

Interviewee: Charlie Andrews

Interviewer: Melanie Gómez

Date: April 13, 2022

MG: Good afternoon. Today I am interviewing Dr. Charlie Andrews, who is the Interim Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs here at FIU. Thank you, Dr. Andrews for joining me today. It's a privilege of sitting down with you.

CA: <Laugh>

MG: You're a very busy man these days. <Laugh> with, with the everything that's going on at the university. So as part of the oral history collection for Dr. Kuntz's class I'm going to be asking you a couple of questions about your experiences with higher education and you know, at FIU and primarily, we're going to be talking about, you know, what your attraction to FIU is.

CA: Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>

MG: Your different experiences and your role current previously, as in, as well as currently with university and kind of like looking forward, you know, what, where do you see Higher Education going?

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

MG: So to begin would you share some information about yourself? Like where were you born? Where'd you grow up? What kind of educational background you have and what made you choose that major in particular?

CA: Okay, sure. Happy to be a part of this. Thank you for inviting me. I again, Charlie Andrews, and I'm actually a Miami native, so I know that's, you know, maybe less rare than it used to be. I think I used to talk about being in my name, Miami native being rare. And actually, maybe what's more rare is that both of my parents were born in Miami, born and raised in Miami. So, I'm like second generation Miami. And well for somebody at my age is maybe more rare than younger folks these days. But I, yes, I grew up in South Florida. I went to American High School, which is in the Northwest part of Miami Dade County and actually came to FIU out of undergraduate after, I mean, out of high school for my undergraduate degree, I went to FIU as an undergrad, and I majored in Mathematics Education.

So, you know, just interesting. I think I chose that because I enjoyed Math. I thought I was good at math and maybe felt like I had to write less papers if I did something with Math than if I was doing other majors. You know, I, I, I did have a draw towards education in some level. And so I guess I felt like, you know I had good math teachers in

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my past that that helped me solidify my interest in Mathematics. So I was like, yeah, maybe I could do that someday. So I, I, I pursued a degree in mathematics and which was interesting, because I started out as Journalism, but realized early on that I missed Math because I wasn't taking math as a Journalism major and was like, I'm going to take another Math course. And so I did that and then I kind of just snowed of all from there, but but yeah, so I, I went here I first commuted, which is the traditional, I think experience of a lot of FIU students.

But after my first couple of semesters, I got very involved on campus, joined a fraternity. I was involved in several activities on campus. I also had an older sister who went to FIU, who I would see just come home, you know, go to school and come home and go to school and come home. And I was, I realized I wanted to do more than just that for my particular experience. So I did move to campus. So I lived on campus for my last three to three and a half years of, of being in school. So that gave other, you know, opportunity for independence and, and to kind of enhance my FIU experience. So I did that. I actually was hired when I graduated by Dr. Lunsford at the time who was the Director of Student Activities at the time he actually knew I had an interest in Higher Education.

I had been really involved and had mentors who were involved in Higher Education. And, but I hadn't really done anything as far as like applying to graduate school or knew what to do next, that kind of a first generation college student. So I really didn't know what to do beyond getting the bachelor's degree. And so he actually offered me a job working in student activities. I literally got paid \$20,000 a year with no benefits <laugh> to, to help out with our orientation program for new students to help out with our programming council to help out with our student government association. So I was hired to do that. And I did that for one year my first year out of, out of college and while doing that found out more about graduate programs in higher education applied to different programs and eventually got accepted to the College Student Personnel program, which is a fancy name for Higher Education at Bowling Green State University, which is in Bowling Green, Ohio.

So I did that and actually on my way, I, I applied to do an internship, an orientation internship at Clemson University. So I went to Clemson this summer, before I started graduate school and got to be a part of their orientation program for new students. And then that, that following fall, I, I started at bowling green and got my master's degree for, for two years there. And when I finished that I did work at a small school called Heidelberg College and then worked back at Bowling Green. And at some point realized it was cold in Ohio and I was a Miami boy and I was like, it's time for me to go back to Florida. So I did come back and I actually got a job back at FIU which was in the summer 1999. So I've actually worked here since full time since the summer of 1999.

Again, not including that one year I did prior to, to graduate school. And I got a, my first job back was actually as an academic advisor in our advising center which I had been

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doing some academic advising at bowling green as a professional when I once had graduated from my master's degree. And so I did that for several years. I did eventually pursue my doctorate degree here at FIU. So I have my doctorate in higher education administration as well. So I completed that while I was working overtime. So, so yeah, so that's kind of the, the basics of my educational history. And then I've had many jobs here at FIU and I'm happy to share more or about some of those if you'd like mm-hmm

MG: <Affirmative> Wow. So you've been all over the place <laugh> yeah. So Clemson, we have Bowling Green, we have what was the, I'm sorry, the, the Other...

