Two Profs and the Prez Transcript S8E1



Tenisha Baca (<u>00:11</u>):

Hello and welcome to two Profs in a Pod. I'm Tenisha.

Beth Eyres (00:14):

I'm Beth.

(00:15):

Tenisha Baca

We are faculty and faculty developers at Glendale Community College in Arizona, and we like talking about teaching, learning and other stuff.

(00:26):

Today we are going to visit with GCCS president, Dr. Tiffany Hernandez. Tiffany has been president at GCC for one year. Previously she served as the Vice President for Student Success at San Antonio College, and as San Antonio College's accreditation liaison to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Tiffany holds a bachelor's degree in Russian language from the University of Arizona, a Juris doctorate from the University of Utah College of Law, and a doctorate of Philosophy and criminal justice from Texas State University. And she is a veteran of the United States Air Force. Welcome, Tiffany. Yes,

Tenisha Baca (01:10):

Welcome.

Tiffany Hernandez (<u>01:11</u>):

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

Tenisha Baca (01:12):

Yes, we're glad you're here. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to have a conversation with us today. So thank you and we have so many questions for you when it comes to just you. I find you so interesting. So I've been so excited for this conversation. When we first signed on, I was like, I want to learn more. You just seem so interesting. So that's is going to go ahead, Beth. Beth Eyres (01:37):

Yeah, we did have questions about Russian language.

Tenisha Baca (01:41):

Got it.

Beth Eyres (<u>01:42</u>):

Because that seems a little rare and unique. And then I just wanted to know if you did things like Reed Crime and Punishment in Russian

Tiffany Hernandez (01:56):

Or what was going on with me right

(01:59):

In the mid eighties, which was really toward the end of the Cold War, but still very much in the Cold War. The Soviet Union was still a country. The Berlin Wall had not yet come down. There was just a lot of things happening politically and as a young student, 17 year olds in college, those are the things that I was thinking about when I started school. And so I needed two years of a foreign language as part of my degree requirement. I thought Russian would be interesting and I loved it, but I stayed with it because I had joined the US Air Force as a cadet and had taken all of the exams that you take where they tried to decide what job or career you would do. I clearly was not going to be a pilot or navigator. I don't have the vision or the aptitude to do that. So really at the time, the two big options given the Cold War situation were you could be an intelligence officer or you could be a, so the job of the Mosier is to sit inside a missile silo and somewhere in North Dakota and wait around to get the order to go ahead and flip the switch and ignite a missile and watch it and which sounded horrible honestly.

(03:14):

So the advice that I got from the detachment folks there in ROTC was, well, you're taking Russian language. If you continue and make that your major, you'll be more competitive for a intelligence officer slot. And I said, absolutely, put me in there. So I just continued on and those are the kinds of decisions you make maybe when you're 17 or 18

Beth Eyres (<u>03:34</u>):

Plus.

Tiffany Hernandez (<u>03:34</u>):

It was interesting. So I continued on and I really loved that. And then went on to be an intelligence officer in the US Air Force and worked with a team of Russian linguists in Japan and then later Korea. So it was just really interesting professional direction that I hadn't planned on, but I'm really glad I got to do. And I did not read Crime and Punishment in the original Russian, although I've read it in English. I did read a lot of Russian story or fairytales, I'm not sure why that was. Maybe it's, they're easy. Speaker 4 (04:02):

They're on an

Tiffany Hernandez (04:03):

Early reading level, which were fun, but that's as much. And then I have almost forgotten everything that I learned really. So unfortunately I have zero skills left in that space. I mean, not zero. I can still read the alphabet and understand some words, but it's been a minute

Beth Eyres (<u>04:23</u>):

Since

Tiffany Hernandez (04:23):

I graduated from college. So that's my sad, weird story about Russian language.

