



# **“All the rules are on my side”: how to have difficult conversations about equity in instruction**

**Presentation to the CIO Conference  
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# Kelly Fowler

Vice President of Instruction

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CIO for 10 years



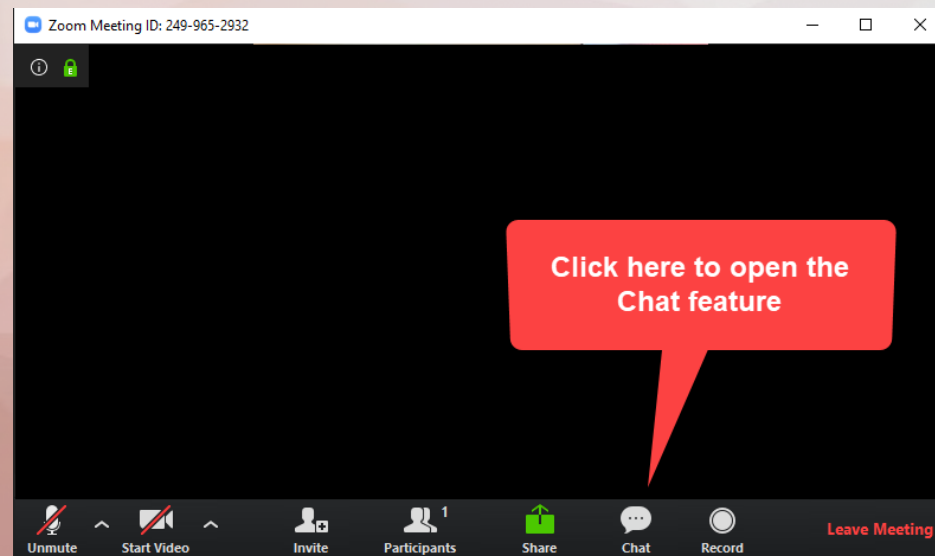
# See Something, Say Something

- **WHAT:** College Committee Meeting
- **WHO:** A large group of college employees including faculty, administrators, and students
- **WHEN:** Weekday afternoon (regular standing meeting)
- **WHERE:** Zoom
- **How:** Public Comment in the Chat



# See Something, Say Something

During the meeting, a faculty member posted a racist and sexist message publicly in chat.



# See Something, Say Something

## *AS A RESULT...*

- Challenged the Chair to respond in the moment
  - First thought: Maybe People Won't Notice...
  - Second Thought: He couldn't possibly mean this way...
  - Third thought: What happens if this meeting turns into utter chaos...
  - Then...immediately texted a picture of the quote to HR and VPI.



# See Something, Say Something

## *AS A RESULT...*

- Participants were offended and started to forward the comment to HR, VPI/CIO, and Chair
- Participants shared that they were tired of hearing these types of comments and without action to address behavior
- No one responded to this comment in the Chat
- At the conclusion of the meeting...



# See Something, Say Something

WHAT DID WE DO NEXT?

- Engaged immediately in the difficult conversation
- Initiated a “SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING: BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING” for all employees
- Training addressed the difficult conversations and to how to react in these types of moments
- What Would Happen Now: Acknowledge, Apologize, Action



# Jennifer “Jen” Kalfsbeek-Goetz, Ph.D.

Vice President, Academic Affairs

Ventura College

CIO for 1 year, 9 months





# This is *exactly* what we signed up for

- Leading in “normal” times is easy. Leading in challenging times is ...  
leading.
- **Campus constituents count on us to:**
  - **Inform** them of all “relevant” happenings
    - “Relevance” is subjective, but not always to our campus community members 😊
  - **Hear** them out.
    - Take time to actively listen before fixing or acting – but not too much time 😊
  - **Avoid over-burdening** them with TMI and TMZ
    - Too Many Initiatives ~ Too Much Zooming
  - **Decide** already!
    - But don’t be top-down in your approach!



# Braving Student-centered COVID Planning & committing to sustainable equity practices

## Approach:

- **Listen:** Positions vs. Interests
- **Share the Problem** Transparency and Collaboration
- **Advocate** for Changes: Fight to Support Stakeholder Interests
- **Be Humble:** Leading is an Iterative Process

## Walking the Walk in COVID planning and on Equity in the Classroom

1. To Meet or Not to Meet In-Person, That is the Question: Planning for Equitable Access to Classes and Resources During COVID-19.
2. “Things have got to change around here!”: Equity in the Classroom and Across Campus.