CA: Heidelberg College. Very small, like liberal arts college. There were about a thousand students that went to that school. It was in the middle of the middle of Ohio basically.

MG: Okay, cool. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> and you know, aside from the weather and the harsh winters you just wanted to come back to Miami, right?

CA: For sure.

MG: You come back to your roots.

CA: Yes.

MG: So, tell me a little bit of about, you know, the, the differences that you've noticed working from Campus Life and then going back into Academic Advising ...

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: Throughout your experiences and the different approaches that you've seen to higher education ...

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: You've noticed kind of like a steady evolution of how students are being supported, correct?

CA: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I, and I think you bring up an interesting point because I think in the traditional student affairs world, and when people think about student affairs and

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people who get degrees in higher education it has focused a lot more on those things that are outside the classroom and, and like maybe less academic focused. So <affirmative>, you know, campus activities, student activities, fraternities and sororities student programming you know, housing and residential life wellness programs. So all these things that are there to help support student success, right.

MG: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

CA: Cause they all do. And they're very critical. But I don't think as I was going through there wasn't as much emphasis on academic support services. So like Academic Advising from in my opinion is one of those things that is very still Student Affairs, it's just done from through an academic lens because those staff members are focusing on helping students mm-hmm <affirmative>.

And actually, even when I began in the advising center and I think I shifted over to the advising center again, besides the fact that I worked there in 1999, I moved to Student Affairs. When I moved back over to the Advising Center, it was 2008. I realized that a lot of the folks who were doing advising at that point were didn't have really a student development background. They had Master's degrees, a lot of them, but they were just Master's degrees in English or biology or whatever the discipline was. And so I remember talking about student development theory and how like students have all of these complex things that they need to kind of pay attention to. And so I helped introduce some of that to the advisors. And I think part of that shift is because advising historically was done by faculty members.

And obviously to this day, faculty are still an important part of providing advising to students. But they, they do a lot related to like what it means in the discipline, looking for research opportunities and, and those types of things. Whereas now in higher education, we have a lot of folks that, you know, are our primary, their primary role is to be an academic advisor. They're not a faculty member. They, their full-time job is to support students through advising and helping students navigate the complicated scenarios related a curriculum because as faculty and administrators, we sometimes like overcomplicate the curriculum <laugh>. And so how do students navigate through that and make the right choices to make sure that they're making progress to their, toward their degree and that they do it in a timely fashion. There's also a slew of academic policies that students are not always aware of and advisors are able to help students understand that.

And not that faculty aren't able to do that. They are, but they have so many other things on their plate, the faculty members, and they can't, it's hard for them to keep up with all the policy changes and shifts. Whereas having somebody who their full-time job is to provide advising part of their role is to keep up on those policies and to help relay those to the students and help guide them and support them. So, so yeah, I do think that there's been a shift. I think the lines between academic affairs and student affairs have been blurred over the years because we recognize that, that it all needs to kind of work together. Like there's a holistic view to what's helps students be successful. And so we need to be supporting them in all way shapes and forms. Actually in recent time when

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we've been talking about retention and graduation rates, you know, even the faculty themselves have been looking at the curriculum and making changes to the curriculum to better support students' abilities to be successful.

So that was not something that I think typically happened when I was in college. Right. Like you, you know, it was like the curriculum was what it was. And, and we didn't always focus on the fact that like, we might be creating obstacles for students. And now we're, we're paying a lot more intentional attention to helping students navigate through the curriculum as well. Like if it doesn't make sense to have a particular course, then why do we have it? Is it just historical or does it make sense that that's learning that we need to have students, are there competencies included in that course that a student really needs. Right. And so, so I think that shift has definitely existed and, you know and shifted over time. And I think, you know, probably the biggest reason for that is that our student populations have changed today's college student, you know, luckily we're providing more access.

So that education is not just for the few, but that we can truly provide opportunities for students of all backgrounds to provide and leverage education as a means for social mobility or for, you know, just doing things that they can get into the dreams that they have. And so as our, as we've had those shift shifts, I think higher education has had to respond. We have probably have not always done it as quickly as we should. But I do think that there's been a lot of shifts to try to make sure that we're doing what we can to support students in lots of different ways.