Tenisha Baca (04:29):

And I was even thinking about that. I was like, oh, is Tiffany going to drop some Russian right now? I'm not pass. I think that's awesome. I think that's awesome that you had that trajectory and had the ability to serve in that role. So my next question is what can you tell us about your military intelligence career? Can you tell us anything about your,

Beth Eyres (<u>04:50</u>):

Because we have a theory that you're still an intelligence officer and this is your cover job. Tiffany Hernandez (04:55):

That's right. Well, my mom thinks I was, and still I'm a spy. That's her working theory and she's not giving up on it. I'm like, well, I'm the most boring spy ever imagine. But sure. Well, that was, like I said, an option, a career option in the Air Force. And what I really did was signals intelligence. So any information that we collect through signals through radio and that kind of stuff that would be collected and analyzed and then created, we'd create reports, intelligence reports about what people were doing, who we were listening to, and that's kind of what you do in the signals intelligence field. So my job really was as a people leader, I had 150 people who were either Russian linguists or they knew Morse code or they were doing some other type of signals collection on a team that worked four day shifts, four mid shifts and four swing shifts and then four days off. So we were constantly rotating the eight hours of the day that were working. We were in northern Japan, so there's not a whole lot to do in northern Japan. So it was really interesting. I learned a lot about leading people, especially young people. There were quite a few airmen right out of tech school themselves.

(06:13):

I had to figure out how to handle disputes when two of them happened to be dating and one of 'em went out and broke up with the other one and then stole the spark plugs out of her car so that she couldn't go anywhere and ended up getting arrested and they're in the rig and I had to show up at 2:00 AM Just stories like that about what do you do as a young adult when you're in charge of other young adults who are just making young adult decisions. So it was a really good learning experience for me about how to be empathetic and learn about people's lives and what their intentions were and how to help them move forward because ultimately I wanted everyone on my team to be successful. So that's some of the things I did. The military intelligence piece I can't talk a lot about, although honestly it would probably be really boring at this point because it's so old. Things change and priorities shift and whatever I was working on is not interesting anymore probably to the US government, I'm guessing, or I'm still a spy either way.

Beth Eyres (07:20):

So those are some interesting educational beginnings and work beginnings. And so your path to here seems kind of interesting. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Tiffany Hernandez (07:34):

Yes. I don't think my path to the presidency is probably common, although I don't know everybody's path. I certainly can compare it to the people that I know here at Maricopa and at other places I worked. So after I left separated from the US Air Force, I went to law school because I really just wanted to go to law school. It just seemed really challenging and interesting to me. I didn't really know if I wanted to practice law or if I did what type of law, but I wanted the opportunity to go back to school. So I did, and I finished up my law school degree here at Arizona State and was able to work with the House Rules Committee as an intern. So I spent a year learning about what's going on with the state legislature, and when I completed that, they offered me a job and then introduced me to some other folks.

(<u>08:28</u>):

And one of those people was essentially someone in the Maricopa County attorney's office who said, instead of staying here in the state legislature, why don't you try being a deputy county attorney that might interest you? I applied for the job and did that. So I did that for a couple of years before I moved from Arizona to Texas and really knew at that point I did not want to practice law, particularly because I had really young children, and it's not a really good career when you have really young children. You're just always working constantly and the hours are long, and it just really wasn't good for me and my husband as a family. So at that point, I decided, let me take that law school degree and the couple of years of experience in criminal law that I had, and maybe I'll do some teaching.

(09:12):

So I applied for an adjunct faculty position, did that for a little while, and then applied for a full-time faculty position at San Antonio College, and within almost immediately fell head over heels in love with the community college and the community college mission. And I thought, this is it. This is where I want to be. This is what I want to do. I taught for eight years and then I went back to school again. So again and again going back to school as an adult. So I really have a lot of empathy and support for our adult students coming back from whatever careers they had or trying to upskill or reskill into something new. So again, had a lot of kids, went back to school, got my PhD, and decided this is really an opportunity for me. I can continue on with my research in criminal justice, which I was really interested in at the time, look for a tenure track position at a university maybe, or I can go and do some stuff in administration, which I also felt passionately about because I wanted to further the motion of the community college in San Antonio where I was.

