

‘Round About Campus Episode Transcript
Interview with Stephanie Waterman (Season 1, Episode 1)

Z: All right, Welcome to the About Campus podcast. I'm the editor of *About Campus*, Z Nicolazzo, calling in from the ancestral and current lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation, which is the home to the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui Peoples. I'm also the co-hostess of the About Campus podcast, and I'm joined today by my other co-hostess, Alex.

Alex: Hey, y'all. It's Alex here, recording from the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute Nations and Peoples. I'm excited as always to be with my co-host Z today and really excited to get into our conversation with Stephanie in a bit.

But before that we always have a little segment we start off our episodes with. And because I'm talking right now, I'm going to be the one to pick this thing.

Z: Oh, I'm so nervous. Nervous.

Alex: But this segment is called ‘Give Me Your Best’, a short interest segment where we talk about our best things, people, things we're reading, talking about. But I want to start with something a little bit sweeter. Z, give me your best ice cream flavor.

Z: Java chip, all the way. You know, when I was a kid, I did not like the smell of coffee. It really grossed me out. But I have grown to love it. I love a Java chip. Little coffee, little choco. Real good. Real good. What about you?

Alex: I have to say, chocolate mint has really been growing on me over the last couple of years. Mint has taken on a new place in my life in many of the sweets that I consume. And my old fashioned, always go-to, though, old reliable, is chocolate chip cookie dough. I mean, who doesn't want the best two things in the world in one thing, which is ice cream and cookie dough.

Z: True.

Alex: So, that is definitely my go to.

Z: You know, mint. Mint can go one of two ways for me. And it's never a middle ground. It's always really great or it's really kind of medicinal and fake tasting, you know? But a chocolate chip cookie dough is just, yeah, a good old standby.

Alex: I mean. And who doesn't have, I mean I have certainly memories of sitting with my grandmother when we were making holiday cookies and getting to lick a little bit of batter, you know. Even though it's perhaps not recommended, it's still a good time.

Z: You know, health and well-being, be damned. Might as well just have that batter.

So we are excited today for the first episode, the first ever episode of ‘Round About Campus. We are going to be joined by a good friend, I think. Doctor Stephanie Waterman, who many

people know. She needs little introduction, but we will certainly give her an introduction. She's joyous, she's wonderful, she's incredible. And I'm really excited for us to be able to chat with her, particularly to think about what it means to be good company and to think about the strategic imperative that ACPA has been using for the last several years and which you actually played a part in creating, Alex.

Alex: Somehow, yes. A group of about eight of us gathered together in Detroit under Stephen John Quaye's great leadership and really sort of fleshed out the imperative I think in ways that helped to make it more legible, understandable to other people. So really excited about that work and really excited to talk about it with Stephanie today.

Z: Yeah. And maybe we'll even ask Stephanie what her favorite ice cream flavor is, you know? Yeah. Just to add in. Thanks for listening with us and will step out of the way so that we can get to the interview.

Alex: Today we are talking about the past and future of coloniality and decolonization in higher education work. And to do that, we've invited friend of the podcast, Dr. Stephanie Waterman, to join us today, which both of us are pretty really excited about. Dr. Stephanie Waterman, Onondaga Turtle Clan, is an associate professor at the University of Toronto in the Department of Leadership Higher and Adult Education in the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education, and coordinates the Student Development and Student Services in Higher Education program.

If that wasn't enough, she is also the academic advisor on Indigenous curriculum and education under the Vice President and Provost for the University of Toronto. Her research interests are First Nations/Native American college experiences, First Nations/Native Americans student affairs units, the role staff play in student retention, Indigenous methodologies, college transition and critical race theories. And she does them all really well.

She was recently awarded the ASHE Council on Ethnic Participation (CEP) Mildred E. Garcia Award for Exemplary Scholarship Senior Scholar and has co-edited a new book with Routledge entitled: *Developments Beyond the Asterisk: New Scholarship and Frameworks for Understanding Native Students in Higher Education*. Stephanie, Welcome to the 'Round About Campus podcast.

Stephanie: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm just still in shock about the ASHE CEP Award. I still can't believe it.

Alex: Awards can feel both really unbelievable sometimes, and it feels so right to me as well, I have to say.

Z: So I'll cosign that.

