**CALL TO ACTION: Invitation for Participation in Societal Education for Equity Challenge Episode 126**

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How are you translating what you've learned in that sessions on bias, for example? How is that transitioning to what you're doing in the classroom or what you're doing with college policy?

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Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell. And you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

... and I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it...

Speaker 5:

She is a sociology major, and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona...

Speaker 5:

... psychology major, English major...

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 6:

... really liked the time that you spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter...

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 7:

... to think of the natural environment around us as a library...

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, learning assistance faculty and professional learning academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. This is Christina Barsi, and we invite you to a call to action, to participate in the Societal Education for Equity Challenge, also known as the SEEC Initiative. We have Dr. Bill Scroggins, the President and CEO of Mt. SAC, to talk with us today about what this initiative is, why it's so important and how you can engage. Here's our host Sun Ezzell and Dr. Scroggins.

Sun Ezzell:

Welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. This is your co-host, Sun Ezzell, and today I'm so pleased to welcome a very special guest to the podcast, President Scroggins, welcome to the podcast.

Bill Scroggins:

Thank you, Sun.

Sun Ezzell:

So today you're joining us to share a little bit about the SEEC Initiative, and I was wondering, to start, could you tell a little bit about what SEEC is and how this work developed on campus?

Bill Scroggins:

Sure. So the Social Equity through Education Challenge, SEEC, evolved from our work on diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice and anti-racism, and it's a student-focused initiative in which we're looking at ways for minoritized student populations to have support that goes beyond the paradigm that we often hear that students need to be college-ready.

Bill Scroggins:

Well, actually it should be the reverse. The college should be ready for the students who are coming to us. So the question is, do we support students of color or minorities populations as they come to us and help them achieve their full educational potential?

Bill Scroggins:

And my concern was that there was a historical institutional bias, the way education approached "non-traditional students" as they were sometimes called, in that the expectation was that students would adapt themselves, their learning and their learning support systems, to the way colleges operated. And that, of course, that favored students of the majority population, the dominant culture, and it created institutional barriers to students who did not have those support systems and culture associated with the dominant culture.

Bill Scroggins:

So, how do we do that? How do we work with students who come to us, particularly from black and African-American communities and Latinx communities, who may have experienced, already in their educational experiences, institutional bias associated with their education? And it can be very pervasive, and to some, these Northern European colonized approaches seem to be the value system upon which America was built, but it really isn't.

Bill Scroggins:

If you consider things like the emphasis on deductive and inductive logic instead of more understanding affective behavioral motivations, that certainly is something that can create cultural bias.

Bill Scroggins:

If it pushes for assimilation, and by that, I mean, individuals have to transform their cultural values, behaviors, and norms to fit the dominant culture, then of course, there's going to be a realization of the long experiences that minoritized populations have been with negative stereotyping, so black and African-American students and Latinx students already come to us experiencing that deficit, thinking that they're not college-ready, that they have been told, "Well, you're not college material. You can't succeed. That's not for you. Why don't you choose this path for your life?"

Bill Scroggins:

So we really needed a program that would say, "Come to Mt. SAC and there is a group of those who have life experiences like you. Come join us in a safe environment where you'll have peer mentorship and leadership mentors who will value what you have to bring and help you realize your full potential", and at the same time provide the ability of advocacy for the campus as a whole to recognize transformation, to put aside these historical institutional biases associated with higher education, and transform the college campus to deal with educating individuals for their full potential so that in the classroom, you're considering multiple ways of delivering instructional material, you're considering interacting with students to understand their needs and referring them to that kind of help.

Bill Scroggins:

In addition, the two centers that will be the most visible sign of the SEEC Initiative, the Black and African-American Support Center and the El Centro, the Latinx center, will have that feeling of welcoming new students and supporting students to achieve their potential, it'll have an advocacy component and a campus celebration component so that when there are opportunities that we're not taking advantage of now, so for example, Martin Luther King holiday, the new Juneteenth holiday, Black and African-American Month, that's not just dates on the calendar, it's actually a campus-wide celebration and a change in the culture to value diversity, equity and inclusion as a campus, as a whole.

