cohort today is Rachelle Howell, who is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima Community College. And our expert guest today is Marty Frailey, who is the Lead Reading Specialist at the Downtown Campus for Pima. Welcome, Marty.

(Frailey) Thank you.

(Trasoff) This is an interesting topic because I think it’s very much misunderstood. Um, within the Pima system, uh, Rachelle, what—how important is maintaining that Developmental Education segment?

(Howell) Well, it’s really important, and it—it’s tough to do. Um, you know, Developmental Education, or Remedial Education, as it’s known in most quarters-- we call it “Dev Ed” at PCC– is all about college preparedness, and unfortunately, we see a lot of students coming to our doors who just are not ready for college-level courses. Um, and there are a variety of reasons for that, that I’ll—I’ll let our expert, Marty, get into here in a few minutes. Um, but it—it’s a large issue that colleges and universities all across the country struggle with, uh, ev—every year.

And when you look at schools like Pima that has an open admissions policy, it—it just compounds, compounds the issue. Um, and it—it’s not just about Pima. It’s about what happens with the students, these individuals, before they come to our doors. And many of them, frankly, are shocked when they take the mandatory assessment tests and find that they are just not prepared for college-level work. And we’re talking about, um, one segment, a lot of people that walk in with, uh, high school credentials, high school diplomas or, or otherwise, who just simply are not ready for college-level work.

(Trasoff) And there’s so many reasons behind that, which we’ll talk about. But it really concerns me. And I appreciate Pima for the unique role it plays, because you don’t just shunt those people aside and say, “Well, you’re not ready, goodbye. Come back when you’re ready.” You try to get them into the fold and help guide them onto the next steps. And Marty, your classes, or the classes within Developmental Education must be some of the most unusual blends of students, because you’re dealing with a lot of issues when people end up in a Developmental Education class.

(Frailey) Yes, our student population is, uh, incredibly diverse. We have the traditional students that you mentioned, who come to us right out of high school, and the high school dropouts who left their
students at college, kids educational educational support in reading, and 52% in writing. I mean, those are astounding statistics, that many people, or that percentage.

(Frailey) Just, just, were you going to clarify? Just for clarification, that—that’s the "new-to-higher-ed," the new-to-higher-ed segment that those statistics are for. Um, so you would; that’s more the traditional-type student, a student coming out of high school, new to higher ed, who is now trying to enter school. So 88% of those students, 88% of, say, recent high school graduates, need remediation.

(Trasoff) The—that, that’s what is so astounding to me.

(Frailey) It, it is. And that’s because they don’t take math past a couple years of high school.

(Howell) Right, right.

(Trasoff) But the English, also, is at a level that is...

(Frailey) Kids don’t read. They’re listening to iPods, and, uh, you know, they don’t read anywhere near what we read in school. They just don’t. And they don’t do the writing.

(Howell) Back in the old days...

(all laugh)

(Trasoff) You know, without going into that, but it’s something that has to be addressed. But you’re in a unique position, Marty, because your students are not necessarily all people who want to go on to college, um, to get their associate’s degree or a bachelor’s degree. You have different goals among your students because of the diverse population with which you deal.

(Frailey) Right. And that’s, uh, one thing that is not, it’s very much misunderstood. Everyone who comes to Pima College is not here to get a college degree. Uh, we do have the traditional students who
are here to get the two-year degree or to, uh, complete two years and move on to university. But, we have an incredibly large number of students who have other goals. Uh, some students are trying to pass--the international students are here simply for a semester or two to pass the TOUFUL test and get into the U of A. Sometimes they have bachelor’s degrees and they’re going to grad school. I had two of those last semester, uh, from Korea and Mali, that already had degrees. We have students here just to get their GED.

We have students who want to pass some kind of a test, whether it’s the Fire Department, Police Department, or a test to get into the military. Because a lot of programs require tests to get jobs, and they, they have taken the test once and were told they’re deficient, and so they want to brush up on skills. Um, we have people who are retired from the military, veterans who are, who are coming to get two-year degrees. But we also have some who are here, uh, to, as a type of rehab. I have three students this semester that are veterans from Iraq that have, uh, traumatic brain injury, and they’re here at their doctor’s request that they work on, um, developing their memory again. And so they’re not really here for a degree; they’re here for rehab, per se. Uh, and we, so we have different reasons why people are coming to college, and it’s not all for that two-year degree.

