

**‘Round About Campus Episode Transcript
About Season 2 with Cynthia Villareal (Season 2, Episode 5)**

Alex: I'm Alex.

Z: And I'm Z, and this is the 'Round About Campus podcast, bringing our scholarly magazine to your ears.

Alex: We are wrapping up season two of the 'Round About Campus podcast. This season, we've taken listeners behind the scenes of the *About Campus* magazine, and today we're talking about season two with another member of the *About Campus* team.

Z: We've discussed what it means to manage the magazine from the vantage point of me as Editor, and from Roman as Managing Editor, and the standpoints of authors and reviewers. Today, we're talking with Cynthia Villarreal, who is a member of the Associate Editor team for *About Campus*.

Alex: In many ways, our talk with Cynthia brings the season full circle. We'll talk about the entire season, but also her role in the magazine and her educational praxis.

Z: Yeah, I think it'll be a nice little 360 spin around the magazine and always nice to catch up with our Associate editors as they are doing all sorts of interesting things on their own as well as stuff for the magazine. So it'll be fun.

Alex: Yeah, I think it'll be a great time. Plus, I think, this season has been a good, I will say for you, victory lap of a great team that you've been able to cultivate and put together, Z.

Z: I appreciate that. It's easy to do this job when you have great people surrounding you. You included Alex.

Alex: I was gonna say, well, and then you're stuck with me, but, you know, it works, too.

Z: Stuck. Just glad to be with, lucky to be alongside, all those things. So, but before we get to our guests, though, we always start an episode of 'Round About Campus with a segment that we call "Take a Round," where we each take a turn talking about something we love. Alex, for today's episode, take a round and talk about one of your favorite classes to teach.

Alex: You know, I'm the one who wrote this prompt, and you would think that that would make me think ahead what my answer was going to be.

[Co-hostess laughter]

Alex: And I really love a lot of the classes I get to teach. I think teaching is one of my favorite things in the world to do. I've loved like playing teacher since I was like, a third grader, I think. And one of my favorite classes to teach currently is our Analyzing Education Literature class.

It's a class built for our PhD students. But it's a class I wish I had in my doc program. And I think a lot of people wish they had too, which is a whole class talking about literature reviews and how to do them, how to actually think about educational literature with different theories, different methods. And I think I really love teaching it, in part, because it feels like a very skills based class to teach doctoral students. That's something that will serve them in every class after. And I also get to preview all of the good thinking of the students in our programs here at CSU. And students always are coming up with great things to research, and it's great to be sort of the first step in that process with them to sort of help them understand: well, here's what exists. And then you work from there in many ways to really flesh out your idea completely.

Z: Yeah. I mean it actually reminds me a little bit of the work that I get to do with the magazine. And thinking about...thinking really with people's thinking. And getting to see where they're at and how they can shape ideas. I think probably similar to you, I really like teaching any qualitative methods class. I yeah, I've taught a bunch here and there around the last ten years that I've been teaching. But I think for me, I am most excited not about teaching the *what*, but teaching about the *how*, you know. How is it that we come to know what it is that we think that we know? Like, certainly I could teach the empirical data. I could teach the literature I do in lots of other classes, but I kind of am really interested in thinking about how we do our thinking and how the way that we approach things actually shifts our ongoing practice. So it's that *how* question that gets to be really exciting for me. I think, probably a close second would be, the Activism in Education class that I teach every other year, which actually is more of a critical university studies class. I think people come in thinking that they're going to get kind of a history of activism. There's been a lot of work, some of which you've participated heavily in creating around activist identity. And that's, I mean, I think really important work for people to read. And also...yeah, I mean, the class ends up being a little bit more about what is this thing called institutional life. How do we think about resistance and how do we think about being alongside each other and being in good company through that resistance? Which I think is kind of a fun little class to teach.

Alex: Totally, I love that.

Z: So enough for us. Let's get out of the way. And, and really get to our conversation with Cynthia, who I think is going to be absolutely fantastic. And I just know we'll have a great banter.

