

[opening music: Sambelissa, by MCC Professor John Nyerges] Ilene: Hello, my name is Ilene Benz, and I'm a Communication Professor here at Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York, where we are known as the Tribunes. This is TribTalk about all things MCC. Today, we get to focus on the Academic and Student Affairs Division, as well as Phi Theta Kappa, with our guests, Provost and Vice President Michael Jacobs, and our Student President of Phi Theta Kappa, Mara Waynick.

Hello there. Mara: Hello. Mike: Hello, thanks so much for having us. Ilene: It's so exciting to learn about everything you do here and what you've gained as a student. Let's first, though, talk about Academic and Student Affairs.

Sounds like a lot. Can you tell us a little bit about what that means? Mike: It is a lot. So the college is made up of a number of divisions.

You have the Division of Institutional Advancement, the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging, Administrative Services, Career and Technical Education, Workforce Development, and then you have Academic and Student Affairs, which is the largest of all the divisions at the institution.

It comprises about 60 to 65 percent of all of the people in operations, so on and so forth, and its main focus really is on student success.

So it covers everything that has to do with academics, teaching and learning, curriculum and development, program assessment, all that good stuff at the center of the college's educational mission. But it also includes all of those things that were historically separate from that element in terms of student services.

So everything from Enrollment Management and Recruitment to Advising to Records and Registration, Athletics, Student Life and Leadership. These things used to be separate, two separate divisions, until about late 2021, early 2022, when our president, Dr.

Deanna Burt-Nana, had the good idea to merge them under a singular division, under a single division. The reason is because we've learned over many decades that, particularly at the community college, when students need support in achieving their academic goals or when they're facing academic barriers, academic solutions alone are not the answer.

You need to affect that merger of both academic and student support in a kind of holistic support system. And that's what I oversee in my position as Provost and VP. Ilene: So you don't really do anything? Mike: I don't do anything. I sit in my big office and I do my Wordle, mostly. [They laugh.] Ilene: That makes sense though, because I mean we're a college, so why not support students outside of their specific academics, not only with the supports for classes, but other engaging activities? Mike: That's absolutely right. And that's kind of at the center, the center of what I do in so far as my role as an administrator and manager and executive leader. It used to be... so I came here as a dean. I was hired back in 2017 as the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, a position that is now called Dean of Liberal Arts and Business.

And in the almost seven years that I functioned as a dean, we would collaborate with folks in the Student Services side.

But collaboration is tricky business when you're reporting to two different vice presidents with two different sets of priorities, two different divisional cultures. Now, what I get to do is I get to sit at a big table with deans and associate vice presidents and directors, and I get to work with them directly to help establish collaboration that's already built into our division. So I can look to the Dean of STEM and Health and help develop a project that she's going to work

with our associate vice president for Enrollment Management, and they're going to improve master scheduling so that students are getting the science classes that they need at the times that they need them in the format that they need them. Mara: Thank you for that, by the way. I'm glad I don't have to take a six to eight p.m. lab. Mike: Yeah. Well, you're very welcome. We were thinking of you, Mara, when we did that. [They laugh.] Ilene: More opportunities.

What does this mean in terms of students?

Why should a student choose MCC? Mike: So great question.

Why should we choose MCC? I think this goes to the heart of why we merged in the first place.

So when students come here, they can be assured that our work, our priorities focus on their goals.

And we've actually just in the last year or so, when I came into the position. So I've only been the Provost for about a year. April 1 was my was my... the beginning of my foray into this. Ilene: No fooling. Mike: Yeah, no fooling. It seems like it seems like much longer than that.

But we got to work developing what's called an Academic and Student Affairs Master Plan, which is this really large document that not only sets up a bunch of goals, but establishes who we are as a division, what matters to us, what our values are, what the scope of our work is, and what student success means for the institution.

And we define student success in kind of very traditional terms about students achieving their academic goals, but also broader terms about enriching lives through education.

Students should come here because we work in earnest to ensure that all facets of the institution responsible for student success are in conversation with one another and working towards the same end.

And more than that, that all facets of the college that are responsible for student success are working every day to get better at delivering on that promise.

We used to be an institution that had so many priorities we took on so many initiatives.

In the last year... last three years, since... and I can talk more about this Unlocking Opportunity initiative... we've really narrowed the scope of our priorities around essentially ensuring greater rates of student success in terms of not just completion, finishing your degree, and not just transfer, going to a four-year institution... because not every student wants to transfer to a four-year institution... but ensuring that at the end of your educational journey, whether it ends with us or somewhere else, that you are in a position to have a family sustaining wage, that you are on a pathway in a field that you're passionate about, and that's going to help you in your growth socioeconomically, personally, professionally.