(Trasoff) We had a program several weeks ago that I—i just found fascinating and so gratifying; all of the things that Pima does to help our veterans, returning veterans. And we had talked about, in that program, more the counseling that’s available to help get them into the system, but Marty, you’re bring up a whole other side of—of the wounded vet who comes back. Some have apparent wounds; others have wounds, such as TBI, the traumatic brain injury, that are not as readily apparent but every bit as much, if not more, life-altering. So this program really is one of those that can be very helpful. Is—is part of what you do also teaching students how to learn? Because the language is one element, but they also, some students must come to you not even knowing how to learn.

(Frailey) Yes, and that is part of the diversity of our campus. Like I said, I had the South Korean student with a bachelor’s degree, but I also had the guy from the refugee camp in the Sudan who had not ever really gone to school, and an Afghan boy who had never gone to school in his own country. He spoke Farsi but had never read it. So we have a wide range of knowledge of, of how to read and how to study and, you know, everything from kids who hadn’t done very much schooling at all to people who had done a whole lot. A professor from China was in my class, and I had a neurosurgeon from Russia in my class. So, um, you know, we have that real--we are teaching how to study, how to take notes, how to plan enough time for academics, all kinds of real basic skills that if you haven’t had 12 years of a solid education, you really don’t have that solid background.

(Trasoff) So you’ve been doing this for a while.

(Frailey) Yes, I have.

(Trasoff) What changes have you seen, because, um, you’re talking about learning how to learn. Some of these students come to you even from high schools, or they have a degree, but who don’t know how to study and have never done homework.
(Frailey) Correct.

(Trasoff) So, tell me about that. Are you seeing, have you seen changes in the, what is it, 20 years you told me that you...

(Frailey) Twenty-two, twenty-two. Um, I’ve seen, we’re getting more refugees and immigrants, for sure. Okay? Uh, and we’re just sort of beginning to see the onslaught of the veterans from Iraq; they were, of course, veterans from Vietnam when I was, you know, starting at Pima College. Um, the high school students, we are; I can speak a positive note, we are seeing that, now that this AIMS test has been; I’m not sure exactly when it started, but about five years ago that it went into place? We’ve seen that some of the students that are coming to us directly from high school are testing more into our higher-level developmental courses, rather than the lower ones in reading and writing. In other words, they’re testing into Reading 091, not 081; they’re testing into Writing 100, rather than 070. I talked to the Math Department, and that, uh, department chair had been there as long as me, if not longer, and he said they are not seeing that in math. But we are seeing that this AIMS test and the fear of not getting that high school diploma have encouraged kids to do more. But I think it also is letting us know that we, we could, you know, that this worked; now we need to do more with it.

(Howell) Because they’re still coming in needing...

(Frailey) Deficient, yes.

(Howell) They’re still coming in needing to take a remedial class, even though...

(Frailey) Just not quite as low a one.

(Howell) So we’re seeing some improvement, but still, still the need for it.

(Frailey) We have a long way to go.

(Howell) Yeah.

(Trasoff) And how do we address that? Rachelle, we’ve talked, in earlier programs, again, about relationships with high schools, area high schools, to try and provide that partnership, just as on the other end, uh, Pima has a wonderful relationship with the U of A so that your associate’s degree earners can segue really smoothly into the U of A.

(Howell) Right. But that’s a—that’s a good question. It’s a tough question, because it’s something that—that, certainly Pima can’t do by itself. Uh, you know, we, we look for opportunities, and we do partner already with local school districts to, to improve, uh, education and, you know, younger, younger and younger levels all the time, it seems, it seems like. But it—it, it—it’s a difficult issue. There is no quick, dirt—quick answer to this. Um, it’s something that’s been, that’s been building for years and seems to be—although it sounds like we’re seeing a little bit of improvement—um, I think we’re at this point, to a certain extent, so far in—in a bit of a hole when it comes to this, that it’s going to take us a
long time to climb back out, I think. But the only way to do it is through partnerships and working with the—the local school districts on, uh, working to—working together to come up with a solution.

