Transcript

Pima Community College Perspectives
“College Plan / Internships”

Guests: Dr. Nicola Richmond, PCC Executive Director for Institutional Research
Michele Betzen, Program Manager, Internships

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

(Nina Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff. I’m so delighted you can join us. We have a couple of really interesting topics, uh, fascinating actually. I hope you’ll agree with me. My co-host today is, as always, Rachelle Howell, who is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima. Welcome Rachelle.

(Rachelle Howell) Thank you, Nina.

(Trasoff) And set up a little bit, what we’re going to be talking about, because we’re talking about the 2011-2013 College Plan. What is a “College Plan” and why does it matter?

(Howell) That’s a great question. You hear the words “College Plan,” and a lot of people’s eyes glaze over. But it’s actually a very exciting topic for us, and it should be hopefully for our listeners and our constituencies as well, because it’s really how we hold ourselves accountable to, well to ourselves, to our Board, but most importantly, to our taxpayer constituents, which is really what it’s all about for us.

And I think what makes Pima unique when it comes to planning, and more specifically the College Plan, is that we actually implement our Plan. This isn’t what a lot of people think of as “planning” where you create something, and it sounds nice, and it looks pretty, and then you it on the shelf, and you pull it down in two or three years and look to see if you actually accomplished anything. What makes it exciting for us is that it has hundreds of initiatives really, with action steps, accountable individuals, assigned individuals who have to report back. We report our findings back to our Board of Governors on a regular basis. And it’s really about moving the College forward and making sure that we continue to provide the services that our students need and deserve.

(Trasoff) Well, the woman who is in charge of the Planning and Institutional Research Program at Pima Community College is Dr. Nicola Richmond. And I was told that you go by Nic?

(Dr. Nicola Richmond) Yes. That’s right.

(Trasoff) So Nic, welcome.

(Dr. Richmond) Thank you.

(Trasoff) It’s delightful to have you here. But before we get into the Planning and Institutional Research, tell me a little bit about your background and how your training segues into what you’re doing now.
(Dr. Richmond) Well my background, um, I studied back in the UK as a geophysicist, and I have my PhD in that subject. And after finishing that, I was kind of, well, "What to do?" And I got the opportunity to do a post-Doc here in Planetary Sciences just down the road at the U of A. And various different things happened, and I did end up staying in Tucson. And that, bizarre as it sounds, segued very directly into institutional research, because any kind of science is about getting data sets, working with understanding the information that’s in there. And really that’s what we do at Pima when we work with our student records. Again, it’s about studying our students, understanding what’s working. And it’s all the same kind of techniques.

(Trasoff) It doesn’t seem as if Planetary Sciences would add up into this kind of research, but it is-- data is data is data. It’s what you do with it.

(Dr. Richmond) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) So talk about what you do with it. Tell me a little bit about what you are in the midst of.

(Dr. Richmond) Well we have a huge number of different things we do at Pima. We’re a very data-driven institution, which is great for the IR office, because we have so many different things that we get to work on. The College Plan, of course, is one of the critical ones. It’s probably singly the biggest project that we have through the department that I’ve worked on. And there’s many kinds of ways we use data to support that, because the whole, the whole purpose of the College Plan is to help us plan for those big challenges that are coming up in the future, to look at the institution and go, “Well what’s currently working? What isn’t working? What techniques are there out elsewhere in the country that we may want to consider trying to incorporate here at the College?”

And of course for that we need to work with the data. We need to understand what is working for our students, and often, more importantly, what currently isn’t working. Because the thing with the Plan is, it isn’t about, kind of like, well it isn’t operational. It isn’t about, “Oh, well, we can make it a little minor change in this one particular area.” It’s what are the really substantial challenges. What are the difficult things we need to address? And for that, for our institution, we very heavily rely on data to make sure we really understand what is happening.

(Trasoff) Talk to me about the data that you are using. Is it just looking at statistics of how many graduates you have, how many move on to a four-year college, how many drop out? Or does it also involve either surveys or one-on-one research, conversation with students to find out some of the things we’re talking about.

