

INTRODUCTION: Hi, I'm Dr. Carlos McCormick, and this is Collaborative Conversations with Carlos, a podcast where we discuss various aspects of Wake Technical Community College and the community college movement. If you want to find out more about the magnificent work Wake Tech is engaged in and also learn about the many facets of the community college movement, keep listening, as we will have a diverse collection of guests from students to community college presidents. Let's get started.

CARLOS MCCORMICK: Welcome to Collaborative Conversations with Carlos. Joining us today is Laura Bethea, and the goal of today's conversation is to discuss Title IX. Laura Bethea from Wake Technical Community College, thanks for joining us, and how are you doing today?

LAURA BETHEA: Great. Thank you so much for this opportunity. All is well. Thank you.

MCCORMICK: Laura and I are gonna talk a little bit about Title IX and how it relates to community colleges. But before we begin, Laura, we always like to get to know our, our guests a little bit. So, if you could tell the audience a little bit about you – what's your role here at Wake Technical Community College and what do you like to do when you're not thinking about Title IX or, or Wake Technical Community College?

BETHEA: All right, thank you so much for this opportunity to connect with you today. I am thrilled to share more about Title IX and what it means for Wake Tech. So, for the past two years, I've served as the college's Title IX coordinator, and we'll go into that in more detail later. But in addition to that, over the past eight years, I've served as the college's career development manager. So, within that, I lead a team in the development, delivery and evaluation of career services to prospective students and enrolled students at Wake Tech. We also connect with alumni with these endeavors as well. Most recently, I have served as the college's equity team lead for the Spark strategic planning process. So, I've worked with a team of colleagues from across staff and faculty lines, as well as students, to research and to pull in data to support equity-related access and outcomes dealing with our next steps in our planning.

Now, I could tell you, outside of that, I am all about volunteering. Volunteering is my passion. I serve as a North Carolina 4H volunteer leader – actually, for the past 15 years – with diverse youth from across the state of North Carolina. So, within that, serving again is something that I really am in tune to here at Wake Tech, volunteering with the Advisory Committee for Pathways is one thing that I'm engaged in. So, Pathways is the Student Scholar, Success Scholars Program, which supports initiatives for our male students. So, I just wanted to make sure that what I do out in the community with other organizations I can also bring here to my workplace. Other organizations I've worked with in the community through my sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, includes Stop Hunger Now, the Salvation Army and the Boys and Girls Club – so many different ways that I connect through organizations and on an individual basis as well.

I can say my pastime, Carlos, that I love the arts. I love engaging in artistic presentations of music and other art forms. I'm actually an executive board member with the African American Culture Festival of Raleigh and Wake County. So, we've had a, a long-lived collaborative connection with Wake Tech, with our Student Government Association, with our foundation. But to bring all of that intertwined here with work and with leisure is, is a bonus. So, I could say that the arts, sporting activities, being involved in

community-related events is definitely what I'm in tune to. And I have two little dogs. They're actually older dogs, but two little dogs here with me. And they are artists themselves: Leonardo da Vinci and Pablo Picasso. So, I have infused arts in all sectors of what I do here, Carlos. So, I hope that explores a little bit about who I am and what I'm all about.

MCCORMICK: Wow, very busy. And thanks for everything that you do in our community as well as at the college. Let's jump right in and, and talk a little bit about Title IX. How'd you get engaged in Title IX? And you talked a little bit about this being a, a passion. What excites you about this role, and what excites you about Title IX?

BETHEA: That's a great question to kick off our conversation. I can say, over the past decade, I have been involved in Title IX operations in some capacity. With my employment and training history and counseling and experiences with students, employees and the community and various roles, as I've mentioned previously, I was encouraged by former dean of students, and you recall, Dr. Paul Norman in serving in a role as a member in a pool of Title IX investigators, along with other colleagues. So, thank you to Dr. Norman for kicking off the, the initial interest. I had no idea, you know, exactly what it entailed, but he brought to light that I could utilize my counseling skills, my investigative skills in this capacity. A couple of years later, I was encouraged by former Senior VP of Student Services Rita Jerman to consider an official position as one of the four Title IX investigators for the college. So, pursuing that opportunity, I transitioned into one of those investigator roles, and for about four years, I served in that investigative capacity.