Alex: So Stephanie, before we get into the main part of our conversation, we opened this episode with a little banter and a little question that we hope that you will feel invited to answer as well. But what's your favorite ice cream flavor these days?

Stephanie: Mango. Mango ice cream. So I'm allergic to dairy, particularly cheese. So they have some good mango fake ice creams out there that are just so refreshing.

Z: I love that. I love that.

Stephanie: What's yours?

Z: I had said Java chip. Yeah.

Alex: Mine was chocolate chip cookie dough. Though I am slowly getting much more into chocolate mint as a go to flavor.

Stephanie: Yeah. It's peppermint mocha time, too.

Z: Yeah. See, this. This is apparently what the whole interview was going to be is just about different ice cream flavors that we could be enjoying.

Alex: Truly. Well, thanks for telling us about your favorite ice cream flavor. You know, we want to always start off with centering, being a little joyful in our conversations, but also having really good conversations about equity across all of these episodes.

And I want to ask you this first question that we've asked all of our guests or will ask all of our guests this season, which is: we're really focused on equity in higher education this season and using Marcia Baxter Magolda's idea of being good company with students. When you think about being good company alongside students, colleagues and others at this moment in higher education, what does that look like to you? Sound like? Feel like? Yeah, all that.

Stephanie: Okay, so I'm setting the standard here. No pressure.

Alex: No pressure.

Z: It's just a conversation, just between us three with, you know, however many people that want to listen, listening in.

Stephanie: So when I reflect back on that article, I remembered that it was a bike ride down a hill, and that there was a guide for them. And the first turn was scary for them. But they also saw an accident. So that guide immediately had the authority in the situation, right? So personal experience: the first turn was very scary. And then the accident really emphasized the knowledge that that guide had. So suddenly they're paying attention, right? And they knew it would be difficult.

So I don't know if when we go into higher ed that we think how difficult it will be. I know from my personal experience, I remember how difficult it was for me. So I was able to apply that when I work with students and work with others. But I think we all kind of fall into this profession. You know, people rarely go into undergrad and say, I'm going to be a student affairs professional, right? Something happens along the line and then they realize that they really

enjoy the field or the work. But I don't know if we think about how we're going to be that guide or how we could be that guide in a really difficult situation.

So in the article, that tour guide really was there to keep them alive. And in a way, we keep the students alive academically, maybe in different supports, emotionally, just listening. So for me, good company is really being accountable and listening. Listening really, really well. I know. I remember that the people who listened to me and they may not have been able to say, fix the situation or help me get into the course I needed. But the fact that they listened and didn't pass judgment and respecting where I was coming from was really important. So that listening, being in that good company of being able to listen to a student and not have stereotypes and judgments lead how you're going to be supporting that student. So, you know, being along their side.

Alex: Yeah, what I appreciate about that is a quote from an old colleague that used to say to me often, like the experience of being listened to is so close to the experience of being loved in that the two are almost indistinguishable from most people. That the idea that someone is invested in whatever you are saying or trying to convey is in fact a very loving act. So that's what I'm thinking about as you share that, Stephanie, often.

Stephanie: Yeah, that's hard to do. We have such limited time in our days and how much time we get to spend with students or with others, colleagues, faculty.

Alex: I wonder: what is being good company with Native students, faculty and staff in higher education look like in the context of this question? Is it about deeper listening? What? What is that for you about being good company, particularly with Native folks at this moment?

Stephanie: At this moment. So there are more of us now. We're more visible, both as students and faculty and researchers. So there's that understanding of how that can be a hypervisibility and how, yet we're still silenced. I think that having that similar experience. Being able to go to someone, even another faculty member or student affairs professional, who is a person of color or racialized or minoritized in some way who can say. Yeah, I've had a similar experience or that happened to me too—it's really important. Because very often, in my experience, people have said: that never happened to me. Well, okay. You're not really going to be able to help me if you're not understanding that this is a problem, and this does happen. So that validation of that experience.

So it's really interesting to be hyper visible and invisible at the same time. You know, some people just want to pummel you with questions about your Indigeneity and your history, and others just have a stereotype, and they're just not going to explore it at all and not develop those relationships.