That's why. Ilene: It's a good reason.

Mike: It's a good reason. Ilene: And let's get a student take on it, Mara, because you're about to graduate.

Mara: I am, yeah. Tell us why you came here. How did you find MCC, too? Mara: So I grew up in San Diego, California, and during COVID, when my family, my mom, her job

went remote, and she goes, well, we have a ton of family out in Rochester. We're going to move. And I said, no way, Jose.

I love San Diego. In the wintertime, there's no snow. I can still go to the beach. It's great. I might not be swimming, but, you know, I don't have to wipe off my car to go somewhere. And I lasted about five months before I decided, no, I love my family. I want to be where they're at.

And my grandmother, actually, she is an alumni from MCC, and she was just saying, it's great. You've got to go. She said, we could enroll in a class together if you wanted.

And unfortunately, she did not want to take any of my science or math classes with me. But, yeah, it was just suggested to me. And I didn't really know anybody here in Rochester, but I was already hearing about MCC all the way from San Diego. So while I was still in San Diego, I sent in my application. I was really excited to come.

My first semester, I took an English course. I took a biology course. I wasn't too sure. And I realized very quickly, okay, this is not something I can do alone. And when I asked for help, it was quick to find me. So the people here, the friends that I made, the friends that I sought out, and especially the faculty and staff that pushed me to, you know, search for things and advocate for myself in different ways. It's been really encouraging. And it's been an awesome, you know, jumping board for me to find success in my own terms. Ilene: What are you studying? Mara: I study chemistry. So yeah, I would like to go into chemistry. I'll go to St. John Fisher University in the fall to study chemistry. Ilene: And you'll bring your experiences from MCC.

Obviously, your classes will transfer. Mara: Oh, absolutely. Every single one. They're taking every single class.

So I'm very grateful for that. Ilene: And you graduate this year. Mara: Yes.

So I'll be graduating on the 29th is our ceremony. So yeah, it's been a wild ride. I've been here for a total of three years, so a little bit longer. But because of that first semester being part time, I knew that I wanted to transfer in the fall. So I was meeting with my advisor, who's now my student success coach, Julie Mills. Love her! And so we made a plan in the spring of 2024 for what all of my classes would be for the rest of my time here. And I just felt, you know, supported.

And she encouraged me and challenges me to, you know, take calculus one or calculus two and go up to that and not just cut my cut myself short or sell myself short. Ilene: And working with an advisor, you can see the path toward graduation. Mara: Absolutely. Ilene: So you have that... Mara: Absolutely. When I look at DegreeWorks, our platform that shows everything, it gets a little bit, you know, muddled. I'm like, Oh, no, what are all these boxes that aren't checked yet? But then when I sit down with Julie Mills, and she walks me through what every single one means, and all of my credits and how they should transfer, and she encourages me to, you know, communicate with St. John Fisher University to see, will they transfer?

Yeah, it's just been a really great experience. And not just on the whole advisor side, but being a part of Phi Theta Kappa, or PTK, has just been really, really beneficial for me too. So that community. Ilene: Let's talk about PTK, Phi Theta Kappa. What is that? Mara: Yeah, so it's the honor society for two year colleges. It's not just a, it's not just an MCC thing. It's not just in New York, it's actually international. So there's chapters all over the world. Ilene: Not just Canada either. Mara: True, not just Canada, Italy, I'm pretty sure South Africa,

don't quote me on that one.

But yeah, it's more than just that, though. The way that I explain it to interested students is first and foremost, it's a really great way for you to be able to communicate to, you know, institutions you're looking to transfer to, or places that you're wanting to work that you're serious about things other than just yourself, that you are committed to your education in a way that goes beyond going to class and turning in your assignments, but saying, you know, I want to be a scholar and I want to embody scholarship, leadership, fellowship, and service... those are the four pillars that we stand on... in a way that's again bigger than just themselves.

How can they become servant leaders in their communities on campus and at home too? How can they, you know, engage in those fellowship activities that we like to do? How can they really connect with the student body on campus so that they can be more successful? So in short, it's an honor society.

You do have to have a certain GPA to get there, and you should be proud of that.

But I would like to call it something more of, you know, a community, a family that uplifts you and encourages you and again challenges you to continue to grow, continue to expand and become servant leaders in whatever arena you're in. Ilene: It's that next step. You're doing well in your classes. Now what? Mara: Absolutely. Yeah. Ilene: Right? How did you find PTK? Mara: I was in a training to become a supplemental instructor at the TAAC, and... Ilene: The TAAC?