And, you know, to put it in perspective, Pima spends about 15% of our annual budget on Developmental Education, about $23 million. And with budget cuts continuing to loom, we’ve got to find a way to become, uh, more efficient and smarter about how we, uh, educate this particular population. Um, and enrollment continues to grow. So those numbers are not going to decrease. So we’ve got to figure out how to, how to do this better.

(Trasoff) But we have to help people better understand what Developmental Education is. I would imagine that in a vast majority of the cases, it has nothing to do with intellectual capacity, but rather their history, whether it be, um, societal or, um, even within families; you still get first-generation people, first-time people in their family, a person is going to anything past high school.

(Frailey) Yeah. There’s a lot of reasons why these—these students are behind. Remember, the older students coming back, it’s really refresher classes. Developmental Ed is refresher. You know, when you’re 42, how long ago was it, the last math class you took? So, um, the, so for many of them, it’s refresher, the older students, the veterans. For all of the international students and whatever, uh, and refugees and immigrants, it’s about, um, them learning a second or a third language, sometimes a fourth language. For the students right out of high school, it’s about not taking high school seriously. It’s about that lack of commitment to their education. And I think, from the work I’ve been doing with the Amphi High School teachers, I believe it’s a lack of understanding, among the parents as well as the kids, about how important high school is to prepare them for college.

(Trasoff) But I want, one of the points I would like to draw out on this though, is something, I mean, the whole point of this program is to talk about Pima and what it offers, but its impact on the community. And the coursework that you’re offering, if we look at the statistics, which I don’t have off the top of my head, but, it’s an outrageously high number of the people in our state prisons who are illiterate, or functionally illiterate. So, what, the work you’re doing, it’s not just, well, helping kids get into college. It’s really addressing societal need that has an impact on our community for generations to come. So how—I mean, I—I, I guess it’s just that we need to be thinking about this beyond just, “So-and-so didn’t do really well in high school,” or wasn’t challenged, or wasn’t on a college-prep course. It’s not just helping them get into college; it’s really helping this entire community have a more educated, uh, populous.

(Howell) It’s true, and it—it’s a societal, it’s a societal issue. It’s—and it’s not unique; it’s not unique to our community. Uh, but Pima is, um, we are on, at this point, what I think, the leading edge of is, of trying to really solve this issue. There is, there are a lot of schools, a lot of, uh, people across the country talking about it and how to improve it, but, but we’re actually taking action. And in fact, um, we, we do a, a College Plan every two or three years, and we’re working on our next College Plan right now. And one of our major initiatives is, is addressing this, and how to, uh, how to improve it.

Um, you know, one of the things, and—and Marty maybe can speak to this, um, you know, these individuals that come in and, and participate in the Developmental Education courses probably need
more one-on-one assistance than our typical students. Um, it—or it’s helpful to them to have more, it’s more helpful to them to have the one-on-one assistance. But with the numbers we’re facing, we’ve got to create a, an educational system in Dev Ed that’s scalable, because these numbers are just going to grow. And so we’ve got to come up with new ways to approach educating these students that, that gets, gets them the attention that they need but also allows us to serve the, the numbers that are coming through our doors.

(Frailey) Well, we’ve been doing a lot of that with the Learning Centers that we’ve developed on all of our campuses we’ve got the most comfortable chairs and the highest-tech brand-new computers, and right in that Learning Center are computer techs that show the students, uh, how to keep up with all the changes on the computers. We’ve got tutoring in every area. Uh, our Re—our Developmental Ed classes are relatively small, 20 to 25 in a class, but we do have, on my campus, a reading tutor, uh, who is working with all those students outside of class, and that’s where they’re getting the one-on-one help. Um, and that’s really been a great asset to me. I have 25 in a class this semester, and that’s great, that are, that are still there.

(Trasoff) And you also are doing outreach with some of your students to high school students to try and help them understand, “Buckle down in high school. It’s going to make it so much easier when you go on, and you are going to want to go on.”