Through a series of training and diverse experiences over time, I transitioned into this current role as the Title IX coordinator. So, over the past two years, I've been able to oversee the entire Title IX process and look at issues of concern from the onset to their resolution. So, it has been definitely a decade worth of interest, of activity that have streamlined to the point of today that I'm sitting here speaking with you.

And then going to the next point of what excites me about this role, well, I'm excited that I can serve in a capacity to advocate, to educate, to motivate, and then, thinking about, to initiate impactful steps to address those equitable access and equitable outcomes for Title IX in our college community on so many levels. So, not only those with our students, those issues that they face day in and day out, but also with our staff and faculty as well. So, it's a community approach that excites me in this process.

MCCORMICK: Thank you for sharing that. And you mentioned a, a great friend and, and, and a former colleague of ours, Dr. Paul Norman.

BETHEA: Yes.

MCCORMICK: Last week, I talked about how Miss Eleanor Miles from our Individualized Learning Center played a key role in my education. But if it wasn't for Dr. Paul Norman, I would not be at, at Wake Technical Community College. So, a shoutout to, to Dr. Norman.

BETHEA: Shout out.

MCCORMICK: And he's doing some tremendous work still in, in our, in our community. You just talked a little bit about education. What exactly is Title IX, and who does it apply to?

BEATHEA: Well, that is the topic of the day, right? Title IX, what is it, what is it all about? And I'm gonna have to quote this, Carlos. So, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law that specifically states no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. So, in some, of course, Wake Tech adheres to all federal, state and local civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination, but as a recipient of this federal financial assistance, the college is required by Title IX to ensure that there is no discrimination whatsoever on the basis of sex.

So, when we talk about sex, it, it goes into several layers here: sex stereotypes, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, pregnancy and parenting status. We go into other forms of sexual discrimination that apply to Title IX. So, we're talking about here sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating [violence], domestic violence. So, all of those are prohibited under Title IX and by the college policy. Any member of our campus community, whether it's a guest, visitor, student, faculty, staff member who asked to deny or limit opportunities for any other person of our college community is in violation of Title IX policy. And so, when we look at all of this, we view our compliance with Title IX as a shared responsibility, one that the entire institution, from our administration to our faculty to our staff members to our students, we all share in this responsibility to comply with Title IX.

Now, when it goes into the mandates of Title IX, it mandates that an institution designate at least one employee as a Title IX coordinator – and that is my role – to oversee these compliance efforts. So, additionally, we take another step with our team being comprised of other key roles. So, I have two right-hand Title IX deputy coordinators who support all efforts within this process. There are four investigators on the team, as well as members of a grievance process pool. This pool consists of our hearing officers, appeals officers and advisors. So, these roles are the additional buffers, and they play vital roles in supporting this oversight, providing the accountability of the Title IX processes and procedures at the college. And one other thing with Title IX, the college has also determined that the college president, the executive vice presidents and the other vice presidents are officials with authority, and these officials with authority address and correct harassment, discrimination and retaliation issues as well. So, they may also receive notices or complaints of Title IX on behalf of the college.

So, there are a lot of pieces to Title IX, and the college takes every effort to meet those requirements and then take another step as well.

MCCORMICK: Thanks for sharing that information, and it, and it sounds like Wake Technical Community College is going above and, and, and beyond. And why do you believe the college has really sat down and focused and said, "Hey, we're gonna take these things seriously by having all of the, these different aspects to Title IX"?

BETHEA: Well, again, it is definitely federal regulations that set the pace. So, we are obligated to meet the needs in such a way. And again, these federal regulations that have been set before us are policies that should be implemented. There is no choice – no ifs, ands or buts about it – they must be

implemented. So, the thing is, we aim to reach the ceiling in everything that we do, reach the ceiling in our services and our resources to specifically address these Title IX concerns. Great question there.

MCCORMICK: Recently, in, in 2020, there were some my new regulations. Can you speak to some of those new regulations and, and how does that impact us, what we do here at Wake Technical Community College?

BETHEA: Yeah, that's another great question, Carlos. So, specifically, after, this date will always be imprinted in my brain – effective August 14, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education instituted new regulations that went into effect on that date. So, but saying that, while the new regulations meant changes, what has not changed is our dedication actually to the process that respects equal dignity for all members of our college community. So, regardless of what has been implemented, the college provides a number of procedural protections, irrespective to your race, gender, ethnicity, expression, age, ability and so on, that we value in our diverse community.

