**Introducing the NEW Academic Senate President Roger Willis! Episode 168**

00:00:00 **Roger**

One thing that I have noticed in my role is that sometimes, I really have to remove myself as Roger. Roger might have an opinion on something. But as Senate President, sometimes that opinion is not as important as what the faculty at large have voted on and have decided.

00:00:14 **Roger**

And that's what I need to represent that faculty voice when I go into those meetings with those managers on campus to try to say, "Hey, this is the reasoning why the faculty think this is the best option for faculty and students, for our curriculum, for our degrees that we share responsibility for, and act as that advocate." And I hope that I'll be as effective for the faculty as possible.

00:00:40 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:41 **Sun**

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

00:00:45 **Christina**

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.

00:01:02 **Sun**

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

00:01:06 **Speaker 1**

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

00:01:11 **Speaker 2**

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

00:01:17 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:01:20 **Speaker 1**

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

00:01:27 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:29 **Speaker 1**

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

00:01:32 **Christina**

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.

00:01:44 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:49 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:56 **Sun**

Welcome back. This is your host, Sun Ezzell. In this week's episode, podcast host Tania Anders talks with communications professor and new Academic Senate President, Roger Willis, about the work of the Academic Senate, his vision as he steps into his new role on campus, and the critical importance of faculty participation in shared governance. Enjoy!

00:02:22 **Tania**

Welcome to the Mt. San Antonio College Podcast. My name is Tania Anders, your host for today's episode. My guest is Roger Willis, Professor of Communication and Academic Senate President. I'm excited to talk to him about his role in the Senate, and his vision for the work of the Senate during his leadership. Hi Roger, thanks for being here.

00:02:41 **Roger**

Hi Tania. Thanks for having me. Super excited.

00:02:44 **Tania**

Of course. Yeah, and of course, we work together closely since I'm currently also serving as Academic Senate Vice President, but I'm excited to learn more about you and to share that with our listeners. So, could you please be so kind and introduce yourself to get us started?

00:03:01 **Roger**

Sure thing. I am Roger Willis, like you said. I've been at Mt. SAC for about a decade now. I originally was attracted to the campus because I come from a background of competitive speech and debate or forensics as we call it in the community. And Mt. SAC was at the time one of the best community college speech and debate teams in the country. We are now, officially, the best community college speech and debate team.

00:03:26 **Speaker 1**

Woo-woo!

00:03:27 **Roger**

If we count up our national titles. But yes, I applied and was offered a position as a director of the speech and debate team in 2012, 2013 and coached for about eight years straight, and then decided to do a little bit of a rotation out to do some campus service. So, do some stuff outside of my department, get to know campus a little bit better, get to know campus leadership a little bit better.

00:03:54 **Roger**

I didn't realize at the time, that I would be preparing to be Academic Senate President, but that is certainly, where the path led me and I guess, all of the stars aligned and it was meant to be that I was supposed to step into this role.

00:04:10 **Roger**

I don't know that I felt that I was fully qualified or ready, but I had people there that were ready to train and able to get me ready to take on the role. So, yeah, I was excited to transition into a new position at Mt. SAC.

00:04:24 **Tania**

Wonderful, I hear you. It's like we want to grow as people, always work on ourselves too. So, you started serving as the Mt. SAC Academic Senate President just a few months ago now. And so, what are you most excited about serving our campus in this role?

00:04:41 **Tania**

And maybe also, why did you decide to take on this task? I guess, you kind of hinted on that already a bit, but so what are you excited about to bring to our campus in this role?

00:04:52 **Roger**

I would say that there's a lot that I'm excited about. I have certainly, like you said, I've only been serving for a couple of months in the role and the funny thing is there's only so much that you can prepare for. There's only so much that people can tell you about this specific role, and what your job is when you step into the position as Academic Senate President.

00:05:13 **Roger**

Some of the stuff that I'm the most excited about is I like that our state organization, the Academic Senate of Community Colleges of California definitely acts as our sort of guiding body that helps direct the work that we want to bring to our campuses as an Academic Senate.