(Dr. Richmond) It’s a wide variety of different things. From the research side, we have a computer system so all of our records are in one very large database. It includes our student records, where we have it down to the course level. So for a given student in a given term we know what classes they attempted, which ones they passed. Then looking over successive terms, we can follow those students along to see along a path line of what’s working for them.
And you can also accumulate the data from several different students, so if all of a sudden, one semester 15 students are dropping out of course “X”, then you might say, “We need to take a look at course ‘X’”.

Yes, absolutely. So some of the typical things we might look at, we have a census date, which is the 45th day after classes begin. And for that particular time period, we’ll look at the enrollment characteristics of our students. And it’s important to note for this we look at a very aggregate level. We never look at individual student records, because they’re protected by law. So, it’s always we look at large groups of students to make sure information is protected. And we look at, say, the demographics of the students, so the sex of the students, the ethnicity, even the time of day they take classes or the day of week. We look at all of that information on the census date, halfway through the term.

Then at the end of the term, we look at the same type of parameters. So again, their age, the time of day, all those kinds of things, and we tie that into how successful they were in the classes they were taking. And for that we also build in the delivery method. That’s a very big area currently. Um, of course we have the traditional classroom courses, but we also teach classes online, we have hybrid classes, and a wide variety of different ways that we instruct the material. And I guess there are a number of different things that play into this, because of course we want to make sure we deliver the classes in the way that is effective for the students.

And we know there’s a lot of variations. Some delivery methods seem to be more successful, for example, for our female students compared with our male students. And so we see these kinds of differences. It’s not just gender related; it gets into the subject. Different subjects seem to be more successful in different kinds of modalities. And for us as an institution, we need to understand these kinds of things, because of course, we need to make sure that classes are being offered in a way to ensure that the students are successful or given the best chance of being successful.

And that is, really, I love listening to... I love, first of all, that you do protect the individual data, because you were talking about every student, the information is there, but you do not go into the student records. You’re looking at a large amalgam of all these people so that you get the statistical base. But is there something like-- that to me is very quantitative research. Is there also a qualitative element to this?

Yes, we have a few different things in that area. One example is something we do every year; we do a "Graduate Exit Survey." So for all the students graduating in a given year, at three points during the year, we have a very comprehensive survey which we administer, finding out more their input on how the feel their experience went at the College. So getting their input on different kinds of student services, whether they felt they had achieved the goal they had come to the College for, to get that kind of input. In addition, one of the other roles through the Institutional Research office is to do with accreditation, which of course, is very important.

And in addition to the institution’s accreditation, some of the programs have their own individual accreditation. And for those, we often do surveys for students who are in their first year and asking them specific questions about their experiences. Then we’ll have a follow up survey in the second year.
We’ll administer a survey to local employers to get their input on their feelings about the graduates in our programs. And then we survey again our students when they leave the institution to see whether they placed into employment, whether they had an increase in their salary, whether they felt their education prepared them adequately for the job that they had.

(Trasoff) That’s an astounding amount of information on all levels.

(Dr. Richmond) Yes.

(Trasoff) And then somehow you massage all this, put it together, and it becomes part of a Plan that you can then judge yourselves by.

(Dr. Richmond) Yes, yes. And that’s just one part of the information we look at for the College Plan. Because while we need to understand ourselves, of course, we need to understand both our local community and the challenges that are facing higher education across the nation. So to get some kind of census, for example, we have, we recently had an expert panel where three planners from the local area very graciously shared their time with us and came to speak with the planning committee to give us their input on some of the local challenges. We also had a series of focus groups where the planning committee looked at things like the reauthorized Higher Education Act and some of the veteran’s bills that are passing through at the federal level, so we could understand what those changes were and make sure that there’s a college within the College Plan. We took those things into account to make sure the College was well placed on all fronts to understand ourselves, Pima County, and the bigger picture.

(Trasoff) And that seems incredibly important, because it is the “Pima Community” College.

(Dr. Richmond) Mm-hmm.

