

Transcription for

THE KEY: INSIDE HIGHER ED



EP. 54: DEALING WITH STUDENTS' LEARNING LOSS

NATASHA JANKOWSKI

EREKA R. WILLIAMS

DOUG LEDERMAN

JULY 2021

PROVIDED BY

CAPTION ACCESS

contact@captionaccess

www.captionaccess.com

SEPTEMBER 7, 2021

THE KEY

EP. 54: DEALING WITH STUDENTS' LEARNING LOSS

NATASHA JANKOWSKI

EREKA R. WILLIAMS

DOUG LEDERMAN

38:25

=====

[MUSIC]

DOUG LEDERMAN: Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of The Key, Inside Higher Ed's news and analysis podcast. I'm Doug Lederman, editor and cofounder of Inside Higher Ed, and I'm grateful to you for joining us.

There's been a lot written and said in recent months about the concept of learning loss in K-12 education, the idea that students failed to stay on the learning trajectory we'd otherwise would have expected them to follow in normal times. We hear a lot less about the concept of learning loss in higher education, which makes sense, given that colleges and universities collectively spend a lot less time than elementary and high schools do trying to quantify students' learning. But in survey after survey after the past 18 months, including those done by Inside Higher Ed and College Polls as part of the Student Voice Project, student and faculty members alike consistently say they believe students have learned less than they usually do. In this week's episode of The Key, we'll discuss what colleges and universities will be facing as most of them prepare to welcome students back into their physical classrooms this fall, and how professors and staff members who work with students might go about understanding which students have been set back and in what ways, and how to get them back on track.

We're joined today by two guests. The first is Natasha Jankowski, former executive director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, who is now a consultant on student learning and a lecturer at New England College. In our conversation, she talks about the greatly varying experiences

encountered by different groups of students who will return to institutions this fall, whether they are new freshmen coming right out of high school, 2020's college freshmen, who may never have stepped foot on their campuses, or students who are technically juniors this fall, but have had two greatly disjointed and disrupted years of college.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: We know our students say they learned less. Faculty, when they're asked, agree. We also know that students in ongoing surveys at various institutions and organizations put out reported that they felt unmotivated, that they were distracted, that they had a hard time finding a place to study and learn, that they're concerned about mental health, that they feel behind. So we know that learning loss happened. We know that learning in the sense of, if we had certain things we want you to take away, the likelihood of you as a student getting that and me as a faculty member teaching it to you really well was the unlikely instance.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Also with us today is Erika R. Williams, associate provost for academic strategy and institutional effectiveness at Winston-Salem State University, in North Carolina. She'll talk about how this issues are playing out in one institutions that was founded to help students, quote, "at the margins" succeed academically no matter their educational backgrounds.

Before we begin today's discussion, here's a brief word from Blackboard, the sponsor of this week's episode of The Key.

VOICE: This episode is sponsored by Blackboard. Each learner at your institution is following their own unique path. Your ed tech partner should make it easier for your institution to thrive and for learners to succeed. From enrollment to progression, retention, and graduation, only Blackboard offers an ecosystem approach that supports learners across their journey inside and outside the classroom. Learn more at [Blackboard.com](https://www.blackboard.com).

DOUG LEDERMAN: Now on to today's first conversation with Natasha Jankowski. Natasha, welcome to The Key.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Thanks for having me.

DOUG LEDERMAN: How would you describe learning loss and what do we know about whether and how

much it has occurred, both for incoming college students and for those who are already enrolled in college before the pandemic?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, so I'm going to answer that by sort of providing a little bit of context around it. So we had this past year and a half where our students and our faculty did not have the luxury or the privilege to just be students and learners, or teachers. You know, we had multiple layers of things that were doing on. We also know that our faculty, while incredibly engaged in trying, were maybe not at their best because of pivots to online and shifting between how am I modifying for some hybrid in-person while also still doing remote. And while it got better, I think over time we know that the pressures and the pandemic and all of that situation, homeschooling, daycare, concerns about health, that never went away. So you have this constant stressor going for this period of time in which we're hoping learning unfolds.

And we have information from students that reported in College Polls did a survey about students, and they said over half that they learned less. And they felt unprepared for college. Sophomore's actually reported having the hardest transition, because if you think about it, if you were a sophomore now at the time this survey was going on, you were a freshmen for like a full semester. You got to experience that institution before the pivot happened, the pivot semester. And so how you engage in your social groups, your relationship with the institution and teachers, all of that has this sudden upheaval. So we know you students say they learned less. Faculty when they're asked agree.