(10:12):

So a dean position came open. I had a really great set of mentors who encouraged me to apply. I did. I ended up being hired and then I just went from there. So I served as a dean and then a vice president, and then this position to come home to Arizona came open and I jumped at it. And I'm still teaching, by the way, I'm teaching one criminal justice course for Rio Sato, just to kind of stay in the classroom, make sure I'm really grounded with the student experience and the faculty experience in particular. Rio Sato has a little bit of a different style, for lack of a better word than we would have necessarily here, but I think it still keeps me grounded in that both of those experiences, which is important as a leader here at the college. So that's kind of how I ended up here. I don't know if anyone could replicate that or would want to, but I'm really, really happy that I did that ended up working out like that.

Tenisha Baca (11:07):

And you've worn so many hats, different hats as far as being in law, being in education, being in serving our country, learning Russian. I mean, there's so much that you've done and I think that's really interesting because you haven't really had a linear path, but I can definitely see how those different places that you stopped contributed to where you're at today or some of the skill sets that you would need today. Yeah, absolutely. So the next question is, now that you've been here for a year, is there anything about this role that surprises you or that you didn't expect?

Tiffany Hernandez (11:49):

I don't know if this is a huge surprise. It's not a revelation, but it's sort of a day to day, I guess, mini revelation, which is no matter how hard the day is, no matter how many challenges or just frustrating experiences that we have, and we all have them in our work, every single time I walk on this campus or I open my email or I talk to somebody, something amazing and inspiring happens. There is no other place that I can think of that has so much work going on in so many different areas by people who are just truly committed to education and the social mobility work and the work of making sure everyone in our community has access to a good education to be able to fulfill whatever dreams they want to fulfill. It's an entire organization just focused on that, and every time I turn around, I'm seeing or hearing about some exciting idea that someone has executed or a student.

(12:50):

I just ran into a student on the way here who I had met with pizza with the president, and she was showing me, she's like, I'm really nervous for midterms, but I went and I made a book. Our library is hosting some bookmaking sessions, and so she showed me the book and she was excited about it, and she was heading back to go hit the books again. I mean, just day after day, hour after hour, these stories and cool information comes across my desk or I run into someone and when I'm walking around or someone on the phone, so I just say, it's the best job ever. If you want to be inspired or if you want to have the motivation to be inspired through some of the harder days, then just work at Glendale Community College. The people are extraordinary unmatched. The mission is being accomplished. I just can't speak highly enough about that. I don't know if I expected that. I hoped for that, and it came true. Yeah,

Tenisha Baca (<u>13:44</u>):

That's awesome. Yeah, thank you. Thank you for sharing. Beth Eyres (13:48):

Okay, so our next question is a little bit about goals. And so we want to ask you what you're hoping to accomplish over a particular time period. And I don't know as a leader how far out you set your goals. So I'll let you define that and then just share with us some things that you're hoping to accomplish. Tiffany Hernandez (14:11):

So I set my goals in the usual, what you would usually see in a higher education setting. So three to five years, and then I set them in 10 years and beyond. So what do we want to accomplish in the next three years? We have a new strategic plan that's about to be rolled out. If anyone listening has an opportunity to who's working at GCC has an opportunity to review it and provide some feedback, we'd love to hear it just about ready to go. And you'll see the priorities listed there as well as a new priority, I guess, for lack

of a better word, that we added this year, which was really building capacity for that 10 years out thinking.

(<u>14:58</u>):

So the priorities, without spoiling anything, George, Greg would probably, sorry, sorry, George, if you, but really we're looking at closing equity gaps in student achievement, and that's on us. We have students who aren't performing as well as others. I would love for us to get to a point, and that's really my goal here at GCC, so that you cannot predict a student's success based on gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, that every student has an equal opportunity. And I'll say equitable opportunity because we meet students where they are and we provide the resources and the support and the access to learning that gets them to where they want to be. So that's something we'll continually chip away at. I'm hoping to make considerable progress while I'm here for however long I'm here. That's really my goal. We also are looking at opportunities to really be clear and intentional to our community, the community we serve that we're Hispanic serving institutions. So what's the intentionality there? We aren't a Hispanic serving institution by default because so many students come here, but because we have decided to create programming and support in a way that really helps our Hispanic students thrive, and in doing that, all students will also thrive.

(<u>16:23</u>):

There's a lot of work around that I would very much like us to focus on, because that is our student population, that's the community that we serve. That's where the United States demographically is moving as well.