(Frailey) Correct. We have a panel of Pima College students on my campus that are at different levels. Some are ready to transfer, one’s dually enrolled at the U of A and at Pima, and the other ones are fr—are kinda different stages of their progress at Pima. And they’re going to meet with, uh, sophomores at Amphí, and we’re going to have them talk about where they are with their education. But they’re also going to be telling them about their regrets, about what they wish they had done differently in high school, hoping that young kids that are maybe two or three years older than those sophomores in high school could better reach them than the teachers who they don’t appear to want to listen to. (laughs)

(Trasoff) I think that’s a really smart approach. Uh, Marty Frailey, thank you so much for joining us on Pima Community College Perspectives. It’s been a fascinating conversation. We’ll be back after this short break with Andrés Galbaldón, who is a student, 23-year old University of Arizona student, who went through Developmental Education classes at Pima. I think you’ll find his story fascinating. We’ll be right back.

[music]

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[music]

(Trasoff) Welcome back. I’m Nina Trasoff, and this is Pima Community College Perspectives. With me is Rachelle Howell, who’s Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima Community College. And we’re joined now by Andrés Galbaldon, who is a 23-year old University of Arizona student, but he was part of the Developmental Education program at Pima Community College. Welcome, Andrés.

(Andrés Galbaldón) Hello, thank you.

(Trasoff) I’m so glad that you could join us. Tell us a little bit about your background and, and how you got into Pima, and why you ended up in Developmental Education.

(Galbaldón) Well, I’m born and raised here in Tucson, and I, uh, went up through the TUSD District. And I—I was, um, when I was 13, I was diagnosed with a preexisting condition called, uh, “Wegener’s granulomatosis,” a rare autoimmune disorder that primarily affects the kidneys, but in my case, affected the lungs. And so, the, uh, it required me to take, uh, chemotherapy for 19 months. Uh, so, so, so this, in turn, was a consequence that I wasn’t able to take the classes that were able to sharpen up my skills, uh, to the level that it needed to be at. And so when I reached Pima Community College, uh, I saw the opportunities there that I was able to bounce back, and it was my second chance, uh—uh, uh, to really develop all my skills. Uh, so that’s why, uh, and—and as well my grade point average was above a 3.8; uh, I met, uh, at the top 5% of my class, and I was a recipient of the Pima Community College Merit Scholarship. Uh, so that was another great, uh, um, opportunity there, as well.

(Trasoff) I really like the way you phrase that as a “second chance,” because we have to keep giving young people second chances to try at, to help them succeed. And you, obviously, have managed that, um, and then some, since you’re now at the U of A and studying to be a lawyer? That’s your goal?

(Galbaldón) Yes, Political Science is my, is my major, and, uh, yes, my interest is in the law, and, uh, hopefully going into U of A Law. Uh, but again, I am, uh, I am looking at different options, so, uh, hopefully when I get there, I—I’ll make the right choice.

(Trasoff) I’m sure you will. Somehow, I have no doubt about that. What are some of the misperceptions people have about students who go into Developmental Ed? We just had Marty Frailey on in the first half of this program, and she was talking about how diverse her student body is, ranging from 14-79, or more, and returning vets as well as high school grads, returning homemakers. I mean, it’s
a little bit of everything. So, what are some of the misperceptions that either you felt before you were in there, or that you, people seem to put on you?

(Galbaldón) Well, I believe that, you know, when you see your friends heading into higher-level, uh, maths, for—for example, um, you know, you kinda feel, uh, like you’re doing something wrong, uh, like you’re, you know, you might feel ashamed or, or unconfident. Uh, but in my case, uh, I will, I was able to, to rise above that and I—and I, uh, um, found a courage within my, within my other students and faculty and staff, uh, and I—and I really saw it as, “I’m focusing on my future.” And, uh, I really wanted to, um, make sure that I was able to, um, you know, find my way through it and, uh, um, it, it was great resources at Pima, especially the free tutoring. Uh, uh, that was terrific, especially with the, with the faculty and administration. I got involved as—as a student; I got involved in Student Government. Uh—uh, also, that helped me through it. So, but I knew it was a lot of classes to take to make up to where I needed to be, uh, so it was a lot of time. But, uh, the effort really paid off now that I’m at the University.