Mara: Yes, the Tutoring, Academic, and Assistant Center. Mike: You got it. Yes. We say TAAC all the time, with all of the letters, I just, I go with it.

And the supplemental instructor is a role, it's a peer role where I go into a classroom that I've been in before, and that I succeeded in that class. And I become kind of a peer mentor to the other students. And I've been doing that for a total of two years now. And it's it's been great. I've loved it. But while I was at my first ever training, one of the other supplemental instruction or SI leaders, David, my good friend now, he asked if I had heard of PTK before. And I said, well, yeah, I just went on a tour at St. John Fisher. And my transfer advisor there said, you're going to go home today and register for PTK.

And I did. And I was chatting with David just a short while after. And he goes, well, what about becoming an officer? And I said, well, I haven't even been to a meeting yet. I'm not sure.

And he goes, well, I mean, you know, we're friends now. Come with me. You're going to come to one of these meetings. You're going to love it. I just know you will. And he was right. And I did. And I got involved the fall of last school year.

And it was great. And it was challenging, for sure, because, you know, there's deadlines that you have to do, boxes that you have to check, initiatives that you have to dream up and and not just talk about, but actually do... Ilene: More work, outside of the classroom. Mara: Indeed, indeed.

But I do attribute that to David, truly, one of my friends.

He's he just really pushed me for it, so... Ilene: It is true that we learn a lot through the academics, through the classroom experience.

It is perhaps also maybe even more true that we learn more outside of the classroom. And PTK definitely sounds like it gives you an opportunity to do just that. Mara: Absolutely. It gave me truly a space to thrive on campus so that I felt

connected.

And I no longer was just coming to MCC to go to my classes and leave.

And once I truly felt connected, that's when, you know, I was meeting with Jody Oriel or Chloe Allen in the Office of Student Life and Leadership Development. And and they were encouraging me to, you know, meet with my advisors or, you know, go to utilize all of the services that the Library offers here.

So it just felt like the final piece to the puzzle of, okay, I'm at MCC, I'm registered for the right classes, I go to my classes, and then I go home. Ilene: And now what? Mara: And now what? And now that I have that connection, now that I'm making friends through other things, and we have a common goal, we're working together to achieve that, that feels good. Ilene: Right. Mara: And that connection really encouraged me to, you know, seek more out of my education and get the full benefits that are offered here. Ilene: Right. The term Monroe Community College is looked upon as the pillar of the community, what MCC stands for, for the community. It is, though, also looked at internally, because as an institution, we are a community. And the way that Academic and Student Affairs is set up really reinforces that now, because everybody's working together, a well oiled machine. on our good days.

Mike: We... [They laugh.] Ilene: Of course, right. Tell us about your initiatives, you referred to the Unlocking Opportunities. Mike: Yeah, sure.

So right now, we're kind of finishing up our third year of engagement in what has become or will become a national reform movement for community colleges.

So just under three years ago, we were selected by the Aspen Institute, in partnership with a research center out of Teachers College and Columbia University, the Community College Research Center, CCRC, one of 10 community colleges to participate in an initiative aimed at what we call post-completion success.

But what has been, I think, more directly and effectively been referred to as an endeavor to eradicate poverty.

And essentially what we want to do, what we've been working towards is institutionalizing ways of being, as a college, that are going to not only improve students' academic success here, right, retention rates, persistent rates, graduation rates, but ensure, like I was saying before, that they're on a path towards a family sustaining wage within five years of completion here, which is really important, because I can tell you, I've been in higher education for 23 years.

And I know that if colleges wanted to, they could just, you know, we could create a mechanism for just graduating students in degree programs. Ilene: A factory. Mike: Yeah, exactly. That's not our mission. Ilene: We care about students here. Mike: We care about students. It's not why we get up in the morning. Mara: Thank goodness! Yes! Mike: Yeah, it's not why I get here at, you know, at the crack of dawn and I leave, like Jeremy, right well past sunset.

But so, so when, you know, we put together a core team, I was a dean at the time, but was assigned to the core team because I had, you know, I had my finger in a lot of pots, right, and I was working at the time to overhaul our Liberal Arts General Studies program, I had led an assessment of our Advising Model.

And I was overseeing an array of programs and programming that lent itself to I think a contribution, at least people thought.

The team consisted of the president, some vice presidents and associate vice presidents, myself, and we had decided early on that to do better in the realm of post-completion, we had... we had to connect that to completion. We had to address those barriers to student success that would move the needle and we couldn't try to address everything. All right.