(16:34):

And we want to make sure that Glendale and the West Valley are primed for talent to come from within our communities rather than pulling people from all over the country to come in and do the paying high need jobs that we have, but really just so that people can be fully developed as humans. And I really think education is a huge part of that. So I want that opportunity. The long term in terms of setting up my 10 years from here, thinking is really creating a culture of inquiry and curiosity that is built upon a foundation of tools, ways in which we work, really capacity building around futures thinking. So the idea of futures thinking is there are multiple futures available. There's no way for us to know which one of those will come to

(17:29):

Pass,

(17:30):

But we can definitely identify a future we want to see for the college and then start putting things in place so that in 10 years, that future won't happen to us from somewhere else because of someone else's decisions, but we'll create the future that we want for the college. So that's some really far or long-term thinking. There's a lot of psychology around, once you get to the tenure point in your future thinking, you're able to maybe disassociate your current emotions and thinking

(<u>18:05</u>):

And just really see a much bigger, broader opportunity. And so if we can get there as a group of colleagues to think, okay, most of the time we are doing our work for today. We're working with our students today. We're doing the things that need to be done today for continuous improvement over the next several years, but sometimes we break off and we take some time and space to do that. Really big futures thinking around what we want for GCC in our community 10 years, 20 years from now, and what do we need to start doing to be able to achieve that now? Because the future of teaching and learning is going to look very different than it does today, right?

Tenisha Baca (18:42):

Absolutely. The

Tiffany Hernandez (18:42):

Future of the community college campus will probably look a lot different than it does today. So I would love for us to be part of the development of what we want that future to be, rather than wait for forces around us to just kind of by default, make that decision for us.

Beth Eyres (19:03):

Thank you. I like how you delineated out to the different time structures in that goal setting kind of space,

Tiffany Hernandez (19:15):

I think. So it's hard for me to be in both spaces at the same time. Well, really impossible Beth Eyres (19:21):

Because

Tiffany Hernandez (19:21):

There are things we do now, and then I get impatient for that future. I'm like, no, no, this is future thinking. We'll set that aside for now. Be mindful of it at all times. But what do we have to do now to get to where we want to be to reduce those equity gaps, for example, to really look at opportunities to kind of shift, how do we resource maybe ourselves? So all that happens at the same time, but not at the exact same time.

Beth Eyres (19:48):

It makes me think a little bit about backwards design, planning for teaching. What's the total end and then what are the steps

Tiffany Hernandez (19:56):

To get there,

Beth Eyres (<u>19:56</u>):

Sort of to get there.

Tiffany Hernandez (19:57):

That's absolutely only you think what sounds ridiculous? Okay, now let's build back from ridiculous. Because who knew you'd be driving around Phoenix with self-driving cars everywhere. You're ubiquitous now. That happened, it seems like to me that happened overnight,

Tenisha Baca (20:21):

But

Tiffany Hernandez (20:21):

People have been planning that for a long time and 10 years ago or whatever, it would've been just preposterous

Beth Eyres (20:28):

To

Tiffany Hernandez (20:28):

Me. But it's not, and it's happening. And I feel like as leaders in higher education, what are we seeing? What are some of the signals we're seeing about how people will experience learning and teaching Speaker 4 (20:42):

Moving

Tiffany Hernandez (20:42):

Forward? It's exciting.

Tenisha Baca (20:44):

It is. It's really exciting. I think that's awesome. All right, so up next, we know you're quite a reader. What books have you read lately that you really liked?

Tiffany Hernandez (20:55):

Well, I brought my list. Yes. I love the list. Well, actually, this is one book that I just finished, which I loved. It's called Finding Margaret Fuller,

(21:04):

Allison Pataki. So Margaret Fuller was a contemporary of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne and that group. And she lived in that area, I guess Boston ish area where they lived and was writing and researching. But because she was a woman, she really did not have a path forward that didn't include a man and a husband, essentially a husband. And so I think what she really wanted to do was, this is historical fiction, but it's mostly historical, right? Because we can't ask her, or we don't have any really, a whole lot of notes about her life because she passed away very young in her early thirties. She drowned just off the coast of New York, I think. Wow. I mean, people were watching the boat sink and no one could rescue people on the boat. So she was just lost. But she's just a feminist, incredibly outside the box thinker, incredibly independent and unusual for her day, and by all accounts, much smarter and a much better writer than Emerson and Hawthorne and held salons and did so many interesting things. So I'm just fascinated by her and women like her, and I'm glad there's some records, a lot of letters that she wrote back and forth with those guys and that kind of stuff. So I wish we knew more. I wish she'd lived longer. I thought that was interesting. And then my list of two read. So I'm rereading Dracula. My Bram Stoker. It's spooky season. And what else would you read? I'm reading a book called Quiet Fire, Emily Dickinson's, life and Poetry.