(Trasoff) So you really are reaching out to the community to make sure not only that processes within the College are working well, but that they’re relevant to the needs of the community, both the students, and the employers, and the people who worry about economic development, and et cetera, et cetera.

(Dr. Richmond) Absolutely. And actually for the, um, the current, the upcoming College Plan, I should say, for 2011-2013, we currently have six draft initiatives. They are by no means finalized at the moment. As a committee and as a community, we are still looking at them. But several of those kind of relate directly to the relationship between the College and the community, both in terms of making sure that we have as many available opportunities for our students when they graduate and leave the College, but also for the College to work with the local community to help in these challenging economic times to see if there are things we can do to support our local employers or small businesses, changes in those areas.

(Trasoff) I’d like to talk about those key elements in a moment. But what is the current—does every college do this?

(Dr. Richmond) No.
[laughter]

(Trasoff) This is an astounding amount of work and attention to detail. I guess, bottom line, is to make sure that you’re successful and that you’re relevant.

(Dr. Richmond) Yes, exactly. And the approach we have at Pima, which was initiated by our Chancellor, Dr. Roy Flores, when he joined the College a few years ago, is very—fairly unique in the country. I’m not familiar with a college that has a same approach. A lot of other colleges will have perhaps, for example, a 10-year plan. So they’ll have a review process for, which could last maybe for a year, and they’ll identify the key goals. And then they’ll have this plan for the following 10 years. It’s a fairly short planning timeline and of course a very long plan. And typically it will list the things that the college intends to do. It doesn’t list necessarily who will be responsible for ensuring it’s done. And they don’t necessarily tie themselves to a specific deadline, whereas us, we have a very comprehensive planning process. As soon as a College Plan comes into effect, we start planning for the following College Plan. At any given time, there are always two Plans on the go. It’s just usually most people only know about the one that’s in place.

(Trasoff) And then how do you plan for 10 years? Who, 10 years ago, could’ve anticipated what happened with the housing bust for example and the recession? Nobody saw the banking—none of this was anticipated.

(Dr. Richmond) Exactly.

(Trasoff) What do you do with a plan then if you’ve got a 10-year plan and then... Sounds like you’ve got a lot more flexibility.

(Dr. Richmond) Yes. And that’s why, typically for us, we have a two-year Plan. The one currently in place is 2008-2011. And the only reason we did it that way was because we had our reaccreditation visit in September, and we didn’t want to be transitioning to a new College Plan at the same time you also had that important event going on.

(Trasoff) We don’t have a lot of time left for this segment, but can you give a rough idea of some of the draft initiatives?

(Dr. Richmond) Absolutely. Um, the way it’s looking at the moment, as I mentioned before, it looks like we’ll have six. Developmental Education is one of the key focuses, and that has been for awhile. And this is basically trying to ensure that our entering students have the correct skills that they’ll need in math, reading, and writing to be successful in college-level courses. And we’re actually looking in a fair amount of detail about different ways of delivering the classes and some of the other changes we could make in that area.

(Trasoff) And all of it is data driven.

(Dr. Richmond) Yes. Yes.
(Trasoff) Very impressive. And you go on to improving student success, expanding opportunities for students, facilitating effective outcomes in the community, state, and nation, which is very impressive, looking beyond your borders, um, leveraging your current resources, which we have talked about in another program, and then enhancing operations, which I’m guessing in these economically-challenging times is critically important.

(Dr. Richmond) Mm-hmm. Absolutely.

(Trasoff) So when will the plan be completed?

(Dr. Richmond) Um, well, it will be presented to the Board as a draft in February. And then based on their feedback, we’ll revise the content of the document so that it reflects the Board of Governors’ wishes for the College. And it will come into effect on July the 1st of next year.

(Trasoff) Very exciting, very exciting. Okay, this has been fascinating. I’ve never thought data talk could be this interesting.

(Dr. Richmond) Oh, it’s very interesting; it’s brilliant!

[laughter]

(Trasoff) Nic, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon. This is Dr. Nicola Richmond, who is the Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Research. We’re going to take a break, and we will be right back. And we’re going to talk about internships available to Pima students.