There's so much... Ilene: Right. in front of us.

Mike: ... So we chose three areas that we thought would give us the greatest chance of improving the quality of education and improving students' prospects for post completion success. So one of them was enhancing our advising model.

That's probably the biggest ticket item on there. The other was improving success and what we call gateway English and Math courses.

So a gateway English or Math course is the first course that you will take for credit in one of those areas that counts towards your degree. So here, English 101, College Composition, is the de-facto gateway English course.

For math, it's any number of courses depending on your pathway.

So Mara is a STEM major, right? So she's on a path towards a STEM degree. And she has to take a certain set of Math courses.

Somebody who wants a degree in Art or Communication has to take a different set or really one Math course, which is Survey of Mathematics. Ilene: So pathway is almost like their major, there. Mike: Pathway is almost like their major. We call these things pathways because sometimes students don't have a major because we don't have the program here.

So if I wanted to study Political Science at SUNY Brockport and graduate with a Political Science degree, I would there's no political science program here.

I would enroll in one of our new Liberal Arts: Arts, Humanity, Social Sciences program, and through my advising have a pathway to ensure that once I completed my program here, I would have junior status at SUNY Brockport as a Poli Sci major. Ilene: And we've had that with other programs like pharmacy students... Mike: Correct, yeah. Ilene: ...in the sciences, and then they go off to St.

John Fisher. Mike: Yeah, absolutely. So we've got advising redesign, improved outcomes in gateway Math and English, and then something we call improved program mapping, which is essentially going back to your question about how do we know that the courses that Mara is taking here align with the expectations of St. John Fisher. We've got a lot of transfer partners, and we have a lot of programs. And so we're working towards ensuring that not only do all of these things line up with what the four year institutions want, but making sure that the programs that we do have that we're evaluating and assessing them in a way that's helpful to faculty so they can make good decisions in the moment.

Right now we have an assessment cycle for our programs that's six years. It's difficult to respond to issues in a six-year assessment cycle, especially now where artificial intelligence is playing a bigger role in how we address teaching and learning.

Could you imagine what AI is going to look like in six years or in six months or in six days?

Completely different. And so we need a more responsive way, right?

Exactly. So those are the three areas we're really focused on. And I won't go into all of it, but what I will say is, for advising redesign, what we did was we completely tore down our current advising model based on what we know about best practices, based on what we learned through our coaching from this initiative. We get our own coach.

We have access to the Aspen Institute and their data.

We just had a site visit from Aspen and our coach. So based upon what we've learned over the years, we completely tore down our current advising model and built one in its place that's more proactive, more holistic, meaning that our advisors can address the whole student rather than just the academic elements or the career-focused elements and one that we used to call intrusive, but now we call intentional. Intrusive advising was a term that we've used for many years where, you know, you don't wait for the student to come to you. And community college students in particular... Ilene: They won't necessarily. Mike: They won't necessarily. We've had a lot of self-advising happen over the years, which can be problematic. Community college life comes at them at a much greater speed and with much greater frequency than what we thought of as... than certainly it did for me as a traditional college student many decades ago. Ilene: Well, especially true because a lot of our students don't live on campus. Mike: A lot of our students don't live on campus. They are employed.

Ilene: They take care of others. Mike: That's right. Upwards almost 20 percent of our students are parents.

So we can't always count on them or expect them to think about reaching out to an advisor. So we are now in a position to... we've just restructured our whole advising program.

We brought in 13 new Student Success Coaches. We created an advising network around student success coaching.

And we are now in a position to reach out to students to engage them, not intrude, but engage them proactively and holistically in a way that supports all of their needs and to triage, to point them in the right direction when they need supports. This goes back to the whole merging of Academic and Student Affairs. I've got an associate vice president who, among others things, oversees mental health services, counseling disability services. And in my team meetings, he sits there at the same table with academic deans, with the associate vice president who oversees curriculum. And we can, as a team, ensure that when a student goes to their student success coach, whatever they need, if it's assistance in the TAAC, if it's assistance with financial aid, if it's assistance with housing insecurity, or it's assistance with mental health issues, that we are equipped, our student success coaches, are equipped to address that in real time for them. Ilene: And we'll have another podcast about that. We've already had a podcast with health and wellness. Mike: Yes. Ilene: So our listeners should find those other podcasts online.

Mike: Absolutely. For sure. Ilene: When you talk about this whole collaboration, obviously it makes sense.

It's like having your friend help you or be that guide throughout your MCC career, right?