We have received updates and guidance from our professional organization, which is called ATIXA. ATIXA stands for the Association of Title IX Administrators. So, this is something to take note of: On March 8, 2021, the Biden Administration issued an executive order guaranteeing an educational environment free of discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual orientation or gender identity. So, this executive order formally started the process to review the existing regulations to ensure that there's consistency, consistency with the Biden Administration priorities. This executive order set a 120-day review period, so by mid-June, there will be some reporting out from the Department of Education that gives the field some ideas on strategies that will be used to meet this imperative.

So, looking at the regulations as they are, where they'll lead to in the future, the questions are: How will the Department of Education take action? How soon will it take action, and how effective will these actions actually be? Also, will they replace the current Title IX regulations, and what would they replace them with? So, we have regulations in place; they are expected to change. So, then that becomes the question between now and 2024, which marks the end of the Biden Administration's term, when would these changes take place? Now, I'm just leaning on your question, what were some of those concerns? There are several paths that may be taken. So, the Department of Education may issue guidance that clarifies the current regulations. The Department of Education may issue guidance on topics not covered by the current regulations, such as LGBTQ+ protections. The Office of Civil Rights may announce some level of non-enforcement of the 2020 regulations. And then, lastly, we have a newly confirmed Secretary of Education, Department of Education Secretary Miguel Cordona. He may actually rewrite the current regulations. So, looking at all of this, even in a fast-track approach, that's predicted to be an 18- to 20-month process unless Congress takes action, meaning that significant changes to our current regulations may not be activated until 2023-2024.

So, for now, I can say that the 2020 regulations have force and are in full effect by law, so colleges and schools must do their best to comply. And some of those areas, just for you to know, it is a lengthy list of regulations to review, but some of those new areas consist of a hearing panel. As I mentioned, we, we have hearing officers and so forth, but a hearing panel has been introduced where a student, faculty or staff member would be the recipient of an advisor. They would go through a period where they could be

cross-examined in an investigation. Previously, it would be an investigation with our team one-on-one or with support. Now, it is more the team would be a part of this hearing panel, and there would be cross-examination or the different parties.

Also, there have been some changes to how the education and training of our Title IX team is posted and reviewed by the college community, how information on websites is posted, again, for the community to be aware of, to relate to and rely on in the future. So, we do have that information posted on our Wake Tech website as a part of that compliance. So, there are several layers of new regulations that have been set at the table.

One thing to also consider, even if the Department of Education signals non-enforcement of these 2020 regulations in the future, the courts still have the authority to enforce them. So, there's a lot of uncertainty at the table on where this would lead, but those are some general, general areas on how this has formulated, where the Biden Administration currently stands. And we know that, at some point, we should get the word one where we go from here.

MCCORMICK: Thank you for sharing that, and that's all a lot to, to unpack for individuals not only here at Wake Technical Community College, but also in the, in the, in the community. If they're wanting to kind of understand Title IX or to learn just, you know, some of that information, where can some of that information be found at?

BETHEA: That's a great question. So, we do have a wealth of information on our Wake Tech webpage. You can find that at www.waketech.edu. Title IX is housed under Human Resources, so you'll find all of our information there. We list the policy, we list information about community resources, as well as internal resources. So, you'll see all of the information there. The Department of Education's information is posted there as well, but they have a wealth of information available on their website. The Department of Education as well.

MCCORMICK: We are actually recording this online, and a lot of our courses at this time, due to the pandemic, are virtual. How does Title IX and online work together now? How, how does that go?

BETHEA: How does Title IX and online work together? That is a great question because, you know, we have conducted most investigations in person, on campus, face-to-face. A lot of the issues that we've had have been face-to-face and so forth. So, one thing to consider is that, regardless of where the incident occurred or in what capacity and what role, Title IX exists across the board, whether it's seated or online classes, remote learning, so forth. Title IX is in full effect at any time and any place that our educational activity, training, engagement is conducted where we have control over the actual location of this type of remote learning. So, just know that, regardless of where it is, where it's conducted, if it is a Title IX or Wake Tech-based type of activity, we would be involved and Title IX does apply.

