Speaker 1: But I'm loving this. You know the committee knows more than we do. As adjuncts we're just in class or between campuses, so knowing what the, I call them, catchphrases are, the main topics, contemporary topics, and where the college is going in the future, that's really helpful. Very important to me.

Liesel: Welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Christina: Welcome back everyone this is Christina. I had the pleasure of sitting in for this recent seminar at Mount SAC about getting a full-time faculty job, and I'm pleased to bring you the third episode in the series today. It is from long-time faculty member Liesel Reinhart, also the co-host for this podcast, and it's all about the advance preparations that candidates can do for a full-time faculty interview. Liesel's been on dozens of hiring committees for the college during her time there and really knows what makes candidates stand out. Future workshops in the spring semester will help candidates with delivery skills for interviewing, but this session is all about doing your homework. And as a former Mount SAC student myself it was pretty fun to see all the teachers in the room realizing just how much homework they had ahead of them to properly prepare for their potential interviews. Here's Liesel.

Liesel: Hi everyone. So my section is talking about preparing for the interview. What I would like to focus on today is preparing for the content of the job interview to figure out what the questions will likely be and how you can prepare starting even now, so that if you are fortunate enough to get an interview you're really ready to go in there. Often you'll get the call and you don't have a lot of time between when you get the call and when that interview is scheduled, so it helps to start now in thinking about what that interview might entail.

Liesel: You know get into the mindset of the person who's interviewing you. Where are the basics? What are they really looking for? What do committees really want to know when they bring you in for an interview? So one thing I want to know is I want to know that you can do the job. So if you've done the job already, if you're already an adjunct faculty member teaching these courses that's a good thing to know, but if not I need to know that you can do it. That you won't be a problem. You're not gonna be a time suck, drama queen, complainer, excuse-maker, slacker, or clueless, or those kinds of things. That's honestly. I'm literally thinking, "Ugh. Am I as a department chair going to be spending a lot of time with this person?" Either handholding or dealing with their conflict with their office mate? So I've got my tentacles up for that.

Liesel: You know what the job is. I've definitely interviewed people who don't get what the job is. They don't know. They think they're applying for a university job and they're like, "Well I'll probably teach one course, and I like to spend a lot of my time in Florence looking at art." And I'm like, hmm, okay. Or they'll keep calling us the university. Or they won't even have looked at our website. They won't know what courses we teach. So they'll talk about teaching courses that they want to teach that aren't in our catalog. So they don't know what the job is. That's a huge problem.

Liesel: I want to know that you have an internal drive to be outstanding. These are very independent jobs ultimately. We don't have a lot of tactics, especially when someone has tenure, to light a fire under them. So we're looking for evidence that you have in the past and continue to have an internal monitoring drive over your job performance, that you want to learn, that you want to improve, so that we're not going to have to be chasing after you continually throughout your career, going, "Hey would you try this or do this or adapt to this change in the world?" That that's something that you were already like.

Liesel: We want to see passion for your field, for teaching, and for students. All three have to come through. If you only dig students but you don't really seem to be that into your job, you're more into all of these other things that show up on your resume that you spend your time on. Or you love your field but you don't seem to talk a lot about the classroom. You love your field, but I don't really see that you're a teacher at heart. And especially students ... So we want to hear students in your answers. And you need to be thinking about how students play into all of your answers. We are a student-centered organization. Students come first, and our faculty, especially at this college, feel that way. So we want to know that you're constantly going to be bringing up students in your conversations about how we want to do things, how we want to do things better in shared-governance, in curriculum, all of these places. Students need to be in the conversation.

Liesel: Then finally that you're exciting to listen to and have good energy. In a job interview it's sometimes the first glimpse we have of what you'll be like in the classroom. And if you're boring, if you put us to sleep, especially after we're sitting for eight straight hours sometimes in a conference room and the energy is low, the tacit idea in our head is this would put students to sleep. So you've got to bring the energy. Even if you walk in and the room is ... They look like they've been in interviews for eight straight hours, you've got to set the energy level. So we want to know you are interesting to listen to. You tell good stories. We want somebody that I would want to take their class, even though it's a job interview. So you've got to figure that out. You've got to figure out how to put the content and the energy into your interview that still makes you seem like a good teacher even though it's not a teaching demo.