[music]

(male announcer) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it, and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500, or visit us on the Web, at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

[music]
Welcome back. I’m Nina Trasoff, and this is the second part of Pima Community College Perspectives. With me still, continuing, is Rachelle Howell. Rachelle, we’re going to be talking about internships at Pima. And this is a good example of the kind of two-way street that Pima has out into the community, helping the community while the community helps the educational process.

That’s right. For our outgoing students and our students who graduate from Pima and move into their occupation, having had real-world work experience is so key in being able to help them get placed in a job that is a right fit for their skills. It just makes them so much more employable than walking out onto the street with simply just a degree or just a certificate. And I use the word “just,” but it really is important. But on the flipside, it’s part of how we partner with our local employers to keep our finger on the pulse of what is it they need employee-wise, but also supply them with, uh, with workers who are, who are bright, and upcoming, and really dedicated to the new job, the new skill that they are trying to learn.

That’s wonderful. And with us is Michelle Betzen, and she’s the Program Manager in charge of internships for Pima. Welcome, Michelle.

Thank you.

And there are a lot of fine lines you have to walk because these interns can’t replace workers, but they have to have a good educational experience that is of value to them while they’re still doing something positive for the employer. Talk about that.

Yes, exactly. There are guidelines that need to happen for any internship. The main ones are provided to us by the Department of Labor. And they give the guidelines of whether an intern needs to be paid or can be unpaid, and that sets the stage for a lot of decisions by an employer. If they’re going to pay the student, then the student is considered a temporary employee, so they have a lot more flexibility in some of the things that student can do for them and some of the jobs that they can undertake.

The, um, if they choose not to pay the student, which is also a very viable option, they have some rules they need to follow. For example, they can’t, the intern can’t replace an employee. They also can’t be guaranteed a job at the end. There’s like six guidelines. But there’s still an awful lot the intern can do for them. They’re really great for bringing in some of the new technologies that they’ve learned in the classroom, or doing some of the back burner projects that some of the employees might not be able to get to, or even kind of a wild goose chase that you might not want to set your employees on but might have some value for the company still.

So it’s a real win-win for both the employer and for the student who is serving an internship.

Yes it is, especially when it is well structured. And that is where the College comes into play with helping the employer and the student structure, come up with their goals and their objectives for the internship so that everybody knows what they are trying to do, what they are going to be
performing and working at. And that way everybody can choose what they want to get out of it and then see it through to actually get those benefits.

(Trasoff) But it’s not something where you develop a plan and just say, “Go forth and work for a semester.” Your student has a guide, a faculty member, who keeps tabs on all of this.

(Betzen) Exactly. An intern actually has two supervisors. They have their supervisor at the jobsite, which is their site supervisor, and they have a faculty supervisor that along with helping the employer and the student come up with those objectives I was talking about, they also oversee the entire process. So the student will provide them with feedback and reports and updates on how it’s going, and they can work with that student to ensure that it’s a successful internship and that everything works smoothly.

(Trasoff) It seems important, um, that you have that follow up and that foundation. How has the response been from students? Has the program been on the increase?

(Betzen) Yes, absolutely. This semester, we have 355 students that are earning credit for an internship at the College. About 200 of those are in health-related professions or in our post-degree education programs. The other 155 are in programs, everything from business to computer-aided drafting to paralegal. There’s about 20 different fields that they can intern in. And that number of 155 is up 230 percent from last year.

(Trasoff) Wow, that is a tremendous jump, but I think it’s also an acknowledgement of how important it is for students to have real life experience before they are out in the job market.

(Betzen) Yes, exactly. And have the opportunity to get into a company where they can learn not only from the textbook or in their labs, but also about the different types of corporate cultures and company business personalities that they might be running into.

(Trasoff) That can sometimes be a shock when you get out into the “real world.”

(Betzen) Yes.

(Trasoff) Um, but you have a lot of your students in the health-related professions, which seems to make perfect sense. You need to translate what you’ve learned in the lab into real life.