Bill Scroggins:

In addition, there's a leadership component where students of minority populations can learn how to lead and be the future determiners of what the cultural and institutional values are not only of higher education, but society in general, and also advocate on issues where the population needs education on cultural issues. For example, restorative justice, rather than a punishment model for achieving justice.

Bill Scroggins:

So that's the origin of the SEEC Initiative. It's... are challenges. Those right now are challenges, they're not achieved yet. The mechanism is to create these centers with directors and staff and support built around existing enclaves of the work that's going on without this level of institutional support right now.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. You said something about the messages that students receive that they don't belong, or that perhaps college isn't for them, and I think that that shift to thinking about how we welcome students as whole people and build community and belonging is such a powerful part of the work that we're doing on campus and such a powerful part of what education can do for a society. Could you talk a little bit about some of the other work that's also happening on campus? How SEEC works together with DAISA initiatives or Title V Grant or professional development?

Bill Scroggins:

Absolutely. So the institution, for some time, has been working on developmental work because in order to really make a transformation on campus, there has to be effective engagement.

Bill Scroggins:

So how do you get people to really recognize that there is a value to an educational component that integrates diversity, equity and inclusion in particular into our way of providing educational support? So we took an approach through professional development that I characterize as a disruptive intervention.

Bill Scroggins:

We had an opportunity, particularly with faculty and classified staff who have whole days of professional development each year, and I'll focus on the Faculty Flex Day as an example, but we did this in other group settings as well for classified and for managers, but I'll just focus on that piece, for example.

Bill Scroggins:

So on Fall Flex Day, we had a series of three experiences, I'm going to call them experiences, you can think of them as speakers, but really they were more than that. And the message there was that this isn't about just the views of a minority group, this is about an entire cultural view of how we work together as a society. So we had, for example, students doing literature dramatic readings. I don't know if you were in that presentation where I had a group of black students reading from publications, many of historic content, and the message carried away is something that I know stayed with many people, I know it certainly stayed with me, of talking about the 13th Amendment in terms of the language in the 13 Amendment that PR permitted indentured servitude, and how that played out in terms of the incarceration of particularly black males as a continuance of slavery. That was very powerful to me, and there were other elements of that.

Bill Scroggins:

So that type of very impactful messaging by authentic speakers, many people heard that message, not just me as a privileged white male. You may remember the speaker we had of this woman who was a lawyer and a neurology professor who talked about how we program children, from the beginning of life, to have stereotypical associations. There were a couple of things that she did during that presentation. You may remember, if you saw it, she showed comparative slides and then asked us to clap about what we saw as positive ideation.

Bill Scroggins:

You could hear the institutional structural bias in the room by where the clapping occurred. And you didn't think about it. You reacted from a visceral, almost an intensive emotional reaction to those pictures, and it showed that the bias is deep inside of us. It's not something that is conscious, but it's something that influence our perceptions and our behaviors. She also showed how it starts at early ages, like showed some of the cartoon movies with characters who were negative characters speaking with accents, those sorts of things.

Bill Scroggins:

And there was many more of these that we did. So that's where we started with professional development, disruptive kind of behavior. And then we started to build positive messaging that of course led to several positive things that we did with showing how we could help faculty staff and managers transition away from that unconscious bias. And it culminated in our writing the current Title V Hispanic Serving Institution Grant.

Bill Scroggins:

What we learned is that proceeding to professional development was important, but not without a continuation and a call for action. So what's happening now that we're approaching the end of the second year of the Title V Grant is we're beginning to follow up with faculty and others, because that training isn't open just to faculty, it's open to many, "How are you translating what you've learned in that sessions on bias, for example, how is that transitioning to what you're doing in the classroom or what you're doing with college policy?"

Bill Scroggins:

So I believe that the SEEC Initiative fits well into that transition from disruptive, grabbing people's concepts of "this is really important work" to the positive professional development to this call for action of actually changing things on campus.