How do faculty fit in to this model?

Because obviously they're the reason why students are here to get their degrees. Mike: Absolutely.

So it's interesting you say that, because right after this, I'm going to a meeting with faculty to have that conversation.

So the model that we've had, what we call the integrated advising model that we've had over the years, faculty have played a central role in advising for continuing students.

So basically the process has been: student comes in, they meet with Admissions, they get intake advising from Admissions.

Then there is an assignment to an academic school. If that student is studying Chemistry, there's going to be a handoff to a faculty member with advising expertise in a STEM or chemistry pathway.

And then that faculty member will advise that student academically, career-wise, and ideally, right, kind of point them towards the right direction of resources that they need outside that. Ilene: And love, of course. Mike: And love and care.

Here's the thing, faculty, their primary responsibility is teaching and learning, is developing innovative teaching practices, effective curricula, and being the academic experts that we've brought them in to be. And so we can't ask of them to engage in the kind of proactive, intentional, holistic advising that we need as an institution.

So what we've been doing is working through our labor management conversations, because faculty have an obligation to do advising. But essentially we're having conversations to say, all right, we don't want to lose out on that faculty expertise and desire for engagement with students outside of the classroom. But we also don't want to ask them to do something that, frankly, we're not set up structurally to do.

So we are in conversations about developing alternative approaches to student engagement for faculty that would be developed in partnership with academic departments that suit their areas of expertise.

So if it's not meeting with a caseload of 30 students to do academic advising, or 40, or 75, or whoever, maybe there's a mentorship program that a department wants to do. Maybe a department like mathematics or English wants to engage students through holding office hours and doing tutoring in the TAAC.

So this really is... you know, we are, we're getting closer and closer to having a model, but anything that we do needs to be a partnership.

It can not be... First of all, I'm not the expert in these things, and so I rely on the expertise of faculty in academic departments to help me and other administrators develop what's best for our students and what's most effective and practical for faculty. Ilene: Well, as faculty too, I mean, we're advising all along the way... Mike: That's right. Ilene: ... as well. Mike: That's right. Ilene: So to have that collaboration, as well as someone for faculty to lean on, makes sense. Mike: That's right. Mara: Yeah. I would say something that I want to add to that is that, in two part, for me, especially with Julie Mills, my student success coach, my advisor, that expertise doesn't necessarily just leave because she's no longer, you know, one of my professors. There was a short time when I was considering applying to dental school and just trying to map out what my programs would be in order to get to that point. And Julie Mills, she had sat on the admissions board for a medical school, and so she understood what they would be looking for. So that expertise does not leave with the shift from the actual professor to student success coach.



Also, the professors here, they care about the students. Ilene: Thanks for noticing.

[They laugh.] Mara: Whether it's just on a personal level of, hey, you're a little bit more quiet today, is everything all right after class?

Or with me in particular, as a supplemental instructor, for two years with the General Biology 1 and then General Chemistry 2, Bio 155 and Chem 152, Dr.

Lisa Flick with Bio 155, I've been with her for five semesters straight. When I took the course with her and then four semesters as her supplemental instructor, and she has been there asking me questions and again, encouraging me, challenging me, pushing me, but really just there for any question I have. And Lydia, Dr.

Lydia Tien, she's become a friend too, and especially with her as she teaches chemistry, she's been a great resource for me to tap and to ask questions to. And to really get that inside knowledge. And I know that doesn't, that would never leave just because they were no longer my advisor. Ilene: Or just because you're not in a class with them. Mara: Correct. Absolutely. Absolutely.

The professors here, even Dr. Silvio, when I took English 200 with him, anytime I see him in the hall, it's still, oh, hi Mara, how are you doing? It doesn't just go away. And that was over a year ago, so... Ilene: I'm going to tell you that it's not going to leave when you leave. It's not going to end when you leave. Mara: That's great! Ilene: Because relationships are often maintained well after graduation.

And I don't know, you might have noticed that some faculty were students here, they go off and then they come back.

And it's definitely that full circle for sure. Mike: Well, that's one of the beautiful things about a community college too is... and one of the reasons why I wanted to come here many years ago, you know, we're a teaching and learning institution, as opposed to a research institution or a technical college, which means that faculty come here. And if they don't come here for this reason, this, this becomes central to them very soon, they come here to develop as instructors. And to be a good instructor, you have to have that kind of passion for that kind of relationship, right?

Yeah. And so the best instructors know how to connect with their students. And those connections end up creating the kind of culture and community that we've been talking about. Ilene: That word again, community. Mike: That's right. Ilene: Right. It's not just a word, actually. Obviously, there's a trend.