MG: Definitely. So there's definitely been an evolution in how to support students...

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

MG: and of just focusing on the academic, there's also the, you know, student affairs, there's the engagement component, there's a career component now that's really a big factor in current education and post-graduation.

CA: Right.

MG: That's definitely something that's very relevant. So those are some of the initiatives that are currently being emphasized at FIU

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: Which of those initiatives do you think kind of stick out the most to you currently now, you know, you meant that there, you mentioned that there's kind of like a holistic approach to

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education and supporting students. And I like to think of it as an interconnectedness between, you know, classroom and outside of the class. So what are some of the initiatives that currently being used at FIU that kind of, that both you oversee, but also you see that might be of benefit most the benefit to students?

CA: Yeah. I mean, there's, there's a lot and you're right. I do think that there's a connectedness, there's like an intersectionality between all of the different things that we're trying to do. And I think that that's really important. I do think that there's obviously looking at ways to provide more support and through student services has definitely been something that has been, we paid a lot more attention to I can use academic is something that I'm very familiar with because when, when we started to focus more on academic advising and having these full-time individuals who could, who could provide that support, we had approximately 20 or so individuals at the university who were providing, who had that kind of role. And then we were relying on faculty for all of the other pieces. And that was again, 2008, 2009, and somewhere around 2009, 2010, we recognized we need to invest in this particular resource.

So, you know, 10 to 12 years later, we have over 150 individuals on the campus, you know, at, at FIU that are providing that particular type of service to students. So there was a huge is, you know, some recognition that the more support we provide that that's going to help students with retention and, and getting to graduation in a more timely fashion. At FIU more specifically, we have seen a huge shift and it taking students, you know, five or six years to graduate to now getting more and more of them through. And four that's been an emphasis that's been very prominent in the state of Florida. But we've noticed that prior to us doing some of these initiatives, our largest group was graduating in five years, somewhere in, you know, by, by the end of year five, we had more students graduating in five than we had graduating in four and more that that were graduating in six and today after a few years of massive interventions, now the majority is four.

Like, we have more students graduating in four years than we do that are graduating in five or six. So we made that shift that wasn't really about like keeping students who are leaving. It was just about getting the ones who were already graduating to do it a little more quickly. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And so that kind of, I think, aligns with the other thing I would point out, which is that post-graduation those postgraduation outcomes, right? The sooner we can get them out, the less debt hopefully they'll have, and the sooner they start getting a paycheck. Right. So so there's that kind of connection. And we have been focusing on, you know, I think the federal and state governments have been pressuring higher education institutions to focus on not just helping students get the cred, but how do we give them opportunities that help them turn that credential into employment?

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And so, because, you know, it makes sense, right? We were so focused on getting them through and we weren't necessarily focused on what's going to happen to them. On the other side, you know, we've always had career services, units and career placement. It used to be called, but there's a much stronger emphasis on what are we doing to try to help connect students with opportunities so that they can take these credentials we're providing and actually get jobs and be able to go out there to do that, I think in a place like Miami, which FIU is serving a south Florida community, we have a commitment to our community to all also be producing graduates who can then go back and make a difference right here in our own community. Especially since a lot of our graduates don't leave South Florida. So I think that, you know, it all kind of interconnects to, to say that that's definitely something that, that focus on helping them find employment post-graduation has definitely been something that has become a major emphasis that I don't think is gonna go away anytime soon. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

Yeah, definitely. Moving forward, you know, graduation and job preparedness is an important factor in, you know, higher ed. It pretty much a lot of the moving factors or pushing impetus for a students to go to college. You know, they're thinking, okay, what am I gonna do? I'm 18. I need to graduate. What am I gonna do?

MG: <Laugh> yeah.

CA: I need to get, get out there and work for sure.

MG: Because yeah. Social mobility is not just about getting a degree <laugh> right. Like it's about doing something with that to then make, to make more money and all those things. You're right. It's, it's more about than just the credential.

MG: Yeah. So in your time work, you know, working with students have you noticed that there are certain populations that require a little more assistance than others? So we know that, you know, FIU is international

CA: mm-hmm, <affirmative>

MG: We're working with students that are of all different backgrounds. But have you noticed in, in your efforts, and these are different initiatives that they're catering to specific population students of it's a specific backgrounds, you know, to be able to achieve that social movement, just like you mentioned...

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

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MG: is that's, that's obviously something that you've worked in, in, in, in the, in the past and currently university is working towards, correct.

CA: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think, I think, you know, you always start looking at and, and I feel like you can't have a blanket statement on who are, who are the group of students we need to look at because different places have different needs.