(Trasoff) That’s terrific. But I do think there is that misperception out there that if you’re in Developmental Education that means that you’re capabilities may not be as great as others. And it really has more to do with history and individual circumstances, in your case, a severe illness, that really impact your whole background. But obviously, you’ve got the capabilities to go on anywhere you want to do.

(Galbaldón) Well, I do know, I try to put forth my confidence in, uh, in every aspect, you know, of my, uh, pursuit of a higher education, and I, uh, encourage students to do the same, regardless of their situation. I don’t think that I’m special because of it. I just think that, uh, it’s just a cross that I needed to, you know, to bear.

(Trasoff) Did you, um, you were talking about finding the, um, tutoring skills really helpful. Did it help you also just learn how to learn?

(Galbaldón) Well, uh, I think Developmental Ed gave me the skills that I needed to, uh, achieve what I’m achieving right now, the, especially the writing skills, for example. I mean, to write a paper, I mean, you’re gonna need those skills for the rest of your life, uh, and these are skills that, uh, that my teacher really, really harped on. Uh, and, uh, um, I’m so glad that, that I had this opportunity. I’m so glad that I didn’t test out of it, because I needed those skills.

(Trasoff) That’s a really good point, um, ‘cause I know that, um, that a lot of, I—I would imagine that a lot of students who test into Developmental Education think, “No, I don’t want to do that. Just put me in a regular course; I’ll be fine.” But you’re saying you really had an advantage because you had this kind of foundational coursework.

(Galbaldón) Oh, yes, yes, yes, I mean, I—I, actually doing the work and actually working with students that are develop, you know, developing their skills as well, so you’re able to connect, uh, with your other students. Uh, and—and you’re able to, um, uh, develop your skills personally, uh, through communication, uh, and you know, at that level. So, I think I was more mature at the time, uh; I was able to really comprehend the ideas and how this was gonna go forth. ‘Cause in high school, I didn’t
really realize how these skills were gonna help me in the future. And now, uh, when I—when I got to Pima, I started realizing that more and more, these skills are, uh, the basic skills that really get you through the, uh, you know, life.

(Trasoff) When, you—you said, when you were in high school you didn’t realize that. What needs to be done to help high school students have a better grip on the fact that, “This isn’t just a game; this is the beginning of the next phase of your life?” And we know the statistics about income of high school graduates versus, um, A.A., associate’s degrees, versus bachelor’s degrees, etc.

(Galbaldón) Well, I always talk to my friends and family about this. But, uh, you know, overall, I just believe it’s, everybody needs to wake up. Uh, I think some people wake up when they’re, uh, younger, when they’re in high school or, or when they’re in college, or, uh, when they’re an adult. Uh, and I think we all have this moment when we kinda realize that life is here, and it’s not a dress rehearsal. Uh, you know, uh, this is the real thing. And, uh, we need to prepare ourselves and be willing to self-evaluate ourselves and, uh, uh, build on these, on these core elements of ourselves and be able to, willing to, you know, to learn, uh, and develop these, uh, important skills.

(Trasoff) You seem very goal-oriented.

(Galbaldón) Yes, very goal-oriented. I’m the guy that writes it down and sees it every morning.

(Trasoff) Really?

(Galbaldón) Yes.

(Trasoff) Has that been helpful to you?

(Galbaldón) Very helpful. Well, you know, I’ll just cross one off as we go. And, uh, uh, as you start crossing ‘em off, you know, you start seeing that, uh, you know, you throw, you throw a stick into an open field, and even though you might not head straight all the time, you’re gonna, but, but once you get there, you’re gonna pick up the stick and throw it again.

(Trasoff) I love the attitude, Andrés. So, you’re at, was the transition into the U of A?

(Galbaldón) Oh, it was fantastic. I’m actually taking advantage of the U of A South program, so it’s a great partnership with, uh, Pima. And I’m actually Student Body President over there at the U of A South, so...

(Trasoff) Well, well.

(Galbaldón) So, um, as Student Body President, I’m, I’m able to address these views.

(Trasoff) That’s wonderful. Andres, thank you very much for joining us. Rachelle, always a pleasure, and we’ll see you next week for Pima Community College Perspectives.

(Galbaldón) Thank you.
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