Bill Scroggins:

I'll mention one other connection. We're working with the Faculty Association about faculty evaluation, and while we're not done with that yet, I've had a chance to be in several sessions working on faculty evaluation, and there is very good buy-in to having a role in faculty evaluation associated with diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and anti-racism. And while there's a lot of developmental work to do, perhaps a pilot, a lot more training, I think that's very much a breakthrough to consider that.

Bill Scroggins:

As part of that, we've already infused that process of including those items in evaluation for management evaluation, and this is our first cycle of management evaluation with this rubric associated with diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and anti-racism, and it's a 360 evaluation model so I'm seeing the first feedbacks of that.

Bill Scroggins:

So there's still a lot of work to do, particularly in professional development and transitioning from professional development to action. There's still a lot of work to do on policy with the Academic Senate. We have a work group on faculty hiring that's going to improve removing some of the institutional bias on our overall hiring processes. The Campus Equity and Diversity Committee has already rewritten, done a first rewrite of administrative procedures on hiring. So there's a range of campus initiatives that SEEC will connect students to and influence the campus culture on interacting with students.

Sun Ezzell:

It's really wonderful to hear you share the work that we've done so far in the past couple of years, that really makes me think about how one of the really exciting parts of being in education is that we also, as educators, have the opportunity to learn and grow and think about how we can better serve the students that we're working with and our role in our communities and in our society. So thank you for sharing that. Is there anything else that we should be keeping an eye out for in the coming months as the work continues on campus?

Bill Scroggins:

So I think that there will be more opportunities to participate in professional development, the Title V Grant is doing another round of offerings of CORA trainings, and I would encourage those who hadn't participated, you don't have to be a faculty member to participate in the CORA training.

Bill Scroggins:

And as you see, these evaluation pilots, it's going to depend on those who are asked to respond in those 360 evaluations of managers, and it's going to take those who are on the peer evaluation teams to invest in making these processes as effective as possible. So there are opportunities for all of us to participate in both improving our own role in reducing institutional bias and in helping us develop institutional practices that will be broadly implemented, so both a personal agenda and a campus agenda to which I would have a call for action for everyone to take that work seriously.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. And I think the opportunity to work together with our colleagues and with our students is part of what makes the work so exciting and hopefully very effective as well. Are there any resources that you would recommend for folks who want to learn more?

Bill Scroggins:

So I think that coming up this fall, we'll have the Classified Professional Development Day, which will be devoted to this work. It'll be in-person this year. There'll also be Faculty Flex Day, which will be online this fall, that I would encourage people to do. And as I mentioned, the CORA training announcements for additional CORA training will be available. And then, again, these pilots for both faculty and manager evaluation and for hiring practices will be working their way through our shared governance processes. So again, shared governance works if it's not just your representative officials who are involved, but that you talk to those who are on the Academic Senate, on the Management Steering Committee, on the Faculty Association representatives, the voice of all of us to be heard no matter how you feel on this issue, and I know there are a lot of opinions, because we want this to be a process that is effective for everyone. So involvement is my call to all of you who may be listening on this discussion today.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. And I just want to ask a really open question. Is there anything else that you'd like to share that we haven't had a chance to touch on?

Bill Scroggins:

So I would like to say that this work that Mt. SAC is doing is through a process of positive affirmation of what we all have to contribute to our mission. You hear a lot in the public media about politicization and buzzwords that have to do with what's right and what's wrong. That's not what this issue is about. This is not, for us, something that we want to push into the political sphere. We want to focus on the educational environment, and while politics is something that we all have to keep in mind, because it influences the policies and resources we have to work with as a higher education institution, I think that if we keep students as the focus of this work, that that will help us avoid some of the radicalization of this issue in society as a whole.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much for your leadership on this, Dr. Scroggins. It's such an honor to have you join us today on the podcast.

Bill Scroggins:

You're welcome.

Christina Barsi:

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever you like to get your podcasts, so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen. Once you subscribe, we'd love to hear what you think by leaving us a review, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.