There is a trend. Let's talk more about Phi Theta Kappa for a moment. Because obviously, you have gained a lot of benefits... Mara: Absolutely. Ilene: ...through it. If a student is interested, what would they need to know about it? And why generally would someone want to participate? Mara: Absolutely.

So there are a couple requirements to get that invitation to join, right?

Achieving that 3.6 GPA, you've taken 12 credit hours here, we will email you if you are eligible, there is no way that you're going to miss it, essentially, I get given a long list of information and I text, I email throughout the entire year. Ilene: As do deans and the provost and faculty. Mara: Absolutely. So I would say it's pretty hard to miss out on that.

Another thing that I really, I love to tell people, because it's a little humorous too, it's not a sorority or a scam either. A lot of people see the Greek letters

and they think, oh, I didn't know MCC had Greek life. And I go, "well, we don't, we have an honor society here." But yeah, so those are some of the requirements. But the actual why, I love to give a tangible reason, you know, an example.

It is not a free membership. It's a \$75 one-time fee, that membership. However, when I applied to St. John Fisher University on my application, on the very first page of that application, there was again, a box to check. Are you a member of the Phi Theta Honor Society?

I click, yep. I uploaded my membership certificate that's given to me from PTK.

And when I got my financial aid package back, there was a \$3,000 a year scholarship, simply for being a PTK member.

Ilene: Worth \$75! \$75 for \$6,000 over, you know, my entire time at St.

John Fisher. And to me, that's a pretty good deal, right?

It's a non-competitive scholarship. That means that I didn't have to submit an essay to get that \$3,000 for my first year. Ilene: You checked a box. Mara: I checked a box and I uploaded a PDF, you know. Ilene: And that's just one institution, many institutions accept... Mara: Absolutely.

The University of Rochester, RIT, schools... and not just in-state schools either, all across the country.

I want to say internationally, but don't quote me on that. So that is a really, really tangible... why you should do it. You know, to me, that's a no-brainer. College is expensive, you know.

Luckily to be here at MCC, not only is it a financially, you know, an intelligent choice to be here, but it's also a great community. But, you know, other institutions, they can be costly.

And for me, to pick a school where a small class size was really, really important, and you know, a smaller school, a really close sense of community.

I fell in love with St. John Fisher, but it's got a hefty price tag on it. So anything that I can do, that I can take, you know, that responsibility onto myself to push myself to maintain that GPA so that I can get that scholarship, you know, it's a little bit of my responsibility. And I'm proud to be able to do that. I'm proud to say I'll have, you know, almost no student loans throughout my entire schooling process.

That's... Ilene: That's a lot in today's world, for sure. Mara: Absolutely. It's great. So it's something that I can do now to set my future self up for success later. Ilene: Tell us a little bit more about the qualities or skills or other aspects of PTK that has helped you grow. Mara: Yeah, absolutely.

So on the, I would say on the online portal for PTK, I have gotten to do a bunch of development programs. They're called EDGE programs.

So I've taken a leadership one, I've learned how to do, you know, adequate research through there. And those are certificates that I get to, you know, put on my resume or anything. But it's also just real information that sometimes we don't talk about, you know, the little tips and tricks. So that's a great one, but also being able to communicate with my peers and have disagreement sometimes on which way I want to take things for, you know, with my officers. I would say a lot of those interpersonal skills have really been developed and even just as at the member

meetings, you know, things that we can bounce off of each other that we can learn.

That's been great. As an officer, I've also, you know, completed what we call hallmarks, which is basically just an essay that's due to say to talk about what we have done as a chapter. Ilene: Reflective pieces. Mara: Exactly.

Yeah. So reflective pieces. But on these projects, we do every single year an Honors In Action project where we focus on the community on a study topic. Our topic for last year and this upcoming year is the power of stories. So we did a bunch of research into the power of stories and we reached out to people in our community and we filmed a documentary, you know, allowing these people a platform to be able to tell their story. And it was powerful. I've definitely when I went through and edited the 50 minute documentary, I cried a couple times just because of how beautiful it was to see my friends and people that I had come to know be able to share their stories in such a real and powerful way. We got to, you know, have a showing of that and just even putting together an event like that, that's another skill, you know, project planning is huge for our whole team and for our members that got involved, too.

For our college project, which is the other project that we focus on, that is definitely more focused on the college. And so Rebecca Mack in Transfer Advising, we met with her a bunch of times and we said, you know, we love this transfer guide that you have, all of the steps that you should take if you are looking to transfer.