MG: Right.

CA: So FIU being a Hispanic Serving Institution with about 65 to 67% of our students identifying as Hispanic or Latinx like that population does so well here, because they don't necessarily feel marginalized in Miami at FIU. Like, whereas I think Latinx populations at schools and other places where they are definitely the strong minority it's a, the transition issues can be, can be more difficult. So we actually have institutions that have like, contacted us to say like, oh my gosh, your graduation rates for, for Hispanic students is like off the charts. How are you doing that? Well, you know, we are doing some intentional things, but also that's part of just our identity being in Miami.

Like those students are not having the same types of transition issues, necessarily as somebody who might be in a predominantly white institution who now is, you know, feeling marginalized because nobody is providing support or understanding their unique lens that they, that they have for education. One thing that I think probably does cross over all types of institution are the first generation college student. That's definitely been something. I didn't even know what that was. Even though I am a first generation college student, when, when I went to college, nobody was talking about that, like at least at the same way they are today. So I didn't really think about like that. I might have had something disadvantages of having parents who didn't understand the, the culture of higher education. And so, so even within groups, I think that first generation status can, can kind of go across like racial lines and other kind socioeconomic background, all those different categories.

It can kind of cut across to know that like you're having to navigate something that the family before you doesn't even know how to support you through that is definitely a challenge which is why we've, we've been doing a lot of initiatives as have institutions throughout the country. There are even metrics that we have at the state level and otherwise that, that ask us to track the success of our first generation population. So that's, that's thing that, you know there's, there's a huge emphasis on I do also think again, socioeconomic is a piece, so students who are Pell Grant eligible, which again has to do with family income. That's another metric that the state is asking us, okay, you're doing great with, with these students. And maybe you're doing great with students of color, but how are you doing with specifically the students Pell Grant eligible?

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Because they, again, to do not have always the same resources at their disposal to be able to be successful, like in a higher education setting. So mm-hmm <affirmative> so I do think, I think it's our responsibility. FIU is a very access driven institution being that we're urban serving and a, and a community that is very diverse. But to me, access is not enough like access without success. On the other end is half the story, right? We can't just provide an opportunity for students to, to enter higher education if we're not going to support them through it. Because you know, that has been a struggle nationally, even as the percentage of students from underrepresented backgrounds has gone up the graduation rates, not necessarily gone out. And so, you know, we're, we're having letting, allowing more to start, but if we're not helping them finish, then we're not really making a difference. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>, you know, we're not moving the needle as far as our economy and our society goes. So it's definitely something that, that has been prevalent throughout higher education in the last couple of decades in particular mm-hmm,

MG: <Affirmative> speaking of access how does it feel like being a, a, so you're almost as famous as Roary at FIU <laugh> how does it feel like having your own website and being "Ask Charlie" <laugh>?

CA: Yes. It's a little, it's a little crazy. I still have you know, both staff members and students who will still, you know, literally today I was walking into a room and they're like, oh, do you have questions? Just ask Charlie. Right. And it's interesting because when the idea for that came out when we were in the middle, obviously the pandemic, and we were shifting to, you know remote courses versus online and online courses and just this new, normal that we were experiencing the concept of creating a website with my own bit emoji that really does kind of look like me too. So that's kinda cool, but that like creating something where students could submit question or concern, and it was gonna go to an actual human being in this day of like chat bots and AI, that is actually a real person on the other end.

Who's, who's going to read what you wrote and then try to help you and answer the questions when you can. But also a lot of times it was reaching out to the right people. It's been a really rewarding experience as much as it's been exhausting, because there were literally times when I was getting like over a hundred submissions a day in the, in the height of the pandemic and, and trying to do my best within a day or so to try to respond to each of those students. Even if it was to say, I need a couple of days to, to look into this, I'll get back to you. Like I said, exhausting, but extremely rewarding. Cause I realized and recognized that an institution of our size 57-58,000 students, we're not typically providing a resource like that, where there's a person on the other end of a computer that can try to help you.

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Obviously, we have a ton of resources and a ton of people who help at FIU, but students don't often know who, who to ask and who to go to for help. So I feel like I was able to facilitate a lot of that. And again, that was really rewarding. We're actually now trying to talk about like, how do we sustain this? Now that we're kind of, you know, obviously we're still in the pandemic, but you know, as things that are returning more to in person there have not, there has not been the same kind of traffic on the, as Charlie site. Students are not reaching out as, as regularly as they were. But it would be a great resource, especially during times of registration when students are trying to get their schedule set, if we wanna support them through making sure they stay on track for graduation out of, we create, you know, how do we sustain that website and allow them to write, ask questions that maybe should be for their advisor, but maybe they can't get an appointment with their advisor for another three or four days, but we can try to give them some intermediate help, you know, enter interim help.