(22:47):

So I dunno why. I'm just really interested in Emily Dickinson lately. And then I have started, but I don't know if I'm going to commit to rereading Lonesome Dove by Mary McMurtry, who I just Speaker 4 (23:01):

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Love
Tiffany Hernandez (23:02):
His writing
Speaker 4 (23:04):
And
Tiffany Hernandez (23:04):
It's such a fun story, but also incredibly long. So I don't know. Get to it. Yeah, maybe I'll just dip in and
out. Those are the three books on my nightstand right now that, well, maybe not Dracula. Dracula I have
to read during the daytime and then put the book in the freezer at night and then pull it back out,
because I have a wild imagination. I don't want to be spooked, spooked in the middle of the night. But
yeah, that's what I'm reading. Yeah,
Beth Eyres (23:34):
I love that. I can't wait to tell my gothic lit students that you're reading Dracula.
Tiffany Hernandez (23:38):
Nice. Well, if you all have recommendations for me, I'll take 'em. Yeah. As far as
Tenisha Baca (23:44):
Spooky
Tiffany Hernandez (23:44):
Books, spooky
Tenisha Baca (23:45):
Books,
Beth Eyres (23:47):
That's one of Tenisha's favorite.
Tenisha Baca (23:49):
We may have to take this off the podcast because we're going to have some conversations, but I have
also started my spooky reads. So I just finished Bird Box, which is on Netflix, but I haven't seen it, but I
read it. So if you're into those types of books, that one was really good. Have you read
Tiffany Hernandez (24:08):
That one? Yes,
Tenisha Baca (24:09):
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Knows. So good. That was good. I have also not seen the Seen it. I don't think I will watch the series because in my head of what it looks like, I don't want to lose
Tenisha Baca (24:18):

She knows. She

Tiffany Hernandez (24:10):

That. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I like having control of what I see as opposed to actually seeing it. I will read a horror book, but actually seeing it on screen just it makes me so uncomfortable. But yeah, I love horror

is one of my favorite genres. Stephen King's, one of my favorite authors. So we have lots to talk about. Yes, definitely's. Okay. Like I said, that's going to be off the mic conversation.

Tiffany Hernandez (24:44):

Right.

Tenisha Baca (24:44):

So the next one is talk to us about your sneaker game and don't hold back.

Tiffany Hernandez (24:49):

Yes. Is this from the graduation ceremony? Yes. Right. So I had seen another president, I'm not sure where she might be even at Howard University at this point. But at any rate, another president who had just the coolest sneakers with her regalia. And I thought, man, you're standing up a lot. Why would I wear boring black heels or something like that when I'm going to wear comfortable cool gaucho red and black sneakers. So I went out and found those. They're Adidas. They're pretty cool, honestly. So I'll just wear 'em for graduation. Yes. Otherwise, right now I've maybe in the spooky season bent, but I've really sorted leaned more back into my Duck Martin phase. So I've gotten some new Doc Martins out there. I'll be pulling out of the closet as soon as the weather gets down to where I can wear them comfortably. So I'm going to switch from my sneaker game back to my old eighties Doc Martin, early nineties. Right. That's when I'm not sure. That's when I was wearing them.

Tenisha Baca (25:53):

Yeah. I noticed them when, because our, for those who don't know, our graduation was at our football stadium, and it's huge. It is ginormous. So going from your car to where you need to go for graduation is a bit of a trek. So when I saw Tiffany with her sneakers, I think I gave you a conference, I was like, oh my gosh, I love your sneakers. They were so cute. They were in our school colors. And I'm like, that is the smartest thing. And I honestly think subconsciously, that's one of the reasons why I fully committed and went all in on wearing sneakers in the classroom. I'm wearing them right now because I was like, and they're Adidas, so I'm working on my shoe games. So that's why I was like, oh my goodness, look at our president with her shoes.