We also know that students in ongoing surveys that various institutions or organizations put out reported that they felt unmotivated, that they were distracted, that they had a hard time finding a place to study and learn, that they're concerned about mental health, that they feel behind.

So we know that learning loss happened. We know that learning in the sense of, if we had certain things we want you to take away, the likelihood of you as a student getting that and me as a faculty member teaching it to you really well was the unlikely instance. That it's more often than not, you probably got something but not all of it. And that's a longer sort of issue for an institution, because if I assume as an institution I've designed some programmatic path of learning that grows for my students, then I need to figure out where you are on that path, and how to reinforce what I need you to engage with and where you are as a learner.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So in normal times, which are, if we ever have them, but they certainly haven't been recently, what were the tools that institutions used to gauge where students were on that path, be it

incoming students or continuing students? And do those... My sense is that tools were pretty darn imperfect to begin with and may not be up to the task in these even more difficult and challenging times. So what's the sense, what's your sense?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: No, that's... I think that's also a great point about these, while we had some tools, they're imperfect tools, and some of this could also be that figuring out assumptions we had about student learning progression maybe prior, in the before days, may not as accurate this time. So we use a variety of things in our institutions. If you're incoming, we have placement testing. Admissions, we're looking at your SAT, ACT scores, those kinds of things. We know now institutions are saying, well, we'll waive that, or we're not engaging with it, or the role of what a placement test can do and where we put you is something different, especially for our incoming students that have had a very different end of high school experience for our traditional age students there.

But we also had assumptions about sort of course progressions and course completion, so that if you got through a course, we're assuming you learning something from that course, and what that course was supposed to do, whether that's gen ed or it's major specific. And so being in a place where now, that's under question. So you have discipline knowledge? Do you not? So do you have sort of enabling learning outcomes, like can you use information resources that can build on that in an assignment later? We're not so sure. And what the means then for you in my class becomes a very different relationships piece.

But yes, I think your point that our tools have been imperfect, but the systems that they were built around are really coming to light as needing to be rethought.

DOUG LEDERMAN: And the reason they are, assumptions about whether the courses what they were designed to do was just because they were being taught in different, if not lesser ways, because of the pandemic, and either a shift to a completely different delivery system or the fact that both students and instructors were maybe at less than full capacity, or all of those things? What was behind your assertion there?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, so I think we had... There's an idea that we have some intentional design behind the learning experiences we asked our students to do, and that if you're gone through a course or some kind of educational experience, you've got a specific learning outcome from it. Now, as the person who has studied assessment over time, I think that's a questionable assumption at best. I think we have good intentions, but if it's actually our design, I'm not so sure.

And we actually did, the National Institute pointed out this assessment, because it did a survey at the start after the spring semester where everyone went remote, and asked about it. And it ended being a really great return to assessment basics, where faculty members were going, well, what is actually the purpose of my course? And what do I really need you to learn from it and what's the assignment and the task that I'm getting at? So that's a really positive pedagogical conversation, which I appreciate. But the larger question of, you know, have we ever been in a place as an institution of education to say that when you graduate with a credential or a degree, you actually know and can do these things, and we have evidence and proof of it as we've going along--no, maybe not as much.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So you.... We have again, it's really hard in any of these conversations to talk about students collectively. So break down a little bit for us the sort of different ways that you're thinking about different groups of students, based on which parts of the, where they were during the pandemic, the sort of incoming freshmen this fall, who again were entirely in high school pre-pandemic and pre-now, those who had the sort of sophomore experience that you described, what are the sort of potentially different ways we should be thinking about those different groups?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Sure, so, and I'm going to answer this one again first with a bit of context, and then go into some specific groups I think. But one thing to think about, if we start to parse our student population, is that most of our students, while they engage with technology, don't know how to use it to learn. And so while our faculty were figuring out how to do this online, our students were also figuring out how to do this online, and then you also had some subsets of students that had very large technology barriers--access to technology, access internet, access to Wi-Fi--and most of our surveys were done via email, so if you can't get online, I don't find you and I can't figure out what you need. So there's that sort of piece happening.

We also then have our students of color that were watching unfold a racial reckoning, seeing all of these situations where, how am I supposed to learn when I'm in constant sort of fear and concern? And all of that we know from neuroscience and cognition literature that learning under stress you do not retain, if you can even learn at that instant. And so if you have that undercurrent going throughout a pandemic....