00:05:30 **Roger**

So, for people who might not be aware, the Academic Senate is primarily responsible for academic and professional matters. And that means anything from helping establish new degrees or certificate programs, or making important changes to curriculum, or helping out with professional development.

00:05:49 **Roger**

And what the ASCCC has charged us with primarily, is making sure that we are continuing our equity and diversity work in all aspects of our Senate work. So, when we're considering things like curriculum, maybe we need to examine some textbooks that we might be utilizing that aren't necessarily reflecting the identities of our students.

00:06:09 **Roger**

Maybe we show video examples for lecture content that might not necessarily have diverse individuals represented in those videos with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. So, we have really great opportunities to help reflect the identities of our students and our curriculum in the classroom.

00:06:28 **Roger**

Outside of that, there's a lot of decision-making that happens at the Senate level, and at many other levels of campus. And we're also charged with making sure that we're keeping in mind diversity and equity and inclusion, and anti-racism, and anti-ableism in all of those venues as well.

00:06:44 **Roger**

So, when we as Academic Senate are charged with writing and reviewing and revising campus policies that affect not only the students but also, faculty members as well, we want to make sure that we're keeping in mind those practices as well so that the highest number of people will have access not only to an education, but educational opportunities and career opportunities.

00:07:08 **Roger**

And I really think that's a fundamental central core of what our focus is as an Academic Senate right now, being as inclusive as possible and giving opportunities to as many people as possible. And I think that's what will guide my time as the academic president certainly.

00:07:23 **Tania**

Thank you so much for sharing that. So, it sounds to me like that that's what you also see as your like main responsibility during your time as a leader for the Academic Senate. Can you maybe elaborate also on some of the other responsibilities an Academic Senate President has in the Academic Senate, so that our listeners, for those that are faculty, maybe they can see themselves also being interested in serving in some of these areas.

00:07:52 **Roger**

Yeah, absolutely. So, we are primarily responsible as an Academic Senate for what we call the 10 plus one. Now, I won't go into what all of the 10 plus one or 11 areas are, but like I said before, it's primarily academic and professional matters.

00:08:07 **Roger**

So, sometimes there's confusion as to what the Academic Senate is responsible for versus what the Faculty Association is responsible for.

00:08:14 **Roger**

So, Faculty Association is more responsible for making sure that they take care of our workplace issues, anything that's contract-related, making sure that we have a good workplace to come to all the time.

00:08:28 **Roger**

The Academic Senate focuses a lot more on the kind of day-to-day, between the students and faculty and administrators sort of role. So, on the surface, a lot of my job as Academic President is to preside over the Academic Senate, our full senate and executive board meetings, guide the discussions about the important topics that are coming up that week.

00:08:51 **Roger**

And then I go to a host of other committee council and various meetings with campus administrators, specifically the Office of Instruction a lot, to make sure that we are working together with those constituent groups to make sure that we're making the best choices possible for the campus.

00:09:08 **Roger**

For example, a couple of things that we're working on right now; the Academic Senate President is often highly involved in working on APs or our Administrative Policies. So, maybe you're a student on campus who went to a different college before Mt. SAC, and you are highly skilled in certain types of graphic design.

00:09:31 **Roger**

Well, maybe, and I'm not saying for sure because I don't know - maybe our graphic design instructors or our department offers what we call, credit for prior learning. And you're a student who can create a really good portfolio that you could present to an employer today showing that you already have certain skills at your disposal to be able to work in graphic design.

00:09:52 **Roger**

And maybe you don't necessarily need to take a full 16-week course on the subject matter because you could take something more advanced. Well, one of the things that the Senate did is we worked on and wrote and finalized our campus policy on credit for prior learning so that students in certain disciplines could have the opportunity to sort of portfolio out or test out of maybe a prerequisite course and move into more advanced courses that meet their needs more specifically.

00:10:19 **Roger**

So, that's something that we sort of did on a curriculum classroom side. Some other things that we're currently working on, we just finished up and now, are sending it to the Faculty Association, the class size task force recommendations. We know that it's hard for faculty and teachers across the board (K-12 or college) to manage a classroom that has way too many students.