So we're talking about it and it actually funny you say Roary because we're like, okay, doesn't really need to be about Charlie anymore. That was just because somebody had to do it, but maybe we, we morph it into ask Roary, right. But it's not, you're, you're not asking the school mascot. You're just asking a team of individuals who are on the other end that can kind of filter your questions and respond. So that's kind of what we're talking about now is how do we, how do we sustain this so that we could then actually promote it right now? We're not really promoting it because literally it's just the one person on the other end. But, but we could really promoted as an amazing resource at such a large institution. If we find the right kind of infrastructure and we have a lot of great people here already, so it wouldn't be about, I don't think we have to hire anybody. I think it's literally just training people to use the technology and allowing the people who already know a lot and do a great job to, to join together as a team to help get students answers when they need it.

MG: Yeah, definitely. Having that website and having the form they're available to students basically 24/7 allows the student to feel more connected and more being able, more able to access, you know, the resources that they need. Yeah. It's not just, you know, sending an email to an advisor who can only respond, you know, so much out of their time. It's, it's having that extra layer of ability to contact another person, to be able to answer a question, you know, for the student. It's definitely a new approach...

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative> ...

MG: and when I saw it, I thought it was a great thing, you know, for the pandemic, because definitely it's also, it, it was a learning experience...

CA: Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>

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MG: You know, pandemic who lives through, through a pandemic it the first in a hundred years. So it's definitely something you know, that needed to fill the void and make that connected for the connectedness for the students. Yeah. And, and it's great that it worked out, you know?

CA: Yeah. And there was some accountability there too, because there were times when I'm like, wow, I've gotten like three or four questions about this same thing. There's obviously an issue here, right. That we made maybe need to be more clear or what have you. Or there were things when I find out, even as we were trying to return to in person stuff, that students were expressing concerns. And I, and I would reach out to a unit to say, like, students are saying this, did you, are you aware that this is what they're experiencing? And they were like, no, that's not what they should be experiencing. Yeah. And so, you know, not that it was to get anybody in trouble, but like sometimes it was just that accountability to say like, okay, wow. Like I could bring it to somebody's attention that we can kind of fix something like real time, like this isn't working, let's fix it. And that's something that doesn't happen a lot because people are too busy doing their, doing the great work that they do. So,

MG: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. It's a more proactive approach. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>, it allows for change at more of an exponential rate than, than just realizing at the end of the semester, you know, with the SPOTs the student perception of teaching surveys, you know, later on knowing, oh, okay. We gotta change that. But you being able to, like you said, being change it it right in the moment so that students can see that they're being heard. Definitely.

CA: Yeah. You're right. I mean, it wasn't always proactive in the sense that we were reacting to the comments, but it proactive in that we weren't allowing it to become a ginormous problem. Right.

MG: Mm-hmm <affirmative>

CA: Yeah. Let's fix it as soon as we know about it and to keep it from happening again. Right.

MG: Mm-hmm <affirmative>

CA: Cause a lot of times, you know, if we don't fix something, then the more students are gonna of have that same issue.

MG: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

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CA: Like, let's address it as soon as we are become aware of it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>, especially if it's something that's fixable, like easily fixable and most of the things are most of the things that I was encountering were things that like, okay, this is just like a procedural thing that we can easily fix. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>, it's not like a budget issue. Right. So so yeah.

MG: Yeah, definitely. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so with the pandemic mm-hmm, <affirmative> you know, we're working with students that are both in person and online, they're all from different backgrounds. FIU was, you know, with its inception, we were supposed to be an international university. So in your opinion, what does the international mean?

CA: Yeah, that's a good question. I think I, I, it's funny that you ask that because I've had colleagues or individuals who maybe less familiar with FIU as an institution and when they hear, when they hear the name, they immediately, or not immediately, but often of times they think like, oh, does that mean like you're, you've you're ton, you have tons of international students at your university. And I'm like, well sort of <laugh> like we don't have like, as far as like international students who are studying here on a student visa, I mean, that's, that's a less than 10% of our student population. So it's, and a lot of those students are also graduate students. But I think the international is more of a, a mindset and maybe a philosophy behind the way we look at things and the lens that FIU tries to educate our students.