(Betzen) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) And then you also, and this is one of the things that I love, you’re really teaching a lot of teachers. People who already have Bachelor’s degrees are choosing to come back to Pima to learn how to be teachers and to get that certification that they need to be able to teach.

(Betzen) Yes, both our Post-Bachelor Teacher Education Programs; we have the Education and we have the Special Education focus.

(Trasoff) That’s filling a real need in our community it would seem.
(Betzen) Yes. Yes, absolutely. And they have a lot of, um, internship built into those programs for that exact reason, that they do get the time in the classroom. And we partner with all of the school districts throughout the community.

(Trasoff) It’s an unusual or less, well it’s becoming more usual or often that this is happening, of women and men in their mid-life, in their 40’s and their 50’s, deciding, “I want to teach. I want to make a different kind of contribution in life.”

(Betzen) Yes, yes it is.

(Trasoff) And it would be hard to know where to begin if it were not for Pima. What are the kinds of experiences that the students get when they’re out there? I mean, you talked about learning about corporate culture and how to fit in, and, I mean, do you have some students who actually go out to intern and say, “I’m not sure this is really what I want to do.”

(Betzen) The goal of an internship is to happen toward the end of the program, so they might do an internship and feel that it’s not for them. But it’s not going to be that they no longer want to be a paralegal; maybe it’s just a different type of law firm. Maybe they want a smaller office, for example, if they’re going to be a paralegal. So it is their chance to try on different types of companies that utilize their program of study. And certainly a good example of that is our Therapeutic Massage Program, because they can go through towards the rehabilitative massage, or they can go towards spas and resorts for massage. And that internship gives them a possibility to try that on and kind of focus which direction they do want to go with their program of study.

(Trasoff) Can students do more than one internship?

(Betzen) Yes they can. It depends on the program of study that they are in, how many credits they are allowed to earn for internships or multiple internships. But the student is always able to do additional internships on their own if they feel that they want to.

(Trasoff) And these are for academic credit. So this counts toward their degree.

(Betzen) Yes, whether it counts towards the degree as a required course or an, more of an elective basis, depends on the program of study. Some of them do have it built into the required courses. Others have it as optional.

(Trasoff) And we talked about the fact that it is real world experience for these students, but this is also helping them build a résumé that they might not otherwise be able to have to prepare them as they go out.

(Betzen) Absolutely. The students really have a lot of benefits from interning. The, from the very beginning in getting an internship, it’s very much like getting a job. So if they haven’t gotten a job ever, or if they haven’t had to be a job-seeker for quite some time, it gets them back into practice. They have the résumé that they can then build with the internship. But they also go through the interview process, so they benefit from that. They benefit from the corporate culture we talked about, from the
experiences, from seeing how what they learned in the classroom actually works in the real world, and from all of the networking and the contacts they can make. And often that is the biggest benefit is that they now know people in their professional field.

(Trasoff) That makes a world of difference coming from academia into the real world. What’s the response from the people who take interns, the businesses? Are they pleased with the quality of the interns you are giving them? Do you get feedback on that?

(Betzen) We do get some feedback, and in general the feedback is very positive. The employers tend to really appreciate the help that the College gives them as far as structuring it so they know what to expect from when the student comes out. And they have the input into those objectives, so that they can help plan what the student will be doing, so that they know what to expect. And then they can see it come to fruition. We have many businesses that return and take interns on a continuing basis that, for example, Merrill Lynch has worked with the College for many semesters and almost consistently had interns from Pima. The Disney College Program continues to come here. They’re very happy with the quality of the interns.

(Trasoff) That’s terrific. And if somebody is interested in either becoming an intern, or a business wants to perhaps take an intern, they would get in touch, email you at internships@pima.edu.

(Betzen) Correct.

(Trasoff) And your phone is 206-4768.

(Betzen) Yes.

(Trasoff) Very good. Michelle Betzen, thank you very much for being with us to talk about the Internship Program at Pima Community College. Rachelle, thanks for joining. And thanks to all of you for listening in. I’m Nina Trasoff, and this is Pima Community College Perspectives.

(male announcer) K-J-L-L, South Tucson.