Tiffany Hernandez (26:37):

And I've seen that style, I guess that fashion, I don't even know fashiony stuff, but where women in particular wearing suits with sneakers, that is the best idea. Let's throw out our heels. They're awful. I trip all the time. They're uncomfortable. They're bad for your feet, they're bad for your back. Forget it. Let's just all wear some cool sneakers. So I'm on board.

Tenisha Baca (26:59):

Yes. I love it. Yeah. Is there anything else else you wanted, wanted to talk about or mention? Tiffany Hernandez (27:05):

Well, I want to call out an invitation to anyone who's listening, who's working here at GCC that there's going to be a lot of really cool work happening over this year as we roll into our 60th year

(<u>27:21</u>):

Around how are we organized and designed? In other words, how are we designing? Well, really organizing ourselves to best serve our students, to make sense for them when they come in that they

will recognize this is the group of people who's here to support me. I'm interested in engineering. Here's where my advisor is. Here's where my faculty live. Here's where other students who have the same interest in me hang out. How can we really improve just the way that we present ourselves and we're accessible to be able to just be so simple and easy to navigate for students

(28:05):

And family members and parents and everybody who's interested in education. So I think we're going to do a lot of really great work around that. So I would invite anyone who's interested in that in particular, I know Karina SoCal Tinsley, our faculty senate president, sent out a call out to see if anyone who might be interested in that work, faculty Senate's going to be working on that with department chairs. If you are interested in the futures thinking work and want to help create an innovation hub, and what does that look like and how often do we meet and how can we share out our ideas, maybe even pilot something new and different and unique. And just in the preposterous realm, which 10 years from now will just seem like everyday work. Talk to me, talk to Aaron free in the Wellness, health and Wellness Department. We're doing some preliminary work around that. I would just say keep your eyes open, keep your emails open. Look for opportunities to engage. If you are fully engaged and you're doing your good work, then keep at it and don't feel pressure to add something new. But if you have a little room on your plate and you're looking for something interesting to do, please look for opportunities around the college this next year because there are always

Speaker 4 (29:18):

Plenty.

Tiffany Hernandez (29:19):

But the more engagement, the more ideas, the more voices, the more perspectives that we have, the better we will be overall. And then lastly, I'll put in a final plug for our 60th anniversary. So for anyone who's listening, GCC is about to celebrate its 60th year of being an institution, which is really exciting. There'll be a lot of really cool events that are going to happen all year long. The idea is to celebrate the GCC community, celebrate our students, and really invite the community to come in and experience all the great things that we have here. So I invite everyone, if you're interested in being a part of that celebration, again, keep your emails and your eyes and ears open, or just contact myself or the president's office will have lots of cool information coming out.

Beth Eyres (<u>30:04</u>):

Will there be cake?

Tiffany Hernandez (30:05):

There will be lots of cake.

Beth Eyres (30:06):

Okay. There

Tiffany Hernandez (30:07):

Will always be

Tenisha Baca (30:07):

Cake. Yes, I love cake.

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Beth Eyres (30:10):

Wonderful.

Tenisha Baca (30:11):

I'm thinking about it now that you

Beth Eyres (30:13):

Mentioned it. Okay. I'm so glad you added that, Tiffany.

Tenisha Baca (30:19):
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That was a great conversation and we are so glad that Tiffany was able to join us on that day. If you enjoy listening to this conversation and want to join in, connect with us on X, formerly known as Twitter. Follow at two profs in a pod, or leave a comment on our blog at two profs in a pod.blog spot.com. Remember, spell out the number two other ways to show your support. Subscribe in your favorite podcast app. Write a review on Apple Podcast, or tell your colleagues about the show. Two Props in a pod is hosted by Beth Ayres, English faculty and Tenisha Baca Communication Faculty. The show is brought to you by the Center for Teaching Learning and Engagement at Glendale Community College in Arizona.