00:10:42 **Roger**

The more opportunities that professors have for one-on-one interaction with their students in the classroom, the more effective we're probably going to be, I would say, depending on the subject matter. But more one-on-one time is always going to be better. It helps us address specific needs of students in the classroom that we might not be able to address if we're doing a large lecture of 300 students.

00:11:03 **Roger**

So, one of the administrative or campus policies that we just passed was a class size cap so that our classes can't go over a certain number so that students get more one-on-one interaction with the professors, a more direct relationship there.

00:11:20 **Roger**

And I think that's really important because at the community college level, we definitely focus on being good teachers and delivering good content. And so, this policy that we passed is going to help facilitate that. Outside of running meetings and helping with administrative policies, some of the things that people don't tell you about being the Senate President (and I don't want to scare anyone away).

00:11:40 **Roger**

So, if you want to be senate president and you're listening to this, please, come on down, do it, it's a great role. Is that people just sort of assume that you know all of the things. So, I spend a large portion of my day responding to emails about anything and everything that could be going on on campus; how classrooms are scheduled. Well, that's not under the Senate purview because that's a part of departments or divisions. And so, that's the dean's job. But I can direct you to a dean because I know who they are.

00:12:10 **Roger**

People will ask me questions that are definitely under the purview of the President of the college or one of the Vice Presidents of the college. And I try as best as I can to provide information, but sometimes, my job is to guide people to the right resource so that they can get the information that they need to do their jobs.

00:12:29 **Tania**

It sounds like you have long days because I know how it is with having a lot of meetings myself. It's like five o'clock comes around and you're like, "Okay, now I can start doing all my emails for the day."

00:12:41 **Roger**

Yeah, that's definitely how it is. It's, "Oh no, my meetings went from 8:30 in the morning until 5:30 at night. Now, I have to take some time to actually do some work."

00:12:51 **Tania**

Yeah, exactly. Well, we're so lucky to have you. Have you really embraced this learning adventure that you've been on for the last couple of months, because you're right, there's just so, so much to learn about a large campus, but it's also really exciting because you get insights and you get to meet people from across campus, which I think is really fun because we have so many amazing folks on our campus and it's just really nice to get to know more of them and to collaborate with them.

00:13:21 **Tania**

You already mentioned that one of your focus areas, if not the focus area of your Academic Senate Presidency is going to be on equity work. And you gave a few examples already, maybe you can share some more. How can you as Academic Senate President facilitate equity work at Mt. SAC?

00:13:39 **Roger**

I would say the number one thing that an Academic Senate President definitely needs to do is rely on the team. I know that there are a lot of people who are more learned than I am, who are more experienced than I am, who are more qualified than I am to guide a lot of the equity work that we're doing on campus.

00:13:58 **Roger**

For example, one of our current issues that we are, I want to say grappling with as a campus, is the idea that perhaps our moniker of being a Mountie could be problematic. And so, the way that sort of our governance process works is students who are involved on campus came to one of our committees that reports to the Senate, ultimately, our campus equity committee.

00:14:21 **Roger**

And these indigenous students said, "Hey, one of the things that we'd like to see is a bit more support and a bit more representation for our indigenous students. And some of that can include having indigenous artwork displayed around campus, having more sustainable greenery and wildlife around, and potentially, rethinking the campus mascot and moniker.

00:14:43 **Roger**

Because the moniker Mountie has a really problematic relationship with indigenous populations. So, we brought those concerns through the student equity team. I'm not actually on that committee, but that committee will eventually report up to some of our councils that I am on. And so, then I get to hear the work that both the students and the faculty are doing together to try to address some of those equity needs.

00:15:06 **Roger**

And then I can bring those to the full Senate, and we can report out what our stance is as faculty and as students to the board of trustees who make the ultimate decisions on campus. So, it really shows that one of the things that I can do is help facilitate the needs of the students who might be in these minoritized populations. And we can bring those concerns all the way up to the board of trustees.