Liesel: So step one. Preparing for your interview is research and engage, just some basics. If you haven't done some of these things, do them. The catalog is really critical. Dig in there, see what courses are in the catalog. Sometimes we're not offering them. Sometimes we're not offering them because we don't have anybody qualified to teach it or who wants to teach it. Reading any publications from your department faculty. Are they publishing? Are they writing? Are there things you could be aware of? What are they doing? Are they doing activities on campus? What kinds of things are they involved in? Do a little stalking of the department members who are likely to be on the committee.

Liesel: Reading the department curriculum. Talking to people about what is important for this department and discipline right now. Before the position closes it's a good time to have conversations with people. What are your priorities? What are you interested in? You can talk to students. And one group of people that sometimes people forget to talk to are classified employees. Administrators. So not just managers but department, division, secretaries, lab staff. The professionals who keep the trains running and do a variety of jobs. People who work in equity programs, student services. So there's individuals who are not faculty, but they're important sources of resource for you. And they can give you information about what's happening in departments and divisions. So if you have relationships ... Sometimes as adjunct faculty you're more apt to talk to a division admin. So go and say, "Hey I'm applying for this job. What do you think is important?" Use that relationship you have with the division admin who you normally maybe call in sick to or have sign a piece of paper for you. They might have some insights or ideas.

Liesel: And then it's time to paper prep for the interview. I think you should think about it like you're a committee member and start by making a list of what they're going to ask you. I think you can decode a lot of the likely questions or question areas on your own. I just highly recommend writing your own questions and then prepping for how you will answer them. The way you'll be asked varies a little, but the type of questions is really all there in front of you if you look for it.

Liesel: You're going to have an icebreaker question, and I'm gonna talk to you about that specifically in just a minute. It will be some kind of opening softball and it is your best opportunity to get information into the interview that you want. There will be an equity or diversity question or two. There may be more. But by policy of the college you will be asked a question in this area.

Liesel: You're going to be asked about getting along with others. That's another area you'll definitely be asked about. Handling student discipline issues or conflicts will be a source of question. Ensuring students are successful in your classes and all the required and desired qualification areas from the brochure, and you'll be asked why you want to work here.

Liesel: So if you take the job brochure and you look at those required and desired qualifications, just take each of those bullets, assume that will be an interview question. That's usually how committees start. So they have an icebreaker, they have certain questions they like to ask you about getting along with people, and then to fill it out they just start writing a question for each bullet in the brochure. And then they have about 15 of them and they go, okay, let's get rid of some of these. But that's where they start.

Liesel: And we'll never know which ones they get rid of so you might as well prepare for all of those. They should give you about 15 to 17 questions that you're going to prepare for if you do this list plus the brochure. So if you have your particular job brochure, I'm going to steal this one if I can for Professor of Art. So, preferred qualification. Experience teaching students from under represented populations. They'll probably just ask you, specifically tell us about a time when you have worked with some underserved population of students. They might ask you about specific strategies you've utilized to help those populations.

Liesel: Okay, how about this one. Professional illustration experience. How about something like, you have experience as a professional illustrator, how do you help your students become professional illustrators? How can you use your experience to help our students become professional illustrators? Add the word students to any of these and suddenly you've got a really good question. And if they don't ask you, if they just they tell me about your personal experience, you can still put students in your answer, right? Because that's a better question. Maybe they didn't ask it of you, but if you can tell us about your experience and then answer it with students in it you're going to really nail that question. So put the words students in almost everything here and you're going to strengthen the kind of question you're being asked. And when they get to that question answer the question that they should've asked you about students.

Liesel: Okay and then also just the major duties and responsibilities. I mean these are pretty straightforward. When it says develop industry partnerships that lead to professional opportunities for students. How would you develop industry partnerships, right? Just turn them into questions. When it says collaborate effectively with other faculty. That's gonna be the question that has to do with, tell us about a time when you weren't effective in collaborating with other faculty, or you've had a difficulty with another faculty member. So a question for every bulleted item on there and these other areas.