[Musical interlude]

Z: All right. Today we are talking with one of *About Campus's* Associate Editors, [Dr. Cynthia Villarreal](#). Dr. Villarreal is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Northern Arizona University, just right up the road from where I am in Tucson. She holds a PhD in Urban Education Policy from the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, and identifies as a *fronteriza* from El Paso, Texas, studying the borderlands of higher education, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), organizational culture, equity and decision making, and Chicana feminisms and higher education. As a critical qualitative researcher, she uses interdisciplinary theories and research to inform her approach to the study of HSI and how they serve their Latine students by interrogating the policies, structures, and

culture within colleges and universities. She is a mother scholar living in Phoenix, Arizona with her two adorable children and husband, who I'm also sure is adorable, but I see lots of pictures of the kids, and they're just darling. So welcome to the 'Round About podcast, Cynthia, we're excited to have you.

Cynthia: Thank you. I'm so happy to be with you.

Z: So, we were deciding to maybe throw in a little bit of a bonus question. Alex and I were just chatting about some of our favorite classes to teach, and we're curious, what's the class or the classes that you just really get amped to teach?

Cynthia: Well, the first class that I ever taught, as you know, Dr. Villarreal, was a class that came somewhat out of my dissertation, and I designed it. It was called Border Pedagogies and Paradigms in Higher Education. And I taught it as an adjunct faculty member at UMass Boston. And to this day, I'm like, still chasing that high. The students in that class, the conversations we had, just the moments where we were talking about what it means to think of higher education as a borderland and use border theories and Black feminist epistemologies. It was just so much fun, and I can't wait to teach it again. Luckily, I have infused pieces of that class into the courses that I teach now. So it's not like I've completely put that chapter out of my life. But, yeah, I would love to just teach that same class again here at NAU.

Z: Yeah.

Alex: It's so funny you say that because I was talking with a colleague today about the way that some of my pedagogical decisions travel between my courses. Once I try out one thing, either content, a certain assessment, a certain reading, that it winds its way up in more than one of my classes at a time, which I always think is really fun and cool.

Cynthia: That. Yeah.

Z: Sign me up for that class. I'd love to take that. Love that. I also love that comment about the kind of the confluence of the content, the feel that's created in the class, the students that get invested. There's almost kind of this perfect storm that sometimes happens with classes. And sometimes it comes way out of left field. It's about content that you wouldn't think: oh, wow, we're having this kind of, like, really amazing kind of mystical experience, but it just pops up. So yeah, hoping that...

Cynthia: Yeah, you use the word mystical and I swear in talking about that class with the students, I just always felt like it was the universe, you know, conspiring to bring us all together. And then I would share that with them, too. It's like this whole experience was magic for me. And so, I'm sure trying to recreate it is going to, you know, not work out in the same way, but it's going to have its own magic. And yeah, the timing of it will be perfect.

Z: Totally. Yeah, yeah. You know, Cynthia, we've asked you to come on to the podcast for a couple of different reasons. The first is really kind of around your role as an Associate Editor of *About Campus*, which I continue to be very thankful that you're on the board and that you said

yes. So first question is: can you describe the role of the Associate Editor for listeners? What is an Associate Editor and what does that role look like for you?

Cynthia: Yeah. So the role of the Associate Editor, it's a two year term. And there's this expectation that I would review a manuscript submission each month. And also an expectation that I would represent the magazine at conferences, you know, in inviting presenters to consider turning their presentations into magazine submissions. We also as Associate Editors will check in quarterly with Roman and Z and, you know, just offer general suggestions about what we're seeing as burning issues in higher ed. So we help provide some of our content expertise in that way. And so I like to think of it as where Roman, in addition to everything that Roman does, but Roman is the one that keeps us all organized and on track. And then the Associate Editors, like, we're the ones like working alongside reviewers, providing feedback on manuscripts. But then we can also give some general suggestions and ideas for the magazine overall. And then my role specifically, you know, as someone who studies more organizational processes in higher ed and then how they relate to student equity and minority serving institutions, I feel like my role is to be somewhat of a content expert in these areas. And when I'm reading manuscripts, to try to challenge authors to be thinking about their studies and their manuscripts in the context of equity, of serving students and then also paying attention to the structural dimensions that impact how we serve students. So those are things that I'm conscious of. And then my lens, when I'm reading manuscripts for *About Campus*.