Obviously we have a lot of students from lots of different countries and backgrounds who, who are also us citizens and who maybe have an international background, but they're not necessarily the true sense an international student, like what we mean from like a, a definition of what that means. So so again, like we have a ton of people from lots of places and lots of diverse backgrounds. So I think there's that component. I, I also think the international is an owed to being in Miami and Miami being the gateway especially to the LA to Latin America. But also I think to the world in a lot of ways, like FIU is becoming a much more world center her when it comes to you know, looking at global issues. And so I think part of that, like I said, part of the name is a nod to the fact that where we're located and so that, that can students can have an opportunity to get a more global approach and focus and perspective on things just through me, the mere fact that they go to FIU, they may have a respect that they're being provided that might be different than another school further up in the state.

<Laugh>, you know, that may not be in the, in the same location that we are.

MG: Yeah. no, I agree. So Miami, you know, outside of higher education is seen as the mouth of Latin America

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

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MG: so it's the, the entering point to the rest of the world.

CA: Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>

MG: It's definitely international in the sense of, you know, geographic sense. But also it's not just Miami's not just, you know, our little small piece of the state it's, you know, it's the here, the now

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: But also outside it's it's the future, you know, the past. So definitely it's a great approach to, to, to the university. So you could also agree that, you know, the university has achieved some of its original intents and intentions and goals. Do you think that the future of FIU, what we're gonna continue our progress and achieving the, the missions of the university?

CA: Yeah, I mean, I hope so. <Laugh>, I would hope that we are able to you know, and I think those are changing, right? So I think our mission and our goals and our, our objectives are going to continue to hopefully adapt as the world adapts. I do think that we have an opportunity. I, I think we have an opportunity to lead and that I feel like other institutions, at least demographically are gonna look like what FIU looks like today because the, the, the population throughout the United States at least is continuing to become more diverse and change. And, you know, the fastest growing a single group of individuals entering higher education, our students who are identify as Hispanic or Latinx. And so we've been, that's the world we've been living for since our inception <laugh>. And so so it's definitely something that I think we have an opportunity to do.

And, you know, we're just entering now 50 years of having our doors open to students. So that's, that's very young in terms of the higher education. I mean, we're definitely a toddler when it comes to looking at, you know, our history as far as institutions that have been around for hundreds of years in our country. So so I, I definitely think that we have, we definitely have an opportunity to continue to, to meet those goals. We've done, I'm blown away. Sometimes you, even though I work here that we've been able to have such success so quickly with a lot of things, you know, whether it be things like the reputation of our law school or whether it be about, you know, we've, we've raised our four year graduation rates from, you know, when we started looking at them and paying attention to them, we were barely at 20% of our students graduating in four years.

And now we're about 6%. Like, and we've done that in like a generation, because it's been like a 15 year kind of process that we're, or less really, it's more like 12 to 13 years that we've been focusing intentionally on doing some of those things. And to, to more than double, you know, your success rate. Again, that's one outcome, obviously success

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to me is not only measured and things like graduation rates. There's a qualitative component too, where, where we know from conversations and anecdotally that we're changing lives of students. And I think that that's a big part of, of our identity and I one that I hope we continue to, to focus on that we don't lose that piece of it, even though we're being pushed to try to raise the metrics and you, you know, compete with the University of Floridas of the, of the, of the state at least because we're a different institution.

Right. but I also love the fact that there are some individuals who discount FIU because we're that like, oh yeah, that's not Miami school that Hispanic serving institution so that, you know, this is not for them. And then we're, and we're proving them. We're all because we're like, bring it on. Like we can do just as we can be just as successful as some other institution. And, you know, we, we're still maintaining access and providing opportunities to students that don't get an opportunities to attend some of those other institutions. So mm-hmm, <affirmative> that's one of my favorite things. I think that mixed with just, we take an innovative approach a lot of time to what we're doing because we've only been around 50 years. It doesn't have to be like, we've always done it this way. Right. Cause we're not that old that we truly can try to do something that nobody else has done before and, and oftentimes achieve results because we tried it a new way,

MG: The way I like to see it is that everyone else has done it.

CA: Right. Mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: And we've seen their end result. And how, how, what, what was the, the result of their efforts, but how can you change it? How can we improve upon that? It's kind of...

CA: Yeah, absolutely. You can't just wash, rinse and repeat because the students are constantly changing. So what may have worked in the past, even at FIU, we can't continue to do the same thing over and over and over again, or else we're not gonna continue to be successful. You have to pivot, you have to kind of adjust, you have to respond to like the, the needs of our current student population. And I think that's what successful institutions do. No matter where they are, the successful institutions..