Liesel: There could also be off-the-wall questions. Curiously I just got a call from my dean while we were out there from years ago. He retired about 10 years ago, but I still chat with him. He hired me in '97 and he loved wacky questions. So when he was on the committee it was his thing, this was Steve [inaudible 00:10:53], he always had to have an off-the-wall question, because he would get bored. He was in this huge division. He had to hire so many people, and I seriously think he just wanted to get his jollies through the process. But they were also revealing and fun, and so sometimes you can get a funny question. His was always what are the last three books you read?

Liesel: And so as much as you prepare all I'll say is it's still a process, and they can still ask you questions if they think they're relevant. And if that speaks to something in the qualifications ... He would always find some way to tie it to that application somehow. It's a good question. And it was fun and it was revealing and it broke people down, and it let us have some fun learning about the applicant. There would always be somebody going, "I have kids. They all have bears in them." You know? Or something like that. Or someone else would say, "You know, Harry Potter. And Harry Potter and Harry Potter." And people would try to be very smart and they would list textbooks. It was always very interesting. I don't know if it made a big difference, but it was just kind of fun. And just know that those could show up, and I don't think they're really meant to throw you, but sometimes they're meant to bring a little bit of personality and levity in the process.

Liesel: So here's one of my fun ones. I think that icebreaker question we should do a little work on it. We're actually gonna, if you could handle it, do a little partner work here. See if we can break down how to answer this question. Because everyone will be asked an opening question of some kind. And to me it's a freebie. It's often a freebie. Sometimes committees are right down to business, and their first question is like, how do you teach about the explosion of the atom? And you're right into it. But often there's an icebreaker. I can't promise you an icebreaker, but I'd say most of the time there is.

Liesel: So how do you capitalize on the fact that it's right off the bat. Can you be undeniable right now? You have control over this. You kind of know what's going to happen. And yet I see a lot of people kind of flounder through this icebreaker question. "Tell us a little bit about yourself," right? You're like, "Gosh I've got a lot of years. What do I choose?" But we can decide right now. And so I have a little formula, and it won't work for everybody, but I'm gonna show it to you.

Liesel: Firs you and ideally you as an educator in one great line. So if you have some scratch paper in front of you, we'll do this one alone. You or you as an educator in one great line. Mine might be, "I've been teaching for 22 years. I love working with students, I like to set the bar really high and use all my effort to try and help students get over that bar." That might be my first line for who I am as an educator. That's just me in a nutshell. There could be a lot of other ways to put me in a nutshell, but this particular moment that's what I came up with. Can you come up with you in one great line? Who might be willing to share out what they've got?

Speaker 4: I listen to the students, care about what they have to say, enjoy the responses that I've never heard of before or even thought of before, and I'm constantly adapting and trying new texts, and I love to learn.

Liesel: That's great. I like it. I think it's helpful if you come up with some kind of a noun to describe. I'm a committed teacher, a many-year teacher, I'm a professional and a teacher. So just something to ground us. I like that, and maybe save some of it for later. It's a little long. But I like that a lot. It was sincere.

Liesel: Yes? This is Christian. He's a former Mount SAC student. I made him come today. He just graduated with his masters from UCLA.

Christian: My name is Christian Green. I am more than an educator, I'm an advocate, counselor, mentor, and professor to and for my students.

Liesel: I like that. That's pretty good. I get it. I get who you are. Here's another one.

Speaker 6: The love that I have for my student help me to go through a very tough time in my life last year.

Liesel: Well that's interesting. I might save that story for later though. Because it's like, what? We're going deep already. But you could tease it. You could say, "I'm an educator who's own life has been tremendously impacted by being a teacher." Keep it kind of vague. I like that.

Liesel: There's something really assured about a person who can say that in one line. I see people say all the time say, "Well I ... Let's see, I was born in Mississippi." Right? And in the amount of time it just took me to do that you could have conveyed enough information that I'd probably want to hire some of you. Just off of that. I'm in. I want to know more, you have a sense of purpose, you've answered so many of those questions already. That you know who you are, you have passion. I mean this is already starting to come through.

Liesel: Alright let's just share it with somebody who's next to you. So would you find somebody next to you and try your line out?