Alex: Nice. I appreciate that. And I appreciate you naming sort of how your role works alongside other roles, because I think in some ways, journals could operate very in sort of all the cards and operate very independently of one another. But I think what you're emphasizing particularly about *About Campus* is its role in sort of taking a sort of interdependent approach to thinking about the cultivation of really good writing and scholarship that comes out of the magazine. So I love that description. So as an Associate Editor, how do you think about your role ushering manuscripts through the review process, and what do you look for? How do you encourage authors to work on revisions? Because I know, I can think of one R&R I've gotten in my career, it was my very first one, that I was like: ugghh, these people hate what I have submitted. They don't like it. Why am I even doing any of this? But I feel like you might be able to offer some different kind of guidance in this role. So talk to us a little about that.

Cynthia: And I think what you're speaking to is reviewer two, right. And this idea of reviewer two just going in and ripping your paper to shreds. And I do not want to be reviewer two, let me just be very clear. I think about my role as someone who provides support, and being very supportive in how I frame my feedback on the manuscripts that I review. And I'm also just very mindful of the fact that since *About Campus* is an outlet that is really intended to be more accessible and accessible by like a general public audience, but also higher education leaders that maybe aren't in the throes of conducting research in their day to day. So I make sure that when I'm reading manuscripts, I keep that in mind, and that I'm providing authors with that feedback to help them ensure that they strike that balance in their framing, in their conceptualizing, that it's meant for a bit of a more general audience, but it's still, you know, upholds a level of rigor. I also provide questions and considerations to the authors, again, regarding conceptions of equity and ensuring that the way that we write about, you know, institutional structures and issues in higher ed doesn't sound like the blame is being placed on

students. So I see that, you know, sometimes in writing and it's not to point anyone out or blame the writers, but it's rather...I do it in a way that calls out the ways that we've been socialized as educators to think and the way that we've talked about issues. We talk about them as being directly connected to student outcomes and performance. And that's the issue. The student, you know, graduation rates, retention, rather than being critical of the structures that are in place that impact those outcomes. So a lot of times it's just a language shift that I offer feedback on and in a loving, critique way.

Z: Yeah, yeah, I really appreciate that. And I was thinking a little bit about, in your intro, you use the word critical to describe who you are as a scholar. And I think that that word can often get confused. Some people think critical means mean and takes people to task and tells people what they've gotten wrong. I do think that there's a way that you practice criticality, that we try to do that as an editorial team around giving some good, thoughtful and generative feedback. Critical doesn't have to mean mean. And, there are ways to provide developmental feedback that is, as you said, rigorous, deep and will, I think, help encourage better final results, whether pieces end up in the magazine or not. Yeah, you know, the second reason that we asked you to be here is, that we—I guess we can call it a tradition now—because this is the second time we're doing it for season two. But we want to talk about season two. We want to do some reflections on the season. So, you've had a chance to listen to the episodes of this season and, you know, just kind of top line thought, what's something that stands out to you from this season's guests?

Cynthia: Season two. So to me, these episodes really captured the work that's being done in higher education to humanize our students. And like when I was thinking of all of the episodes, I was like, what is the strand across all of them? And it's just, to me, humanizing higher education, humanizing the student lived experience, but then also, again, challenging practitioners to think critically about how to best support and serve students, keeping in mind that how we humanize them is really key. What I appreciated about the episodes and the collective of voices that were represented in season two is that they challenged me to reckon with the ways that I've been complicit in maintaining certain practices that are not grounded in, you know, to come back to the word 'critical,' not grounded in critical care or critical empathy. So, I mean, I'm grateful that these episodes heightened my awareness of how to move forward in my pedagogy and in my practice from a place of love, from a place of empathy, from a place of compassion. So we, you know, I'm so glad that we were hearing about things like how addiction and spirituality and grief and resilience and climate justice education. Like how all of these pieces impact the way our students show up. And, you know, these are conversations that we really need to be having. So I'm glad to see them. I feel like I don't hear what the speakers were talking about that often, in higher ed circles. So I'm just, you know, again, to reiterate, if we're going to be talking about issues like addiction and recovery, that they need to be discussed in addition to us as higher ed leaders, reckoning with things like party cultures and party schools and depictions of college students in pop culture and movies. And it's like we need to make sure that we don't have one without the other. You know, just in the same way that we need to confront this reality, that our students are human, and they're not robots who are just meant to produce work for the assignments on the syllabus. So, you know, I'm just glad that season two and the contributors made it clear that these are also things that we need to prioritize when we're thinking about our practice and our pedagogy as leaders.