DOUG LEDERMAN: And they were disproportionately affected by the pandemic itself in most places in the country, etc. So...

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yes, and concern for family members, and financial security, and, you know, [UNCLEAR] populations... And so within any of those subgroups the question even is not even what kind of learning loss are we looking at and more can we even assume that learning happened? Or was it a matter of survival and just form-filling out, and like clicking boxes, and, yeah [UNCLEAR]...

DOUG LEDERMAN: And we saw how many students just didn't continue. Those were at obviously an extreme, but it wasn't a small extreme. We lost half a million students, probably close to it, who...

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah.

DOUG LEDERMAN:...for one reason or another either didn't start or didn't continue.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, and I think for institutions, if we put in too high of a hurdle around learning recovery, we don't get those students back. That's a group of students we've lost. So that's just sort of, I think, the big.... Institutions of higher education really need to look at their student populations and who they serve, and how their students are, experienced very differently this past year and a half.

But within that, I think we also have some groups incoming freshmen that didn't have closure around high school. We don't really know what college readiness they fall into this. But the K-12 sort of remote learning experience, it's very different from the pivot that that went on in higher ed. And we at least, I think, had more tools, and maybe engagement with online learning in ways that some of our K-12 and partners had, so they're going to definitely need not just orientation to institutions but to expectations of engaging in learning and behaviors, and knowledge and skills at an institution level. So that's a very special group of students there.

But we also had a freshman class that started remote. They started this past fall, or they had a very hybrid experience behind plexiglass and masks. And they're now becoming sophomores and need an orientation to the institution to even, you know, what was your understanding of major choices. In an environment like that like how you're thinking about your career and your role as student... So that's a... While we don't normally think about your sophomores in that way, that's a crucial retention learning group as well.

But then we also had our freshman class during the pivot that are going to be incoming juniors. And so

they got sent home and have had a very mixed relationship with their institution that we need to think about how are we reorienting and reconnecting with them. And if you were doing a two-year or a shorter-term credential, you're gone already. Like, what experience have you had with us and how do we need to think about that alumni connection so that we still have a life-long learner partner and not someone that's just had this very surreal experience?

So really, as institutions, we need to think about three sort of "freshmen" in quotes orientations, and the curriculum structure that goes around that, like the role of pre reqs and introduction to majors and of that becomes something that we really need be thoughtful about.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Wow, that's a scrambled picture! I don't envy institutions trying to figure all that out. So if you're in academic affairs or student affairs, or if you're a professor, what are the strategies or tools or approaches you should be thinking about embracing to try to make sense of this puzzle and to try to make it personalized or targeted enough that students at their different levels are getting what they need to remain or to get back on track?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: I'll start with sort of some ideas for institutions, and then I can talk about for faculty and staff. But one of the things I think to be very mindful of is we also had a ton of leadership turnover. We had a wide range of leaders that were like, you know what, this is great, but that's enough change. I'm good. And so you have new leaders coming in at a time when stability can be helpful and comforting both for our faculty and staff. I think we've done a lot of meaningful attention on our faculty and what they need, and less so on our staff, who are the ones that are really going to be picking up and carrying that sort of personal retouch and how do you help me with this paperwork to even be able to show up in whatever sort of class environment I'm in.

So I think on the one hand for an institution, really start with empathy for your faculty and your staff, and with care. They've been through it. If we start mandating more things at this point in time, that's going to be less than ideal. But there is an opportunity to co-construct there and say what kinds of... We know we need to offer multiple orientations to our students. What might that look like? And which of these, while that might normally be a student affairs orientation office, how is this something we can do together to address and really orient people to academic and support and think about who we are as an institution. So sharing that load, I think, can be really great.

But also, most of the time when we've done orientation for our students or sort of that role of an institution, it's to the campus support and structures in our institution, and we also need to think about

that, how are we orienting you to online learning for students? Because if we have these students that have been through it, they could have locked at this point bad behaviors in terms of how they engage with online learning, that happened out of sort of a quick need, but now they've been doing it long enough that's a pattern, that's an engrained behavioral pattern.

So thinking too about what are the tools we offer our students about how to learn online, how to really think about maximizing your time when you have these moments I think will be crucial. And doing it in a way that like shorter modules that I can pick up and watch as I'm going, give me some of that. And then I have an opportunity to connect with the person, is I think also a manageable way to think about doing it from an institution.