Sacremento: My name is Sacramento. I'm both a professional and a educator. Recently I just started as adjunct faculty member here at Mount SAC. I began my career, well I began my story actually in an introduction to sociology class at Compton College. This particular professor, the way he demonstrated passion for the teaching really motivated me to change my major and pursue this field. Whenever I'm in the classroom I always focus that student teaching is transformative, so I try to bring that to the field.

Speaker 8: So from my understanding this is the icebreaking questions, right? Introductions.

Sacremento: So tell me a little bit about yourself.

Speaker 8: I'm applying for this teaching job. Essentially I remember when I was in at UCR my chemistry professor William [Okumura, he once told me that if you want to learn something more teach it. So, and that's always stick with me, and I believe teaching is also learning for me, and that's why I love and enjoy doing it. And not only I teach the students, they also teach me a lot of things. And that's why I feel like doing it for the rest of my life. Mount SAC is great because Mount SAC is all about student learning outcome.

Sacremento: That was actually really good. You make me want to know more.

Liesel: So how are you going to connect it to Mount SAC or the institution where you're applying? For some people it's super easy. How many people went to Mount SAC in this room? Okay, they love that. So being a Mount SAC student is a great thing to bring up at this point. How many people currently teach here? That's also great, but you're starting to see that other people have these things in common with you that doesn't always make you a distinct candidate. Maybe it was a particular faculty member here.

Liesel: What if you have no experience at the institution? How can you tether it in? What kind of things do you think you can say to explain why you're at that institution? "Well I read all your courses, and I was so inspired at the design of the curriculum here and the way in which you walk students through this process. It really made me excited to teach here." Oh, you read the catalog. Okay, that's really cool. Or maybe you've had some other experience here. Maybe you've ... Some people, like, "I came here for the Mount SAC relays one time with my family, and I was so impressed with this campus and I've always followed Mount SAC in the news since then. And I live in the district." I think just showing that you really aren't just applying, throwing things at the wall, but there's some thought process that's connecting you cognitively to the experience of being on this campus.

Liesel: And then finally after you've done that you need to say something to let them know you're done, that just says I'm so excited to talk with you today. I'm excited to answer your questions and learn more about this position.

Liesel: So let's talk about the equity and diversity questions. These are often make-or-break questions at Mount SAC. This is a really important topic for us at the campus. We had a campus equity plan before it was funded by the state. Years ago. We are very aware that we have certain populations of students who, for whatever reason, when they arrive here we can't make them succeed at the same level as other students. Some of them are ethnic groups, some of them have to do with other things like their economic conditions, their status with regard to citizenship, their gender or sexual identity, even veteran status, foster youth, and others. Various programs have different equity gaps. Some don't have gaps for certain populations and others do, and as an institution we have them.

Liesel: I strongly recommend that you get your hand on the Mount SAC campus equity plan and give it a read. It's online. You can just search "equity plan" and read about it. It outlines what are the specific gaps that we have? Who are our demographics and which populations are behind that we're focusing on? That's really important to know, because part of what every faculty members is tasked with here, and a special focus for our new faculty, is understanding your role in closing those equity gaps. We want every student to succeed at the same level, and then we want to bring the whole bar up higher and get more students to succeed. But we want to make sure that we're not leaving groups of students behind when we do that.

Liesel: Diversity and equity are not exactly the same thing. Equity does not just mean equality. It specifically refers to this initiative, the equity of student success. So that's where we can get kind of hung up in the interview process. If you extrapolate equity and you take that to mean treating people fairly, it specifically refers to, in the case of a question you might get, the initiative to have students all achieve at the same level. So equity, by definition, would be all students are achieving at the same level. So they're all ... 72% of all of our students are completing this course. Not 80% of this group, 22% of this group, 60% of this group, right? That everybody is roughly equally achieving this regardless of their identity characteristics.

Liesel: Diversity is very broad. So we don't have an initiative for diversity. Diversity refers to everything from the breadth of the people that you might have, a respect for diversity has to do with cultural competence and understanding. Respect for difference, how we treat one another. So if you have a question about diversity and cultural competence, those have to do with how you treat your colleagues, your peers, the kind of materials you use in your class, your own sophistication with regard to other cultures, how you adapt your communication style, how you show sensitivity to cultural differences among our students. Equity is actually a data point that we are trying to strive towards.