Z: Yeah. I'm kind of sitting here thinking about the paradoxes and the tensions around hypervisibility and invisibility and, you know, how that can create kind of a tug and pull in terms of how people want to seek your expertise and or sublimate your expertise in various different contexts and across associations and the profession in various different contexts. So I appreciate you kind of talking with us about that. I think, you know, your response to that

question is as well as kind of the intro where we talked about this recent CEP award that you got and this new book that you've co-edited. It kind of leads to the second question, and we're wondering if you can talk to us a little bit about how you're making sense of the shifts in higher education and student affairs related to Indigenous knowledge systems and discussions around coloniality.

Stephanie: Yeah, how am I making sense of that? So one thing is: I never thought I'd see this. So to me, I'm kind of in awe, wow, people are talking about decoloniality and talking about Indigenous ways of knowing without saying: oh, that's myth or it doesn't really matter here. The thing I like about the discussions about decoloniality is that now we're really, well, I hope that we are. I hear talk about how we're interrogating the pace of the work. How much work we do in the field. How it's kind of accepted that we overwork and that you're always on and always attending to students and your colleagues instead of your own well-being. And, you know, we always say you have to take care of yourself first, but, you know, our staff's getting cut. You may not have the resources you used to have. People don't get replaced when they leave. So I think that's been real important to start that discussion about not just giving yourself all the time to this.

I also am impressed that we're talking about different ways of doing things. And maybe giving students a little more leeway and giving ourselves a little more leeway. That's really hard to do when you may have an administration that isn't thinking about that. They're thinking about the bottom dollar. And unfortunately in enrollments. That's something that really upsets me is I only have so much I can give and my fellow faculty members only have so much to give. And, you know: please increase your enrollments. I mean, I think I've heard that at every single institution I've worked in. There's only so much I could do. We all need to be healthy; there's only so much we can produce. Yeah, I think it's been a very toxic environment in the field for a long time, and this has given us the opportunity to discuss that.

Z: Yeah, absolutely. Your conversation about time just brought me back to last week when I had a meeting. One meeting with a faculty peer in a different department on campus and another meeting with a student. Both of whom said: I'm not feeling well, but let's just keep this meeting. And I was like, that's interesting. Why are we meeting if you're not feeling well? Because I'm sure that we can just do this work later. And also thinking, too, about, you know, for myself, it has not been easy to slow down. It's actually taken some really tragic stuff in my life to happen to help me slow down. So after the death of my mother is when I really started to slow down and think about time differently. And so it's interesting to think about how slowing down reverberates through my practice now. How I try to invite other people to slow down and what some of the resistance to that slowing down is. Not because they don't want to, but because they've been socialized in, like you mentioned, a fairly toxic culture around speed and production.

Stephanie: Yeah. We need to be accountable to ourselves and to our students as people and human beings, all of us. We're all human beings. When I had my medical leave, everything continued. And I think that was a really important thing for me to learn. I mean, I always say I knew that. But there wasn't hard, black and white. The world continued. Somebody taught my

courses. My students were advised, things kept going. And so, yeah, being able to take that time and I felt really cared for in being able to take that time.

Another thing is that relationality and accountability. So the universities as a whole are always expanding, and it really bothers me to see buildings getting torn down and new buildings going up. To me, that's really violence against the environment. You know, they dig a hole. What's being destroyed when they dig a hole. Things to live in the ground. We need the grass. When they make concrete, it's a terrible producer of pollutants, and those things aren't really considered when universities expand and build a new building. And there's a lot of buildings that can be renovated, which is also producing pollutants. And there's just so much we can do with the amount of students we have and the amount of faculty and staff. But that, that's something that's really bothered me. You know, I always bring up the climate and water, but that's another thing with Indigenous knowledge systems and decolonial thought is: what is the impact of expansion? What is the impact of building a new building or a new parking lot? Can we have more transit or some other ways instead of paving things over? But that's something I think about a lot, especially here in Toronto, where the building is just out of control. I'm sure city planners in the province love the fact that things are expanding and buildings are going up. To me, it just, it just hurts.