But, you know, it's on a paper.

We would love to turn this into an interactive online element. And so one of those skills, again, that communication that we're learning and learning the ins and outs of how an institution can work.

We worked with the Virtual Campus to be able to open up a Brightspace module, a whole course, Ilene: Let me just tell you, we had a podcast with the Virtual Campus. Mara: Yeah.

Ilene: A little plug. Mara: They are seriously great, too. And now just to know that there's people all over campus that I can just, you know, walk into their office if I have a question or if I need something. That's great. But getting to actually create something like that with our team, with Virtual Campus, with Rebecca Mack and having that cross-department collaboration and allowing us to be a part of that, that's definitely something that we learn. We learn the importance of collaboration, the importance of communication and documentation so that, you know, being able to show what you have done and not just talk about it a little bit. Ilene: Three pillars of success right there. Mara: Absolutely. Mike: It should be noted that not only is that project very much central to the Unlocking Opportunity work that we're doing for program mapping and advising, but Mara has been a member of the Unlocking Opportunity Implementation Team for this last semester. Ilene: Get the students involved. Mike: That's right. Mara: Yeah.

Something that the other student representative, Billy Simba, and I have chatted about is that we are glad that we aren't just being talked about in a room, but that we are actually there to give our two cents. Ilene: Included. Mara: Oh, you're included. And that is truly the spirit of what I see here at MCC again and again and again. Whether it's at the TAAC and the SI department is figuring out how they're going to create this, they created a special position called "uploads" for myself, a student named Jamie Hill, and then a student named Will for us to actually come in and become managers of the smaller groups and have that leadership opportunity, but also create a real pipeline for student concern to reach the top of the food chain without a whole bunch of red tape or forms to fill out. It was

organic communication that was great. And to me, that's them actually caring about the success of the SI leaders and therefore the students in those classes. It's me being asked to sit with the Unlocking Opportunities Team and for the most part, listen, because I'm jumping in and at the end of year three, but also be asked questions at our meeting that we had on Wednesday where we got the visit from Aspen.

I was extremely encouraged and I want to say inspired, but that might be a little extreme. Mike: You can say that. Mara: Okay, I'll say inspired. At the very end of that meeting, the closing of that meeting, Mary, I believe, who was asking us questions, she said, all right, for the very end, I want to hear from the student representatives.

What have you guys learned from this? What have you taken away? That for me, again, was just a huge piece of, "whoa, we aren't just being talked about here, but we're being brought into these spaces and genuinely utilized as students." And I don't think that there is an aspect of anything that I've seen here on campus where I haven't had a little bit of an opportunity to be a part of. And for me, for other future students, for other current students, I think that's very encouraging to know that, again, I'm not just being talked about, but I'm being planned for with me in mind, but then very intentionally brought into the conversation in very real ways, asking my opinions on things, asking my perspective, because we've all been students at one time or another, we'll all hopefully continue to be students for the rest of our lives. But in a very real way, my student experience is unique and other students as well.

And they're cared about each one. Mike: And we, you know... I co-chair that committee along with Dr.

Robin Cole, he's the vice president over Workforce Development, and I made a conscious decision in the beginning that I wasn't going to, I wasn't going to kind of put on a persona that was, you know, kind of very saccharine, you know, student-, like, friendly, I mean, student-friendly of course, right, but I wanted to be transparent about the challenges in front of us and the work that we were trying to achieve.

Not only because I thought that was the best way to solicit honest student feedback, right, and to make use of that valuable perspective. But I also wanted it to be a learning experience for Mara and Billy as well, you're sitting in a room with individuals who have been charged with affecting significant change for an institution, and change is scary, and it can be difficult, because of the uncertainty it brings. And my hope is that, you know, when you leave us and go on to bigger and better things, and you go to Fisher and your career, that you can take from those meetings, something that can inform how you approach the big changes that you bring about in your world and the world moving forward. Mara: I would say one of the things that I've learned directly from you, Dr.

Jacobs, is the importance of realistic implementation, not just writing down really cool ideas or coming up with great initiatives, but how can we, how can we make an impact with this really... very real thing? How can this be bigger than us? How can it last once we're gone from here? And how can it be real? And how can we get things done? And I think sometimes that can get lost with planning committees or, you know, just groups of people who come up and have these amazing dreams, but to actually see it through and make sure that there's a way to measure that success, or say, has what we have put our effort into actually happened?

Is it actually good for the students?