00:15:26 **Roger**

Now, on Senate right now, I know that one of the things that we're going to be working on is a resolution that sort of determines what our stance on the campus moniker of Mountie is, and how student populations find it problematic. And so, we can send that information up.

00:15:41 **Roger**

Some of the other really important work that's happening right now through one of our Senate councils or our student preparation equity and achievement councils, is our equity plan, our student equity plan. And what we do there is we use disaggregated data to determine what equity gaps students are experiencing.

00:15:59 **Roger**

For example, maybe I'm an Asian Pacific Islander student - I'm not ... this is a podcast, so for those of you who can't tell this is a white guy talking. But maybe hypothetically, I'm an Asian Pacific Islander student, and maybe the data shows that - and again, this is not accurate, I'm just giving it for example.

00:16:18 **Roger**

Maybe the data shows that Asian Pacific Islander students are not passing college or transfer-level mathematics courses in their first year at Mt. SAC at the same rate as other student populations. Well, the student equity group determines what resources can we create or can we highlight for those student populations so that we can make sure that they achieve the same level of success as other student populations in that first year that they might not know that they have access to.

00:16:49 **Roger**

And then we can close those equity gaps so that those Asian Pacific Islander students in my hypothetical, have an equitable chance at completing at the same rate as other student populations. And so, those committees really work through the Academic Senate to make sure that we're addressing those needs of those students. And I think that's really the most important thing that we do.

00:17:08 **Tania**

So, can you maybe explain to our listeners, once the Academic Senate passes some resolutions or the work, like you said, that comes through committees, where does that go then after the Senate? Because the Senate can't make decisions on its own on our campus. Or are there some that the Senate is completely relied upon? Or what is the pathway then of some of this very important work that happens in our committees and councils?

00:17:39 **Roger**

That's a really important question and if somebody has the answer for me, I'd really love to know. It's a little bit more complicated. One thing that you're pointing out right now, Tania, is that we do operate under what we call shared governance or participatory governance.

00:17:52 **Roger**

So, the Senate represent the faculty voice. We represent what the faculty think is right. And sometimes the student voice, obviously, we have our associated students who also have their own particular resolutions and processes, but we want to make sure that we work directly with those students so that we're representing their needs as much as possible.

00:18:10 **Roger**

But oftentimes, we need to come together with campus administrators like the president of the college or the vice presidents of the college, sometimes our direct managers or our deans - to cooperatively make decisions based on what we all feel is best for the campus.

00:18:29 **Roger**

Are we always going to agree? No. One thing that I have noticed in my role is that sometimes, I really have to remove myself as Roger. Roger might have an opinion on something, but as Senate President, sometimes that opinion is not as important as what the faculty at large have voted on and have decided.

00:18:45 **Roger**

And that's what I need to represent, that faculty voice, when I go into those meetings with those managers on campus to try to say, "Hey, this is the reasoning why the faculty think this is the best option for faculty and students, for our curriculum, for our degrees, for the areas that we mutually agree upon and that we share responsibility for, and act as that advocate. And I hope that I'll be as effective for the faculty as possible."

00:19:13 **Roger**

But yeah, there are a lot of constituent groups and sometimes, it's not management. Sometimes, we have to figure out, okay, who needs to update this advertisement so that students know where the writing center is so that they can get tutoring or who needs to update the catalog so that if a student is looking for information on testing, this is where they go. Or what services are available, how do we advertise that stuff?

00:19:41 **Roger**

And so, sometimes it can be a little bit of a guessing game, but we figure it out, we contact enough people until we get the answer.

00:19:48 **Tania**

I think it comes in really handy that you're a communication professor because like you said, it's a team effort and sometimes, it's about asking around and relying on the expertise of others. I think it would be very arrogant to say that one knows everything. And so, you're absolutely right about that.

00:20:06 **Tania**

I think it's a sign of good leadership to say, "I don't know this right now, but I'll look into it for you or I'll point you in the right direction."