Z: Yeah, yeah. I love too way that you think about the humanization of our work as something that encourages us to do our own internal reflections. That it's not something that's just out there for other people to deal with, but that we need to really recognize and rest with the ways that we're both complicit and seeking to resist and make new spaces as well. Because those are often juxtaposed really tightly together in a lot of times. So I appreciate you bringing that to the fore. Alex, what about for you? I'm gonna put you on the spot. What, what stands out to you from this season? Good job on the season, by the way. You did real great.

Cynthia: Yeah. Great job.

Alex: I think for me, I'll pick up a thread that Cynthia began to weave as well, which is, you know, this is our second season doing this, so I have another season now to compare it to. And in some ways, to me, thinking about both season one and season two, there is the stated theme of the season, and then there are the sort of subcurrents of the season that I think were not as intentional as I think when we were planning them, but become really beautiful in practice. And the particular subcurrent I'm thinking about here is how many of the topics that we talk about. I'm thinking about the special issue we talked about with Becky and Q. Thinking about talking with our authors about their work. These are all subjects that don't necessarily have sort of easy placements in higher ed courses. Often because we're trying to teach people either if you're in a more student affairs program or thinking more from an administrative and organizational lens, if you're in a more higher ed based program. And, to me, there is a sort of, both poignancy and relevance in these topics in the everyday that I guess are not on my radar. They're not things I normally think about, but the things I, as Cynthia was pointing out, should be thinking about more, should be talking about more.

And I've even thought about like: how do I weave issues of climate justice in multiples of my courses? Like I'm getting ready to teach, finance in the spring. And I'm like, is there a week I can design around sort of the costs and benefits of not paying attention to climate justice, the costs and more sustainability of programs. And then I even go back to our very first episode with Stephanie Waterman and thinking about how, you know, something that still sticks with me from that interview is when she talks about redesigning campus buildings and how even disrupting the earth of the buildings are currently on damages the ecosystems that have been built under those buildings. And so it's to me just like: oh, this is where I think most people would feel very stuck or very frozen about that. Like, well, if we can't do anything, can't we do anything? And I'm like, no, we can do a lot of things. We just have to dream a little bit harder or dream a little bit more, get more creative about exactly what we do. And so I'm taking away from this season, I think in particular sort of the undercurrents of those topics and how do I in my role as an instructor, as an advisor, as someone who serves on committees across campus, how am I a steward of those ideas in ways that help us push campuses even further? To think about equity, inclusion, justice, and transformation in really awesome ways. So that's what I'm thinking about. And because you put me on the spot, Z, I feel like it's only fair that I get to put you on the spot now and ask you about, like, your takeaways or your thinking about this season at this point.

Z: Yeah, yeah. I mean, what's fair is fair, right? So I'm happy to answer. I mean, first of all, I will say we just had our quarterly meeting with our Board of Contributors members, and part of

that was dreaming up possible special issues for the future. Not that they needed to be the ones to usher them through, but some of the ideas were really exciting, and some of those things were things that we haven't seen special issues around in other spaces too. So stay tuned, Alex, for some of those other sorts of pieces to kind of bubble up through the magazine.

I think, you know, I've been on a little bit of a care work and a worldbuilding kick these days. And so some of what you're both talking about really also resonated with me that, when I first took on this role, I think there's one way that you can think about being the Executive Editor of a magazine in terms of the work that needs to happen, right? We need to get manuscripts in. We need to get manuscripts through. We need to publish manuscripts and move them out. But there's all of these other touch points and all of these other people involved in that process. And there are ways that we can create different worlds of care through that process. You know, I think over my career of working with students, they often tell me that the place of the most heightened anxiety for them, whether it's an assignment or submitting something for publication, is clicking the submit button. And so when I think about this season, I think about all of the work that goes into recognizing that that is a moment of anxiety for people and doing our best to think about how we can hold them gently through that process. Whether it is our grad student and new professionals, editorial board members, thinking about how they provide feedback, whether it's, Cynthia, you and the other Associate Editors really modeling the type of really side by side collegiality that you're doing when you're stewarding pieces through. Whether it's thinking about how we, and you'd mentioned this earlier, Cynthia, how do we reach out and encourage people to write for this magazine, which is decidedly different than other journal spaces?