# David Williams, Ph.D.

Vice President, Academic Affairs

Solano Community College

CIO for 4 years, 4 months



# Listening to our students

*(Email from a student)*

“Good morning,

Allow me to start by saying that it has never been my intentions to attack. This is intended for those faculty of the Math dept and the Dean, who refuse to see what's right, and equitable.

Degrees and titles are useless, when you aren't putting in the work. When it comes to me as a student, there is a major problem that's unethical, and shows an ineffectiveness in the quality of an education that I'm paying for.



# Listening to our students

So, I pose the question: (1) when the college, has loaned out more than 300 chrome books to students, what leads you to believe that these students have the technology to scan in an assignment, when most students can't afford a smartphone? (2) what do you recommend for the students that can't afford to purchase a \$300 nearly decade old textbook? (3) How do we ensure that our most vulnerable students are getting prepared for the demands of current jobs based on a decade old textbook?

As a student I am requesting answers to my questions. *As educators I believe that you should have no problem answering them.* [emphasis added]



# Bureaucratic response (*pass the buck*)

*Response from the dean:*

“Sadly ... Deans have no purview over textbook selections unless the faculty are willing to give it away across the entire campus. Until then, the argument needs to be toward the faculty senate and their committees to resolve.”

*Response from the faculty member:*

“I understand and empathize with your concerns about the difficulties imposed on students by the pandemic. However, I just want you to know that as an adjunct math instructor, I don't really have any options in terms of the course materials such as the textbook.”



# Difficult conversation #1: Listening

- Stopped the email battle
- Brought everyone together (except the faculty member, who wasn't copied on the emails – my oversight)
- Spent 45 minutes listening to the student's anger, frustration, pleas
- In previous instances, we had dealt with *issue* but had not changed our *system*
- Realization that the college really has no tangible value statement related to equity whereby faculty and staff could receive direction on decisions/policies



# Difficult conversation #2: Talk to Action

- CIO addressed the Academic Senate
  - Textbook costs are a recurring theme in student complaints, focus groups, and student success
  - There are alternative options besides high-cost textbooks (OER, for example)
  - Some faculty have embraced zero-cost textbooks while others have resisted the effort
    - “Not rigorous enough” (aka “I have higher standards than my colleagues”)
    - “The book I use has worked for me for years”
    - “I would have to change my whole syllabus”
    - “The publisher has really helpful test banks that I can use”
    - “Academic freedom!”





# Action plan

**After presenting the issue to the Academic Senate, we decided:**

1. Senate will put out a resolution encouraging faculty to rein in textbook costs
2. Faculty advocated for a “Low-Cost” option as well as (ZTC)
3. Administration agreed to a stipend to jump start the process



# Summary of difficult conversation

- **“All the rules are on my side”**: it is easy to become complacent
  - One “supportive” comment from faculty was, “We are so tired right now. Maybe we can address this when things get back to normal.”
    - I encouraged the faculty to redefine “tired”
- **My fears of pushback were alleviated by conversations with faculty leaders**
  - Interesting . . .when I approached it as a “conversation” rather than a directive, faculty gave me ideas about how to get buy-in from other faculty. Say, “Here’s my big idea, make it work.”
- **The difficult conversations have to come from a place of caring and respect**



# Tammy Robinson, Ed.D.

Vice President, Instruction

Cañada College

CIO for 5 years, 6 months



# There's Nothing Traditional about this!

- What are the difficult conversations that have had to happen during the pandemic?
  - **How are we ensuring that the classroom is a safe place for students?**
    - Are we discussing pedagogical needs with Academic Senate?
    - Are we remaining flexible to meet students needs for success?
  - **Are we ensuring that students understand where to find support?**
    - Are we assuming that we are communicating effectively with students?
    - What are we doing to find out?



# Recover with Equity

- In accordance with the California Governor’s Council, *Recover with Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic*: “...Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and Indigenous Californians, as well as adults without post-secondary credentials or those who need to return to post-secondary learning to upskill or re-skill for a different job or industry” (pg. 8).
- The Taskforce believes California needs a recovery that courageously addresses inequities in post-secondary education that have created and exacerbated wealth gaps (pg. 8).



# Discussion