MG: mm-hmm <affirmative>

CA: Are willing to pivot and willing to recognize that we have to do some things differently if we want to continue to support students because their needs are changing.

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MG: Yeah. Just like with the other university across the ...

CA:

mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: across the city, you know, across yeah. Across town UCG yeah. They have their method; they have their style. FIU has their own style. Yeah. And our style is we're innovative, we're progressive you know, society is changing, it's changing faster and faster and FIU, you know, we're taking the opportunity to see that that students need assistance, you know, and we have to be innovative in, in our methods of, you know, extending those, those that assistance to students. Yeah.

CA: Well, I, I think along those lines, I think FIU has always embraced the fact that we have a partnership with Miami Dade College, whether we want to, or not, which used to be Miami Dade Community College, because they are feeding us so many students, Broward College as well to a lesser. And, but to, to recognize that the pathway to a bachelor's degree might be through Miami college for so many of our students. I think, you know, it's somewhere in the 60 to 65% of our new students every year are transfer students. And not all of those come from Miami Dade College, but a lot of our huge percentage of them do. And so being an Urban Serving Universities, you have to kind of work within the ecosystem that's created there ...

MGmm-hmm <affirmative>

CA: ... so some of that's through the K-12 system. And then for a lot of students, the accessibility comes through the state college and then we're providing an opportunity.

They do offer some, some bachelor's degrees at, at Miami Dade now, but not a lot. There's about a dozen or so Bachelor's degrees that they offer. So for a lot of students, their next option is, you know, from an affordability, geographical standpoint is going to be through FIU. So FIU has always embraced that, that we have that that part of our, of our makeup, I think we're like the third or fourth largest transfer in receiving institution in the country. And so we, we have to always think about that to you. It's not just about the traditional experience of coming at 18 out of high school. Right. We have non-traditional age students. We have tons of students that are coming from Miami day college to finish a bachelor's degree, and then hopefully get a, a higher degree beyond that, like the Master's or PhD, et cetera. And so that's something that I think that we've always embraced. And if not, we wouldn't be successful if we didn't recognize that, that we have that, that pipeline and that pathway for our particular student population too.

MG: Yep. Definitely. Non-traditional FIU's never been, you know, one for tradition even with, with Charles Perry at the beginning, you know, he wanted to bring Higher Education to

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Miami, make it accessible to the public you know, at a more economical price for school. And by embracing students going to Miami Dade, right.

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

MG: Or students who applied to FIU, you know, very well. They don't meet the necessary metrics at the moment, but let's say you give them that alternate avenue, right. Go to Miami Dade, complete your Associate's, and we'll welcome you with open arms. So you're at the university ...

CA: mm-hmm, <affirmative>

MG: You're not telling 'em no, right? You're just telling them, look, we have this alternate better fitting option for you...

CA: Right.

MG: And, you know, go to Miami Dade College, or go to Broward College. And then, you know, in two years, once you finish your, your Associate's, you'll be able to come back here or come and begin taking classes here, and you'll be able to achieve that Bachelor's degree later on. That's a great approach. That's definitely reinventing the wheel <laugh> and like I said, you know, or traditional universities don't use that, you know, or, or don't yeah. They're not operating in that way. They're not relying on it.

CA: As, as heavily. Yeah, absolutely. And you know, and some students, like you said, some students maybe there could be some academic preparation challenges that where we feel like they're gonna be better served at that state college first mm-hmm <affirmative>. And then, and then other times it's, or could be other family reasons where the Miami-Dade route might just be a better option for them personally, you know, maybe they, they could do fine here, but, but we're gonna, you know, still provide that opportunity for them, because for right now that's a better choice for them and, and for their circumstances. So,

MG: Yeah, definitely. You know, going down, if a student were to go to Miami-Dade, let's say they would establish a better foundational educational foundation by going to Miami-Dade and then coming here and then they'll be able to perform at a better level here.

CA: Yeah, absolutely. Like there are certain courses, for example, that like, we're not allowed to teach as a state university that, that the state colleges are allowed to teach. And again, part of that is about access mm-hmm <affirmative>. So if there are these courses that are providing some, some refresher and, or reinforcement of certain skills and content that

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they can get that, that baseline at that state college, and then, you know, use it as a building block, hopefully to, to obtaining the bachelor's degree.

MG: Yeah. Do you see a trend in students? That's do you see this as a trend in, in students recently that they'll, a lot of them are going, you know, to other universities, let's say community colleges and then they're coming to FIU.