And so I think even for seasoned scholars, I mean, I was just talking with someone who said I'm really nervous to write for this magazine. I want to do it, but I'm nervous because it's totally different from the type of writing that I do. For other journal spaces. So I really do think about the care work that we do together and the way that we're able to craft a different sort of world within, underneath, alongside kind of the institution that is higher education. That I think does maybe aid in helping people dream and imagine something different. You know, if it's just even one piece that they read and they're able to hold on to for a little while. If there's, Alex, for example, you're talking about how can we use magazines in classrooms to help people think differently like that. That to me, I think, becomes a really exciting thing. And one of the things that became incredibly salient as we listened to, yeah, all the friends of the pod that we had over this past season, you know. And I'm excited to keep on doing that work. I mean, the Becky and Q's special issue is going to be outstanding. I'm so excited for people to read Ryan and Sharon's piece. And I'm excited for people to continue to imagine differently as they look at other pieces that are published in the magazine, and then they can maybe start to think: oh, I can do that too. So, yeah. This is like a real feel good episode. I kind of love this.

Alex: I mean, I feel like taking a round about our own seasons is bound to do this in some way.

Z: Yeah, and I think it's telling that all three of us are really kind of spinning around some of the same ideas, you know? So it's nice to think about not just a thread that runs through the season, but a thread that's really running through how we think about coming together to do this thing called putting together a magazine. Right. So, yeah, that's cool.

Alex: So Cynthia, let's come back to you for a bit. I'm thinking more about you as a scholar, practitioner, academic, those kinds of pieces, what's your foundation in doing the work of higher education and student affairs? And are there particular thinkers, frameworks or texts you often come back to when thinking about that work?

Cynthia: Yeah. So prior to my career as an academic and my career in higher education, I was an English major, and I was an English teacher, and I also majored in anthropology. So I think, and I can probably tell you that, like critique culture, cultural critique and analyzing and theorizing, it kind of comes from those early parts of my college experience. And in that work, even though my focus is more like organizations and structures and policies, I make sure that I'm bringing in voices and leaning a lot on Black feminist and Chicana feminist scholars to help me not only interrogate the structure, theories, and practices and policies, but then to start to, the word I think of this episode is like reimagine. To reimagine how we study and think of higher education. And so I look to theories of decolonization and post coloniality and Indigenization in that reimagining. So some of the authors that I look toward are [Eve Tuck](#), [K. Wayne Yang](#), [bell hooks](#), [Gloria Anzaldúa](#). And I think this really adds to my research because it brings an interdisciplinary lens to my work, but it also helps me bring in frameworks that are maybe newer to higher ed, newer to student affairs, so that we can lead from places of community and care and love and seeing each other's humanity. I feel like that is something that can get lost in research that's focused on organizations and structures. So I want to make sure just to show the interpersonal, but then also the macro level and all of that.

Z: Yeah. Yeah, I love that. I always have a big appreciation for people that are doing the work of interdisciplinarity throughout their practice, whether it's daily as an educational administrator, as a faculty member, or however we kind of conceptualize our roles. Because I think there's something about our field saying that we do interdisciplinarity, but not actually doing the doing. So it's exciting to hear you kind of put that into practice a little bit. I think this last question, Cynthia may kind of riff a little bit off of what you just offered. And, as you know, *About Campus* is focused on the connections between scholarship and practice to enhance the everyday work of student affairs and higher education professionals. So we are wondering, what are two pieces that you would recommend for our audience to think about their practice in the field?