So, our college policies are written and interpreted broadly, and they include specifically online and cyber manifestations of anything. So, when we look at our education programs, activities, we also consider our college's network, our technology and our equipment. One thing, Carlos, to think about is we may not control websites, social media, we, we may not have control over those means or other

means in which harassing communications may take place. But when they do, such communications can be reported to the college, and the college will engage in a variety of means to address and mitigate any of the effects to the college community. So, of course, the college community is encouraged to be good digital citizens and to refrain from online misconduct, sharing inappropriate comments, unwelcome sexual or sex-based messaging, distributing or disseminating threatening breaches of privacy, pornography, those things are definitely, come to light when I think of encouragement of online misconduct. Anything that is said to harm another member of the college community, we definitely encourage that one refrains from posting or sharing in that way. Any online posting or electronic communication by students, let's say cyberbullying, cyberstalking, cyberharassment, may be completely out of the college's control, occurring outside of that, but they will only be subjected to our policy when the conduct can be shown as a substantial in-program disruption for infringement on the rights of others.

So, understand that things may occur, but unless they are an infringement upon our college activities or the rights of our college community, then, you know, some of this, we may or may not be able to enforce through our policy. Otherwise, when we look at communications, they are considered protected by the First Amendment dealing with free speech. Supportive measures for complainants, they will be provided. But protected speech cannot legally be subjected to discipline. So, we do educate and inform complainants, those that are experiencing those perceptions of violation or discrimination. We do go through those educational pieces and break down what the laws and policies state to make sure it's a clear understanding on where things stand. Another thing is harassing speech, so whether it's online or in person, this may be regulated with, by the college, again, only when this speech is made in an official, let's say official, official or work-related capacity. So, dealing with free speech and online and remote learning, there are several layers to that as well, Carlos, as, as I've mentioned here.

MCCORMICK: You talked about some of the violations and, and, and penalties. Can actually criminal charges be brought against an individual as it relates to Title IX?

BETHEA: Yes, the short answer is yes. And even though we do not, as an institution, and let's say press charges, we actually engage with our students to ensure, and our staff or faculty, to ensure they have the means, the resources to move forward if they desire to. So, the criminal process and the, the policy violations are separate procedures, but they can actually occur at the same time. Like we could have someone to notify us of a Title IX concern and also contact Raleigh PD to pursue charges on a case at hand. Great question.

MCCORMICK: Talk a little bit about, you mentioned some of the things of being a good steward as it relates to faculty and staff and students as it relates to digital aspects. But what are some other things can individuals help with the cause of, of Title IX? And I think about our police department when they say, "If you see it, report it." Kind of, what does, take me, walk me through what does that mean as it relates to, to Title IX. How can an individual help out with the Title IX process?

BETHEA: That is a great, great question. So, if you see something, say something, you know, that is one of those taglines that we use. But it is definitely effective when we discuss Title IX efforts here. One thing I would suggest for our entire college community, if you have not, first take the time to review the Title IX

policy. Granted, it is quite lengthy, Carlos, if you haven't had a chance to go through all of those, but our policy is lengthy, but is worth staying abreast of the issues at hand so we know exactly what we're dealing with when we're speaking of sexual discrimination, harassment and so forth.

Next, I would say, ask the questions. Always ask. If, if it's something you feel in your gut is a concern, bring it to the table. Ask the questions. Gain clarity as much as, as you need to. I receive questions every day from our college community, from faculty, from students, from staff that ask, "I'm not sure if this is Title IX or not, but I just wanted you to be aware," or you know, "This student brought this concern to my attention. Where do I go from here?" So, ask the question, gain the clarity.

The other thing is just stay vigilant and aware. Know that this is our college community, and safety for each of us is at the forefront and is essential. If there is a concern, report the concern. So, as a member of the college community, all staff, all faculty, have the obligation as mandatory reporters. So, there is not an issue that should be held and guaranteed confidentiality, privacy with another student or staff or faculty member, even if there's a thought that it may not be a Title IX concern, report the concern. So, our team is, again, available to provide that guidance to consider next steps and resources. If Title IX is not the appropriate next step, do not hesitate on any level to report it.