[MUSIC]

VOICEREKA R. WILLIAMS: This episode is sponsored by Blackboard. Underpinning Blackboard's technology is the market's only true ed tech platform, offering more impactful and easy to use solutions, including accessibility tools, a virtual classroom, communication tools, and the LMS. The Blackboard ed tech platform powers personalized experiences, fueled by data, so that every individual is supported by the technology, services, and care they need to thrive and succeed. Learn more at [Blackboard.com](https://www.blackboard.com).

DOUG LEDERMAN: If institutions or instructors assume that there's been some kind of learning loss. Do you envision them responding by paring back what they try to accomplish in terms of volume of content or instituting policies that provide more flexible grading or take other approaches like that? Or do you anticipate a push to turn to the rigor of before.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, no, I think that's a definite caution to avoid, because the ripples from this will persist. This isn't done and we can't just sort of be like, well, we're back to campus and normal. And so if we start putting in those now that you're back at this institution full time, no flexibility at all on this assignment, we're going to cause more harm than good in that space. And so this, I think, is a great opportunity for institutions to really consider students as partners in our process of identifying issues and developing solutions. And it's honest conversations, like where is everyone at and what can and can't you do right now? Does this make sense? And give me your timeline of when you can submit work, based on what your current schedule is and let's figure out... That's a great self-reflective tool to engage in. Do I know how much time it takes me to do something as a learner? It's a wonderful cognitive exercise that people should do.

But I worry in hearing some conversations at institutions that they're rethinking the role of prerequisites to be back to more of a gatekeeper, and saying, well, if I put a bunch of course pre reqs in the way, that's this quality control that I'll... And at this point, we need to not be making policies about blocking students out. We need to really be making policies that lead with lifting learning up, and thinking differently about the role of things like a prerequisite, thinking differently about how I figure out where students are the first day they come into a course, and engage, and who that I share that information with to help future planning. It becomes much of a team sport as such occasion, because it's really going to take the entirety of our institution to help our students move through this. And also not to have our faculty and our staff feel like this is impossible for me to solve on my own.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So if you are an individual instructor, depending on how much help and guidance you're getting from your institution, what are some approaches, what are some ways you would encourage them to be thinking about all those things, judging where their students are starting and how to move them along, especially if they're, and I'll quote, lesser place than they, than you might be accustomed to them being?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, yeah. So I think I would start with take your summative assessment hat and go hang it up for a while and put your formative one on, and really engage in that formative development assessment. And classroom assessment techniques, like go back and dust off your Tom Angelo and Pat Cross book on asking quick, easy things to do to get handles on where students are as they're consistently moving through that learning. If we lock this into a couple of summative points, midterm, final, we are not going to be able to move the needle in the ways that our students will need us to sort of address and get over this gap.

If you're not a fan of classroom assessment technique, Small Teaching, the same sort of idea, James Lang, like go find your center for teaching and learning person, and think about the pedagogical approaches that help you in that formative assessment place. So we don't want to take a gotcha stance on learning, you want to take a very developmental stance on learning.

The other part I think that goes with that is that thinking about partnering with our students. Peter Felten just did some great work on relationship-rich education. And one of the things that we had heard in the National Institute for Learning Outcomes assessment survey was faculty and students both reporting that realizing like they're whole people, like there's all this stuff going on with you, led to a better relationship where they were able to share more, where they were able to learn better together, and create an environment where I can speed up in that process because I have trust we're moving and I

can get it done. And that, again, moves us away from more of a gotcha gatekeeping function and more into a we're an environment of learning. You know, let's put that learning helmet on and jump on the that roller-coaster and just head it down together.

DOUG LEDERMAN: So it's actually that last thing is sort of anticipates the question that I was going to ask, which is, what are, are there things that make you more optimistic than you might have been, and were there sort of silver linings from the pandemic and the way it changed learning that might help, given, help institutions and instructors, and students, address whatever learning loss there might have been.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, I think for sure. The realization of who students actually are on the part of faculty was great. The understanding of the need for transparency, like, I really as a faculty member have to tell you as a student why I'm asking you to do this, what I want you to get from it, and thinking differently about about how to apply it, and asking my students to say, what's going on in your life right now that you can use to engage with this. There was some, for instance, there was math faculty that were sharing assignments on having students run tests of their internet speeds at the their house, and then graph it, stick it into like thinking about like how do we do quantitative reasoning skills and all of that. But that's immediately applicable to something that I'm engaged in doing, and that making learning relevant was, I think, very crucial and helpful.