Z: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I appreciate your call back to the land and to the water, because I think that those things are vital for life. Not only just for us, but for other people. So it's, I think, it's such an important reminder to think beyond production and literally think about livingness, right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah, yeah. In many ways because production is always going to beget more production. Like, I'm thinking a lot, Stephanie, about this idea of expansion and how, you know, the amateur historian in me goes back to Kerr's idea of the multiversity, that the university should be everything to everyone or most things to most people. And that is always going to be an expansive project, which in some ways is quite harmful to the environment, even as people sort of, you know, even at my own institution, as we pursue more LEED certifications and greener buildings. But there's still an environmental cost to even creating those things, right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Alex: So I'm thinking about a lot right now... And I want to focus us in because I think an article I think is, very safe to say, that Z I think about a lot is the way that a lot of your work there's [*this piece in the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*](#), I think we're both thinking of. But more broadly, your work points to the ways that well, you mean campus in getting distance from the student experience actually promotes the thriving of Indigenous students. How do you think about or talk to student affairs practitioners about this dynamic? [Especially] as many of them are going to say, like, no student should be here, they should live in our halls, they should do these practices that we think have a lot of impact on them, but it should be done in the boundaries of a campus.

Stephanie: Right. Well, wherever an Indigenous student or any student needs to succeed is in the academic classroom, really. So we can concentrate on making those academic departments more supportive of all students. So maybe that department secretary who a student sees the first time when they come in to see a faculty member could be, I don't want to say trained, but more educated in student services. I think that would be really helpful.

I know that a lot of student affairs offices want to keep the students busy on campus, but it's not for everyone and some people can't afford it. I mean, there are a zillion reasons why a student isn't participating in student activities or living on campus. There's a zillion reasons why. I think that's just something we have to understand and live with and not try to force this. I'm using air quotes for podcast people the "college experience." You know, people talk about the "college experience." Well, what is that? And that's really for a certain population that can afford to live on campus and not work. And yet, a lot of students think of that when they go to university. Or their parents do. But so how could we have meaningful activities on campus during the week or during the day or support students who need to go back?

Alex: Yeah, I think a lot about even many ideas folks have of, like, you must in some ways detach from where you are coming from in order to be more fully engaged, quote unquote, "here" when that actually may not be a success strategy for many students. Many students may actually have deep attachments to their prior communities or communities in which they're coming from that actually will enhance their success more than hinder it.

Stephanie: Right. So that's meeting the student where they're coming from, right? It's to value what they're bringing into the classroom.

Z: Yeah.

Alex: Totally.

Z: I'm thinking too about just shifting some words around, too. I mean Stephanie, you were talking about the notion of the college experience. Who is that for? To what ends are rethinking about the college experience? What if we thought instead about a college experience or about college experiences that then decenter this notion of a residential college, which I think implicitly has in it a notion of a four year education at a particular type of institution?

Yeah, I think there are all these things that we can start to expand and start to explore beyond this particular physical environment that folks have always already been engaging in, particularly marginalized and multiply marginalized communities because they know what they need and have been finding what they need for years. Oftentimes in spite of universities and colleges saying otherwise.

Right? I mean, I think the one of the things that you alluded to, Alex, earlier, I think, was this notion of High Impact Practices. Like, where is home-going as a high impact practice? It doesn't exist. And also we know from research, yours thankfully, and other people's research that home-going is actually a really important strategy of success for a lot of First Nation and Native students.

Stephanie: Right. And Symphony Oxendine, one of her students, did a study about sense of belonging. And I think it was with LGBTQ+ populations. But the findings of that study was there were pockets of sense of belonging. On campus, off campus that this building...and I hope that this person publishes on that, because that's really important to start thinking about where are the pockets that students feel comfortable that we can start supporting and really thinking about in a student services way.

Z: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I wonder if that may even lead us to this next question, Stephanie. What do you wish people asked themselves and or reflected on more in relation to equity work?

Stephanie: I have a list.

Z: Oh! We're ready for this list!

Alex: I'm ready.

Z: Alright!

Stephanie: The first question is, who are they doing this for? Are you in the way or supporting? Did someone ask you to help? Are you helping in the way you were asked to? And the last one is what privilege do you have or what power do you hold that could best support the people?

Z: I love those questions. I love those questions. I hear answerability, I hear relationality, I hear some deep and important check ins around our own desires around how we're positioned, how're positioning other people, what that means. And I hear an invitation to also do some unlearning and r learning through that process of these questions as well. I think those are really, yeah, powerful. Really powerful questions. So...

What are you— Alex, I see you...pod listeners will not see this, but I see Alex on Zoom just giving the Alex contemplation face. If folks know Alex, you'll know this particular face. But what are those questions bringing to the fore for you friend.