And is it real? And I think that's something I will definitely take with me into

other things that, you know, I've seen in the meetings where you've gone, all right, well, this needs to happen.

So let's actually have actionable items and not just, "oh, well, we want to do this" but let's do A, B and C.

And that's very encouraging to me. Mike: Well, I appreciate that. Not everyone's a fan of my pragmatism, but I'll take it. Mara: Yeah.

Right. Ilene: This is the epitome of what MCC is, your conversations, because in just two years, a lot of people look at MCC, it's a community college, but it's not just a community college, it's the beginning of life. Mara: Right. Absolutely. Ilene: It's the beginning of what you will do in your life, how you will affect the world around you. And it's not just going to class.

Mara: I have goosebumps. Ilene: So have I.

So have I. What would you tell a student considering coming or who is just going through the admissions process? Mara: What would I tell a student?

This whole process, MCC in general, but also, like, the start of your life, really as an adult, it is so amazing.

And there's going to be so many different opportunities.

I would definitely say, don't spread yourself too thin. Ilene: Easy to do here.

Mara: Be realistic. Ask for help, because there is so many different resources here at MCC that go beyond the classroom, like we were talking about.

Ask for help. Find a way to get involved and find a way to give back in a way that's more than just yourself. But most importantly, I would say, is don't allow the two years to just happen. Try your absolute best to be present, even though sometimes the classes can get a little bit monotonous, but find ways to be present in what you're doing in the moments, in the small little moments, because five years down the line, 10 years down the line, life is going to be so different, and sometimes you'll wish that you could just snap back.

But life isn't happening tomorrow, life isn't happening yesterday, life is happening right now. And guess what?

You get to be right now. Ilene: And it's not happening to you. Mara: Exactly.

Ilene: It's happening for you, so create it... Mara: Absolutely. Ilene: Like you've done. Mara: Yep. You get to author your own story. Just make sure you're there for it. Ilene: That's awesome.

Congratulations on... Mara: Thank you. Ilene: ...creating that story for you and for us. Ilene: It's amazing.

And I'm sure we'll hear from you. This won't be the last time. And Dr.

Jacobs, I've heard vision, community, collaboration, communication, engagement.

What gets you excited about coming to MCC every day? Mike: Oh boy, that's a big question.

Ilene: Thanks. Mike: Well, today I was excited that it was Friday.

But what gets me excited? I've worked at a few colleges.

I've never... I spent most of my career at an access-oriented college in New York City that had two and four year degrees, I adjunct taught at NYU, big research university.

And of course, I've been all over the country and engaged folks in all different institutions.

I've never seen an institution. I've never seen a college where... and I'm not just saying this because it sounds good or because I want to please people,... where everyone has a singular passion for helping students. And that doesn't mean that everyone is in agreement about how to do that, that everyone has the same ideas about what's going to be effective.

But people take very seriously this mission that we have about access-oriented, equity-driven education.

And they do so to the extent that faculty who are teaching a five-five load still engage in all manner of professional learning and culture building, like this project here, this podcast, that individuals who are, you know, have a 300 advising caseload are still going into, you know, three-day professional learning institutes that we've stood up here to become better and better about, you know, in terms of their capacity to help students. I've never seen a place like this.

I get excited about helping people who have very clear goals about student success figure out how to achieve those goals. That's my job. My job isn't just to come up with ideas and, you know, tell people to do them. It's to hear other people's ideas, help package them in alignment with the president's vision, our strategic priorities, and remove all that stuff that's in their way so that they can achieve them. So that's what gets me out of bed, I think. Ilene: All right. I'll come back on Monday. [They laugh.] Maybe.

Yeah. Okay. This is one of the most inspiring conversations we've had on TribTalk.

It's so exciting to have you here before you graduate.

Congratulations! Mara: Thank you. Ilene: Thank you so much. We've heard from Mara Waynick, not just a student, not just a participant in the college vision, also a president of Phi Theta Kappa, the International Honor Society on campus.

And of course, a small role in the college, the Provost and Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs... I could barely say that without Dr.

taking a breath... Michael Jacobs, thank you so much. We can't say goodbye without a shout out to our amazing production crew: Jeremy Case from the Virtual Campus,... Mike: Yay, Jeremy. Ilene: Yay! ...Patrick Farchione and Jason Flack from the Visual and Performing Arts department. And our inspiring theme music is courtesy of MCC Music professor, John Nyerges, titled Sambelissa. We are a collaboration here on TribTalk... All Things MCC. My name is Ilene Benz, and I look forward to another TribTalk. [closing music: Sambelissa, by MCC Professor John Nyerges]