But also realizing that our students are people. They're not just students, and they're not just there to learn. They're learning in spite of all of these other things, or as all the rest of these things are going on. So I think that transparency, that engaged learning, that part.

But I'm also very optimistic, just naturally anyway, but I remain optimistic that faculty in the pivot and sort of persisting over time, have a new appreciation for student affairs professionals that they did not have before. That was a, if I'm the person you see, I'm now getting all these questions. I'm having mental health issues. I'm having this home situation. How do I engage with that? Which, while on one hand, helps me understand you as a person, also has me going, omigosh, student affairs friends, I get how this actually is a partnership in support of learning. Our students can't learn if they're hungry. Our students can't learn if they're not in a mental space to do so. And so if some of our solutions to really addressing learning loss are going to be holistic, that needs academic and student affairs working in partnership. But that newfound appreciation I hope persists--and we don't sort of go back into silos and our discipline homes, and forget that we each bring strengths to really enabling and supporting learning.

DOUG LEDERMAN: I'm debating whether to challenge your optimism and upbeat nature by asking you about, you talked about sort of the increased understanding, and maybe that leading to better relationships and more respect. The one thing that might have mitigated against that was a lot of perception on the faculty side at least about there being increased cheating by students. And I'm curious whether you think the sense the faculty members have that there was greater academic misconduct and dishonesty during the pandemic, some of made, enabled by online learning and virtual settings, some of it probably driven by greater student desperation or other sort of impairments on the students' side will have lasting impacts, or will people sort of write that off as having been of the moment?

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Yeah, this is a tricky and a slippery place. And I think this does raise my questions in humanity [LAUGH] angle.

But, so there's a couple of ways that it could go. I think one is you get faculty where they're watching you take a test. And I feel better about it and now maybe my concern about cheating goes down. But the opposite of that is to say I'm now expecting you all to cheat, and even though you're doing it in front of me, I'm assuming you figured a workaround, and so now I start spending a lot of time and energy fielding up ways in which I can block that, and I'm blocking cell phones and I'm turning off internet in my room, and I doing all these...

So you could go sort of extreme directions. And I think if we do that, we lose sight of several things. One, yeah, students even reported that they cheated more, and we saw cheating go up. That's legit. But it was a pandemic, like, pandemic learning I think deserves a bit of a like, well, that's not oversurprising that you would see things related to each other. But if it's also, if we didn't afford instances that greatly matter to student progression, empathy and humanity, and we instead answered with still take this high-stakes exam...

DOUG LEDERMAN: And do it in front of a camera....

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: And do it in front of a camera and don't blink too much, don't have a dog walk behind you, as though we can really find those places to do it, are we surprised to the, the students responded in that way? And I think it sends a very mixed message to our students on what we value and what we care about. But one that like we really need to careful in our faculty conversations what assumptions persist from proctoring and the online cheating conversation.

DOUG LEDERMAN: And the hope, to let you be optimistic at the end, is that lessons that you and many others were shouting throughout the pandemic about the answer to probably more cheating being change up your assignments and your assessments to make them less high stakes than all the other things that one might do to minimize the instinct to cheat were embraced and will be even more fully embraced going forward.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: One can only hope. I also think, though, that there is a larger conversation to be had about if we are in a technology infused environment, what counts as cheating, right? So if I share exam questions on a discussion board and somebody picks it up and answers that, is that cheating or is that like how are students examining and really thinking about how these different technology platforms play into these things, because I think there was also some instances where you had students very surprised, because they're like, well, I didn't cheat. It's not like I went out and found these answers, or I didn't take the exam results out of the teacher's cabinet and write them down. And so, we have a very high bar in higher ed as faculty on what that is. But it we're trying to teach collaborative problem-solving, is that an instance of that, where students figure that out? I don't know. So I think there's also a conversation on what is cheating in an age of technology.

DOUG LEDERMAN: I agree. And we'll have to leave that for another episode, and so maybe you'll come back. But thanks for being here.

NATASHA JANKOWSKI: Thanks so much for having me.

DOUG LEDERMAN: That was Natasha Jankowski, former director of the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, and now consultant and a lecturer at New England College.