Alex: Oh gosh. So much. I think...I mean all of them, I think that every question I was like, "Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah." But I think the one I am sitting with and thinking and reflecting deeply on right now is "are you helping in the way that was being asked?" Right? Because I think my entry into this work, into this field, is that at foremost it's a helping profession. Like I think there is a lot of other work that we do, but to me that's such a core part of higher ed and student affairs work. And I think oftentimes we're trained to help in ways that we've been helped and trained in ways that center our ego in how we help others. And I often have reflected on in my own training about, like, am I helping people in the way they want to be helped, right? And not not for some I know better than right. Like, yeah, all three of us have gone through student affairs and higher ed programs. We have been trained to know how to think about different people, their needs, all of that stuff. That's not to discount any of that knowledge that we have, but it is to...or, and it is to say, how are we entering into a relationship

with a person where our two perspectives are equivalent rather than some form of hierarchy of one knows better than how to help the other, right? And so I'm sitting with that question in particular that you're offering, Stephanie, was just like, I don't know if... I think that lesson took me a real long time in my career to learn. And so I think that question really sort of brought that up for me as you were talking.

Stephanie: Yeah, awesome.

Alex: Yeah. So, as I, as I come down from my mind being blown, which is a usual course of action when I am ever in company with these two. Stephanie, *About Campus* is focused on connections between scholarship and practice to enhance the daily work of the student affairs and higher education profession. What are one or two pieces that you regularly go back to when you're thinking about the work of equity in higher education?

Stephanie: Yeah, and I don't think this would come to mind for a lot of people. But it's [2018, Michelle Samura about applying a critical spatial approach to student service, to student spaces](#). So it's a study about how students feel when they're going to, I think it's the dining hall or the student, the student hub. So there's different spaces where they walk through. So there's tabling happening there. People go in to eat, and how some groups do not feel welcome. Do not feel like they're welcome in that space. Some feel hypervisible when they walk through the tabling and into the little walkway there. And others just feel like this is their space. And that really speaks to me because that's how I felt on campus and how I think a lot of other marginalized, racialized students may feel. And this is the student hub or the student dining area where everyone is supposed to feel welcome. And that's where our tabling happens so that you can make connections with other students and maybe staff and faculty who may be there. So that's how the space is conceived. But students are feeling it in a multiple different ways, and I go back to that quite often, you know, as I think about Indigenous student service centers.

Z: Yeah. Yeah. We, we here at 'Round About Campus love an underground banger of a piece, right? Like, we don't always have to use the classic hits and the foundational pieces. So I'm thrilled to be able to have that enter our list, and we'll put a link in the show notes to that piece so that folks can think alongside, think alongside that piece, too. I think it also kind of links back to this conversation about for whom are these spaces hubs, right, on campus. and what might that mean. Yeah. What becomes centralized on campus, usually hubs are in the middle of campus, and so what's centered. What's on the periphery and what does that, what does that maybe say in terms of a reflection of institutional values. So yeah. Yeah, yeah.

I, you know Stephanie, I will just say as we close this episode. Alex mentioned it at the beginning. I will mention it at the end. You're someone with whom I think the both of us have just often really appreciated a sense of calm when we're together and talking with you. You have always been someone who, for me, exudes good company and exudes good company across identities and experiences, which I think is a rare gift in this field and probably any field. And so, yeah, we're so thankful. I know you felt a little pressure, but we're so thankful that you're starting off this season, our inaugural season of 'Round About Campus and helping to set the tone. So thanks for your time today. We really appreciate it.

Stephanie: Thank you for those kind words. I'm not always calm, but I try to be.

[Shared laughter]

Z: It's always, it's always a both/and here, you know, always a both/and.

Alex: Yes.

Stephanie: Yeah. Thank you.

Alex: All right, time for the credits. Thanks to the folks who pulled this all together, including our fantastic season one guests.

Z: 'Round About Campus is audio engineered by the incredible tech team in the College of Education at the University of Arizona, including Jason Aragón, Erica Lmuth, and Michael Griffith.

Alex: Mary Ellen Wade designed our logo. Thanks also to my fantastic and fabulous co-host, Z.

Z: Thanks to you, too, Alex! We'll look forward to being with you round about campus soon.