Liesel: Once you read the equity plan and you literally see these are the different groups that we study at the state of California, so foster youth, and veterans, but even broken down in some ways that you might expect like minority males are a cohort in a group. Asian Pacific Islanders. So we have specific populations who tend to, not always, some institutions, those groups might thrive, but in other institutions they struggle. So each institution has its own profile.

Liesel: Diversity and the work we consider to help us become a more diversely and culturally competent institution help us achieve equity, but they're not the same thing. If you want a job here read the mount SAC equity plan. It's worth it. It is really the core of the work that we do. It's our mission here as a community college. We are charged with trying to get every student to achieve their academic success here.

Liesel: Now you gotta link it to you. So bring up any specific training, projects, or classroom strategies that show your competency, rather than just telling us your feelings or philosophy about it. "I also am interested in this and here's what I do." There is pedagogy that is associated with equity. There are strategies such as referring people to student programs and services that are related to equity. So there are things you can do in and outside of the classroom as faculty. Think about some concrete examples that show I get the equity plan and I fit into that, but be willing to say you want to grow is a great ending too.

Liesel: Next thing I would suggest that you prepare for all those questions that you've written, is you need to do an inventory of stories and experiences. One of the big things that people fail to do in interviews is to speak concretely. So they like to tell you things like, "Oh I like to do this, and I've been really transformed by my students and I feel this way." Don't tell us. Show us. It's the creative writing principal. That I don't want to hear that that was the best day of my life. I want you to tell me a story that makes me go that's probably the best day of that person's life. I want to feel what you felt. So don't just say I'm a people person. I want to hear a story and at the end of it I go, wow, that's a people person.

Liesel: So you need to have some concrete stories. So for instance, what's a time you failed at life and then improved? This is always something that will fit into a job interview somewhere, right? There will be some kind of question about how you deal with failure. How you deal with a challenging situation. So if you have a great story or two about a time you failed and improved, you're gonna be more prepared for this interview when you get that kind of question.

Liesel: One of the coolest things for me in an interview is when I'm listening to a candidate and they're talking and suddenly I can see them in the classroom. It's a weird moment, but they're talking in such a way and they say, "I was in the classroom and this student walked up to me and she handed me a paper and it was covered with red jelly. It was sticky and I didn't want to accept the paper." And I remember this, because I remember them telling the story and I could see it happening. I saw the desk and I saw the teacher. It's very powerful when we can create that image of you in a classroom with students. You working. It's tangible now. I'm going to remember that. When I'm sitting at the end of the day, I'll be like, "Remember the red jelly guy? Remember the red jelly guy? I liked that story. I remember that person."

Liesel: So these visual stories ... If you can create and paint a picture of you in a scenario where you're working, especially if you're working really hard. "I was running across campus, trying to get my grades in before the deadline." Right? That's a great image. It tells me so much about you as I'm seeing you hustling to try and make a deadline. That tells me so much about you. So what are your stories? If you have any special qualities that distinguish you, you think, from the pool, remember this is a competitive process. These are competitive interviews, meaning you can't just be great. You have to set yourself apart. So if you have experience as a veteran, if you have done more than most adjunct faculty have by being on a scholarship committee or helping write curriculum, being involved with student learning outcomes, if you speak a lot of languages, if you've lived in other countries, if you've done interesting research that could be relevant or have other skills like you know, you could be useful in professional development or you really are strong in the area of sustainability and notice we have a campus sustainability plan. Make sure that gets into the interview somehow. Don't leave the room without dropping that. Right? Don't leave the room without the competitive edge that you have somehow on the table.

Liesel: You will get the questions 30 minutes before the interview. So they'll actually hand you a printed list of them when you come in for the interview and they'll let you review them. And so that's a time that you can take, what are those things I definitely need to figure out? That's where I'm gonna mention that. I'm gonna get this in here. This is where I do this. And put down your stories, right? You only have 30 minutes. It's not enough time to figure it all out, but if you know what your stories are, you've got a general plan, you can bullet it all in and you can bring that sheet with you and you can set it down, and it will be there with you for the interview.

Liesel: Hey. Thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments. So please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcasts. iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor, we're there. And we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.