Our second guest this week is Erika R. Williams, associate provost for academic strategy and institutional effectiveness at Winston-Salem State University. So, Erika, welcome to The Key.

ERIKA R. WILLIAMS: Thank you, thank you for having me here. I appreciate it.

DOUG LEDERMAN: What's your sense of how much learning loss colleges and universities are likely to see, both in their new incoming students, and in those who had already been enrolled at the institutions during the pandemic?

EREKA R. WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think most of us in this space, in higher ed space, are gearing up for the unknown as much as that can be done. I think that it is appropriate for all institutions to plan for their learners, both those that they're meeting for the first time in August or September, and those who are returning, either from having just been out since May or some who had to leave unfortunately in 2020, because they just couldn't return to us. For one reason or another, it's fair to expect some dips in content, content mastery, some dips in comfort and ease of classes are now all face-to-face on the campus, which, that's not our case here at Winston-Salem State University. We will be continuing in different delivery formats and things we had to explore and open up for the first time in 2020. You know, no matter how they're coming to us or returning to us, I think it's fair and reasonable for all of us to plan for them to have some dips in some of those right now, day-one-ready skills and dispositions that historically we've expected from a new freshman or a continuing junior, or returning continuing student of any status when they came to us in the fall of the year.

DOUG LEDERMAN: Assuming more students are walking in with these dips, as you describe them, how effectively equipped do you think colleges and universities collectively are to identify those gaps or setbacks?

EREKA R. WILLIAMS: You know, I think that Winston-Salem State, you know, we were an institution founded for those at the margins. This is an Historically Black College and University, and just like the other hundred or so us that remain, it is in our DNA that we assess and determine what those learners who are showing up to our doors, our campuses, our Zooms and our campus shells, what it is that they need, how they need it, and to stand ready to respond.

So our university-college is outfitted with just an incredible team of professionals, whose job it is, is to take experiences like the first-year experience. We take all these different opportunities that we get close to students, if they're traditional students, close to their families, and to really kind of get a handle on or assess where it is that we are inheriting them. Because our belief, and it's written in our mission as who we are, it's in our strategic plan, and it's codified from a social justice lens is our belief that we're here to meet them where they are and to get them where they have to go.

DOUG LEDERMAN: To the extent you're able to diagnose where students are, what are the tools and approaches you have at your disposal to help them make up any lost ground if they've come in with perhaps greater needs than normal?

EREKA R. WILLIAMS: We have increased the number of supports and people in the tutoring, writing center space, and in those areas--all of those services fall under out what we call UCaLL in university college. So every angle with the student tutoring. And the areas that were already in existence before, we're going to, we've added more folk, we've got more manpower, womanpower there. We are also going to spend more time and resources on the social and emotional piece with the counselors, and the, as well as academic counseling.

So we use an early alert system, most universities do. I think ours is called EAB Navigate. And so I'm working right now with our EAB team to make sure that we are codifying a little more aggressive attention to the early alert system. We've been using it for a couple of years. We've gotten better at it over time, as most people do when they get more experience and training, but we are really going to lean heavily on using and raising flags and alerts sooner, and more often, when the smallest of things pop up on our radars. And so codifying that a little more in the system... We're going to be working with faculty on that piece, and others in those spaces, in the academic affairs spaces that have access to students academically to not let them slide off our radar.

DOUG LEDERMAN: That was Erika R. Williams of Winston-Salem State University.

If you've been listening to the last few episodes of The Key, which have been about various aspects of the teaching and learning experience, a couple of common themes have probably jumped out to you as they have to me. I think some of us are going to have a tendency to want things to return to normal this fall and to revert to some of our old comfortable ways of doing things. But whether it was Natasha Jankowski this week urging professors not to go back to their old summative assessments, or Mays Imad a couple episodes ago asking administrators to take a six-month pause in making changes in their academic policies to give students and professors alike a chance to adjust to their new/old settings, we've consistently heard experts recommending flexibility, patience, and, ultimately, kindness and understanding in what are certain to be energizing but also anxiety-producing environments. Let's try to keep that in mind as we edge back to our former lives in the coming weeks and months.

That's all for this episode of The Key. Thanks again to Natasha Jankowski and Erika Williams for their insights, to Blackboard for its sponsorship of this episode, and to you as always for listening. Until next week, I'm Doug Lederman and this is The Key. Stay well and stay safe.

[MUSIC]