00:20:13 **Tania**

Since we have so many different content experts on our campus and speaking now from the faculty side since the Academic Senate is our faculty, what would you recommend that faculty do that now see themselves as like, "Man, I really want to contribute my expertise. I'm really interested in learning more about this in this area. Or I really want to further my equity knowledge."

00:20:38 **Tania**

So, what do you recommend they do? How can they engage more with our Academic Senate?

00:20:44 **Roger**

There are a host of things that people can do, and honestly, I wish that I had taken advantage of more of these options before.

00:20:51 **Roger**

So, before I got into leadership, I was on a campus committee here or there. I did serve as my department senator and I had a little bit of experience a few years back serving on the FA as my department representative to the Faculty Association.

00:21:03 **Roger**

But honestly, there are so many ways that people can get involved. If you don't have a lot of time and your schedule is already full, you could join a committee that sounds interesting. Some committees meet once a month and they do really important work there in that hour or two hours that they're meeting. But it's not a super, super big commitment, especially if you're a committee member, not necessarily the chair of the committee.

00:21:29 **Roger**

You could get involved in one of the campus councils. They probably meet a little bit more often. The ones that report to Senate are SPCH, like we talked about before, which is all about student preparation and equity, or curriculum and instruction. If you're really interested in getting involved in the curriculum process, which is a huge part of our job as Academic Senate.

00:21:49 **Roger**

And they might meet a couple times a month and that's a good way to get involved in any kind of campus-wide committee. Maybe you're really interested in professional development, you could join the professional development council or you could get on that Flex Day planning committee that meets as needed.

00:22:05 **Roger**

So, it's not going to take up a huge time in your schedule block, but it does give you insight into campus leadership and how the shared governance process works, and how we contribute to the overall way that campus functions.

00:22:20 **Roger**

Another thing that you could do is go to a Senate meeting, they're open to the public, you can come see how we operate. One thing that Senate's doing right now that I'm really excited about is the Academic Senate Academy. And so, what that is, is on the fourth Friday of the month, we do rotating topics with campus leaders.

00:22:37 **Roger**

Like what is a day in the life of the Academic Senate co-Vice President, or what is the 10 plus one? Or how can we get more information about early alert systems to help students who might be falling behind in some classes so we can make sure that they get the services that they need to pass.

00:22:57 **Roger**

And so, each fourth Friday we cover a different topic and people can register through the pod calendar for that. And it's an hour and a half, I think, each month. And that gives you insight about campus leadership from campus leadership and it's a good drop-in, fulfill your service to the college hours and eventually, might even count for that professional growth increment.

00:23:18 **Roger**

So, if you show up, you might even eventually get paid more. So, there's lots of ways that you can get involved or just look at the pod calendar. Does something on there seem like it's really interesting? Maybe you want to brush up on some skills about teaching from the back of the classroom, which is a term that we hear a lot that we might not be super familiar with.

00:23:37 **Roger**

Well, maybe there's a pod activity that's an hour or two hours or maybe a four-hour training this month. Maybe you want to be more informed about equity and diversity work. Well, there's definitely training through the pod calendar of activities. We have a few different ones - AQ, ITEL, and lots of different individual meetings that people can go to where they can learn a little bit more about that.

00:23:58 **Roger**

And professional development as part of our charge as Academic Senate as well. So, you could spend an hour a month, you could spend lots of time if you want, you could dip your toe in the water and learn about campus leadership, and then eventually, you can jump in and be your department senate representative or be a co-chair of a big council that reports to Senate, or get really involved in professional development and get your PGI credit. There's lots of things people can do.

00:24:25 **Tania**

I'm really excited that you said that you really weren't as involved with everything that has to do with Senate because of your incredibly high obligations you had for the speech and debate team. Because I think that shows people who might be interested in stepping into some of these roles that you can do this.

00:24:47 **Tania**

Of course, it's probably a little bit easier to not just jump into the deep end of the pool and work your way up a little bit here and there, but you did that. You did a little bit here and there, but there are probably a lot of people who've done a lot more also and still are scared maybe, or intimidated by taking on the leadership role that you have taken on. So, I really applaud you for that. And you sell yourself well because I feel like you know a lot more than I do already. And you know-

00:25:18 **Roger**

It's all fine, it's smoking mirrors.