Cynthia: Yeah. So in thinking just generally, okay, so I wasn't sure if you wanted me to speak to the magazine, in contribution to the magazine or just general. And I went with in general; I hope that's okay. But I would be happy to go back and go through my notes and recommend some magazine articles too. But the text that I come back to and recommend that everyone read is: [A Third University is Possible](#) by la paperson. Which I think I remember seeing you, Z, post something about this on Instagram like years ago, and I was like, oh, I want to check that book out. And then now I read it like once a semester, it seems, and I use it a lot to inform this class that I teach on, foundations and higher ed in the US. [A Third University is Possible](#). Also [Community as Rebellion](#) by Lorgia García-Peña. And, I just love the way that she weaves together talking about the importance of community and care. But as an active resistance and rebellion, and there's themes in there that also come through in another book that I recommend highly, which is: [Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice](#), edited by none

other than, co-edited I should say, by Z Nicolazzo and [Amanda Tachine](#). And there's just pieces and chapters in that book that help me make sense of all the pieces that I mentioned today and how to reimagine by committing an active refusal of the neoliberal university and the way that we can dream up something different as an Indigenous project. And so those are just a few of the many pieces that I continually come back to, that I'm always reading and always citing. And I highly recommend.

Alex: Listeners should be aware that, one, Dr. Nicolazzo literally covered her face as her co-edited volume was being mentioned.

Cynthia: Blushing.

Alex: As if she is not a prolific scholar in writing all the things. But anyway.

[Crossover talk]

Z: Well, shout out to friend of the pod Board of Contributors member Amanda Tachine, who, yeah, is just a joy to work and live with. I literally was just talking with Amanda last week, and realizing that we've known each other almost two decades now. It's like, feels wild to say it, but that's what this season of life kind of allows for, right? As you age, you realize: oh, there are people that I've been alongside for this long. And yeah, I'll have to, I'll have to check out that Community as Resistance book. I haven't read it yet, so I'm really excited to check it out. Oh, yes. Yes, I love it. Okay. For people who obviously will not see this video, Cynthia just held it up. So now I have a visual of what the book looks like when I look for it. Cynthia, thanks so much for taking a round about campus with us. This was so fun and, yeah, just rewarding and, like, a delicious little conversation. So I appreciate the chance to catch up with you.

Cynthia: Thank you so much. I loved spending this time with you. And I hope we get to have more little chats like this: les dos chismosas.

Alex: Hey listeners, we've officially wrapped up season two of the podcast. And believe it or not, we're already recording season three.

Z: For season three of the Pod, we're doing a book club. Specifically, we're reading [Ashley Neese's Permission to Rest: Revolutionary Practices for Healing, Empowerment, and Collective Care](#).

Alex: That's right. And we will definitely put that whole title in the show notes because we know it is a little bit long. But we're gonna discuss the lessons of the book and how we can think more about rest in higher education, student affairs work, especially in this current moment in the field and profession.

Z: Girl down, that is true. So we will be back with season three in the spring of 2025. So if you want to prepare for those conversations, you can find the book wherever you get your books.

Alex: Maybe your public library or local bookstore even.

Z: And we will also be doing a little giveaway with some copies of the book too. So stay tuned for more on how you might be able to win a free copy and get it shipped directly to you. But enough about next season. For now, let's celebrate the fact that we've officially wrapped up season two. By, first of all, saying, congratulations, Alex. Great job.

Alex: Congratulations, Z. We've made it.

Z: We did make it. Now off to the credits.

Alex: The 'Round About Campus podcast is audio engineered by the pretty spectacular tech team in the College of Education at the University of Arizona, including Jason Aragón and Erica Lmuth.

Z: Mary Ellen Wade designed our logo. Roman Christiaens helps us pull together the show notes and transcripts. Thanks also to Cynthia for joining us today. You know, I really kind of, yeah, love the way that we were thinking around some of the same ideas on what the season looks like. And I think sometimes the idea of humanization can get a little clunky in education. It becomes kind of a hollow term that people like to use, to virtue signal, but not really do the work. But I was really kind of, heartened to have a different sort of conversation with Cynthia and really think about how, we're not only seeing that done through the magazine, but also we're engaging in that process together with each other. So, yeah, it's kind of a nice little, nice little conversation to have. As always, I'm Z, and I'm recording today from the ancestral and current lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation, which is home to the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui peoples.

Alex: And I'm Alex, recording today from the ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute nations and peoples.

Z: You can send questions or reflections about this episode to aboutcampusmag@gmail.com, and we'll see you 'round for our third season in January/February 2025. Until then, we're hoping you find some rest and relaxation during what we know is a busy period for all who work in education. Ciao, ciao!

Alex: Bye!