CA: I don't, I don't wanna say it's a recent trend. I think, I think it's just, it's always been a part of, of our particular scenario here in south Florida. I don't think it's increased and actually the state colleges are starting to feel a little bit of a dip in enrollment. That's oftentimes tied to the economy. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> when the economy is better, you know, people focus on making money, but then like when there's economy issues, like they are like, Hey, I'm gonna go back to school. Cuz credential might help me make more money. Right. So there's economic kind of a alignment with, with how enrollment goes across the country. That's everywhere. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. But I, yeah, so I wouldn't say it's like a, a new trend. I think it's always been something that has been, and for so long, prior to 1972 in south Florida, if you were gonna stay in south Florida, unless you went to a private institution that you may not be able to afford. Cause it's way more expensive. Your only other option was to go to Miami gate. And so now we provide the only public option here in Southeast Florida. So I think again, I don't think it's a trend as much as it's an ongoing, you know, thing. That's continuing to be part of just who we are and the community that we serve.

MG: Yeah. And have a couple more questions for you.

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

MG: What do you think the future of FIU looks like? So we've thought we've been talking about, you know, the past and alternative methods of education for students. What do you think the future looks like? What do you think the future of F fi looks like?

CA: Yeah, so, so part of this, I think I addressed a little before when I said that I think demographically, like other places in higher education are gonna look more like, we, we, we look like already, which is more diverse student populations, you know, people from more backgrounds. I definitely think that that's gonna continue to happen all throughout the United States, at least, and probably throughout the world as well. But I definitely think that's part of it. I do think that there's, you know, the shift of focusing on like 21st century skills, at least while we're in the 21st century focusing on like competency and skill based development. So not just about getting a degree that has a diploma, but like what types of skills are we trying to help students achieve? So so that they can be successful out there in the workforce.

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So I, I think that there's been a shift on that and we've been talking a lot about Micro-credentials badges for as another one. So I do think that there's more and more even the state of Florida recently starting with the next class, that's gonna start this upcoming year. Once they've completed the basic English composition course, we are required to now award them a badge in, in communication so that, that they will have a credential unrelated to their actual degree that they could say like as part of my education. So received a credential in communication that I might be able to then market myself to an employer to say like, you know, I've earned this badge or this badge. So I think the badging slash micro credential is definitely a wave so much so that some people in higher education feel threatened a little bit by that because maybe it's that I don't actually need that full degree.

I just need certain competencies that I could earn through Micro-credentials and some employers that might be enough, right. Because for too many years we were giving people degrees and then sending 'em out into the workforce. And employers at times were saying like, I don't know how to work with this employee because they don't know how to do this or this or this. You know, they may have content knowledge, but how are they applying it as like an actual worker so to speak? So I do think that that's definitely something that higher education is trying to respond to right now. I think the, the use of online, you know, then the mix, especially, I think COVID showed us too that, you know, remote learning options too, where it's like synchronous and, but online, I think that's becoming more and more of something people are thinking about that. Especially people who are anti online programs, which, which are a synchronous that like, you don't get the same experience if it's just fully online. But if I can B if I can learn from anywhere, but I'm still getting like live interaction, that's becoming, I think something, you know, that worked for some students and in some disciplines. So I, I wouldn't be surprised if that continues to be another mode that we might provide us for students to give them a little bit more flexibility and accessibility to getting their degrees

MG: Online classes. So online classes have been around for a little while ...

CA: mm-hmm <affirmative>

MG: And you know, I've taken my fair share of online classes. They definitely give you the flexibility, you know you're able to also cater to students who might have to work. Right. so it's definitely an element in, you know, to consider in the evolution of higher education because, you know more and more people have to go to work straight out of high school. They might not be able to go to class in person during the day, you know, the traditional college experience might not fit for them.

CA: Mm-Hmm <affirmative>

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MG: So definitely higher education is you know, it's a timeline, it's, it's an evolution. It's, it's both proactive retroactive to everything that's had in the world. Definitely I look forward to the future of FIU and the future of higher education. I look, you know, I enjoy every day working in higher education and as a student of, of FIU and of just life. I appreciate your time, Dr. Andrews, thank you for, and thank you for your input and feedback on you know, for and everything, you know, from your experiences. Yeah. Thank you for sharing.

CA: Yeah. Thank you again for inviting me. It, it was a lot of fun. Appreciate it.

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by: Melanie Gómez and Ashley Floyd Kuntz, PhD