Another thing I would say for the college community would be to request the conversation with our team, whether it's through a chat, through a podcast or through a presentation, whatever it is, a meeting with your team, your, your staff or your division. Allow that conversation to take place. Allow the communication to be brought to the table on what the concerns are with Title IX. How can we address them? How can we educate further? We're happy to support this training and education with any student group, any faculty member, any division, so keep that in mind. As long as the conversation continues, that is how we're gonna grow and expand in our knowledge and understanding, whether we have current Title IX regulations at the table or there are new regulations in the future. We all can be a part of that conversation.

MCCORMICK: Early in the conversation, you talked about one of your roles as one of the leaders here at the college in terms of, of equity. I know the college has a, a big push these, these days when it comes to diversity, inclusion and equity. In your eyes, how does Title IX and, and equity align?

BETHEA: Title IX and equity. So, let me tell you, it all goes hand in hand. So, when we look at, Carlos, equity on several levels, we're making sure from beginning to end that equity in the access of material, support persons, of resolutions are at the table for each and every individual who is involved in a Title IX process. One area I could say with equity being at the forefront is dealing with protections for both parties to a fair process. So, meaning that, from the onset that a complaint is made that the complaint and the accused, so the respondent, have equal rights to a fair process. They have a right to connect with advisors. They have a right for their issues to be heard by a diverse hearing panel, so diversity in ethnicity and gender and experiences from our team. They have, again, that right to equitable notice of resolution and the right to request an appeal, regardless of what party they are. So, dealing with equity, it is essential on every front, every level that we deal with the Title IX process. That's a great question.

MCCORMICK: And Laura, this has been a, a great and wonderful conversation. Are there any other things that you like to, to add as a relates to, to Title IX in general or specifically what Wake Technical Community College is, is doing?

BETHEA: Yes, we have so many, I can talk for another hour, Carlos. It's so much at stake, at hand here with Title IX. I'd just like to say that in April, it is nationally acknowledged as National Sexual Assault Awareness Month. So again, sexual assault is prohibited under Title IX and the college's policy. I'm gonna just throw a couple of stats out there for you, statistics from the Department of Education. Every 73 seconds, another American is sexually assaulted. One out of six American women have been a victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. About 3 percent of American men, or one in 33, have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. And when we look at survivors and where crimes occurred, 48 percent were sleeping or performing an activity at home, 29 percent were traveling to and from work or school, 12 percent were working and 7 percent were attending school. So, ultimately, we want to serve, as the Title IX team, as a resource to those within our Wake Tech community experiencing any level of sexual assault or form of sexual violence.

We have a number of activities, awareness events for our college community in April. So, I would say stay tuned to see those promotions, which will be engagement with our community partners, such as Interact, with our police department, with, we have "Know Your IX" series, a series of various topics on Title IX that we'll be promoting every couple of weeks through the summer. So, just be aware of what is offered, what we can bring to the table, and know that there are resources here to support. Know that you can report any and every concern. There's not a concern that should not be heard. Please bring any kind of notice or complaints to the table. You may file a complaint directly with verbal notice to me. There is an official report on our website. There, there's a link that says "report now," that you can make a report online, and you can always contact a supervisor, contact an instructor if you're a student, to make sure the information is relayed to me or to the other appropriate authorities. So, just making that point again, if you see it, if you feel it, let it be known. Definitely report any incidents to our college, to our team. Make sure the information is known.

And then lastly, Carlos, one more thing, one more last thing. There is on our webpage a listing of community resources. So, whether we're dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault, any form of sexual violence, there are resources available on our web page. Also, there is information on campus-based resources, including our Campus Police, Wellness Services, Student Advocacy and Support. So, know that we're here to support you, but we also connect with other partners too to build this community of safety.

MCCORMICK: Laura, thank you so much. This has been an enlightening conversation, and can't thank you enough for what you do and your team does for not only Wake Technical Community College, but Wake County as a whole. It's been a real pleasure, and thank you.

BETHEA: Thank you. And it's been simply an honor to connect with you today, and I definitely appreciate this opportunity. Do not hesitate to reach out for further information as needed. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

MCCORMICK: Thank you.

CLOSING: Thanks for listening to Collaborative Conversations with Carlos. If you like our show and you want to know more, be sure to visit us at waketech.edu. See you next time.