00:25:19 **Tania**

I'm sure it's not. I want to start slowly to wrap up our conversation here. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not talked about that you would like to share with our listeners?

00:25:33 **Roger**

I think that the big thing is before I really got involved in campus leadership a little bit more in depth, it was a scary thing. I think you kind of brought that up. It's like it's sort of a scary thing. You feel like you're not knowledgeable enough to be able to jump in.

00:25:49 **Roger**

And the first thing that I said when I stepped in, because the way that I really got involved in this job is I stepped in to finish out somebody else's term as co-VP when they got a different position on campus. And within the first two weeks, I was definitely overwhelmed as co-VP.

00:26:05 **Roger**

The first words that came out of my mouth in a Senate leadership meeting was, "You don't even know what you don't know. But the thing is, is that you can't know until you get involved." When you start going to meetings, you learn what all the acronyms mean. It's acronyms, everything is acronyms.

00:26:22 **Roger**

So, you start learning what all the acronyms mean. You learn the process of how something becomes a campus policy. You learn how a course goes from an idea in somebody's head to a class that a student can actually take, that they're going to enjoy, that can help them better their future.

00:26:39 **Roger**

And it is a little bit intimidating and it's a little bit scary at first because I would look at those campus leaders and be like, "I don't know. I don't know how they're doing all of that. I don't know where they learned all of this stuff." Well, you just got to jump in and get involved in the process.

00:26:52 **Roger**

For me, before I was my department senator, I really relied on just my department meetings every month to find out what was going on across campus. Like I didn't know, I didn't know why this thing happens. I can't even think of an example right now, but I wouldn't have known why class sizes changed or I wouldn't have any idea about why we could no longer offer a certain math course because it doesn't transfer in a certain way to a university.

00:27:22 **Roger**

And I would have to rely just on a five-minute report from another faculty member in a two-hour department meeting every month. And you just don't get all of the information that way. And I really did want to know more about how campus functioned and what my role could be. And so, I just said yes.

00:27:38 **Roger**

The Senate leadership came to me and said, "Hey, are you interested in serving in a more in-depth capacity?" And I was like, "Yes. I'm scared, but I want to do it because I want to know. I want to be a part of the process."

00:27:50 **Tania**

Well, and I think really we grow fairly fast in these roles. I've been involved with committees and councils quite extensively now for I would say, three years. And it was definitely like jumping into the deep end of the pool, and that did not feel very pleasant at first, I will say. But then you learn swim. And what I've learned also is that everybody is so willing to share their knowledge.

00:28:19 **Tania**

And it is therefore, I think also, really important that we all engage in some way or form because those that otherwise would serve in these roles for 10, 15 years in these different committees and councils, once they rotate off, we would lose all that knowledge that they have.

00:28:39 **Tania**

I really like the senate structure that we try to onboard people on a rotating basis so that we continuously have all that institutional memory and expertise. So, I think it's definitely really fun to serve on these different committees and councils that we have. And so , I want to echo what you said - it's really an opportunity to learn more about our incredibly large and complex campus.

00:29:08 **Roger**

Yeah, and I think even if people are brand new and they can't jump in and get super involved yet, listen to their department senators in those meetings where they get those reports. Don't be afraid to ask questions like, what does that acronym mean? You know, what is SPCH, what is CNI? What does this thing mean?

00:29:23 **Roger**

Because your department senators are a really good resource too. And the more that you ask them questions, the more knowledgeable you'll be and the more comfortable you'll be having those conversations and maybe participating in those roles in the future.

00:29:36 **Tania**

Well, Roger, thank you so, so much for taking the time out of your very busy schedule. Well, I really appreciate it and I'm sure our listeners appreciate it as well. So, thank you again so very much for your time.

00:29:51 **Roger**

Thank you.

00:29:54 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.