>> Welcome to "Going Online" with Oregon State University Ecampus, a podcast series highlighting resources and tools for online learners across the globe. I'm Eddie Rodriguez, the Student Engagement Program Manager at Oregon State University Ecampus, which serves more than 13,000 online learners annually through the delivery of 100+ online degrees and programs.

In this series, I'm joined by my colleague Rachael Guenthner, Entry and Transition Advisor at South Seattle College, and former OSU Ecampus Student Success Coach. We're glad you're here. In this episode, we're getting to know Raven Chakerian, Senior Instructor for Spanish and Italian online at Oregon State. We'll talk to her about her teaching style and philosophy, and she'll share how online students can build meaningful relationships with instructors from a distance.

Let's get into it. All right, welcome, everybody. Eddie Rodriguez here, student engagement program manager. I'm joined today by Rachael.

>> Thank you, Eddie. Rachael Guenthner Student Success Coach, and we've got a pretty lively and exciting episode for you today. And I would love our guests to introduce themselves.

>> Hi I'm Raven Chakerian, and I'm a senior instructor in the world languages program, and mostly teach Spanish, and a bit of Italian sprinkled in.

>> Wow, Italian?

>> Yeah.

>> My goodness, that's exciting.

>> How long have you been teaching at OSU?

>> I started here in 2013.

>> 2013 feels like a lifetime ago right now.

>> And at least one pandemic ago, if not two.

>> Knock on wood on that one.

So if teaching primarily Spanish, how much of the sequence do you teach?

>> I'm kind of all over the place. So I teach introductory Spanish first year, intermediate Spanish second year. I teach conversational Spanish for our intermediate and advanced students. I teach some literature classes, some cultural classes is whatever they need me to teach.

So I'm serving as the coordinator which means I pick up whatever classes don't get covered.

>> Yep.

>> That's awesome. Again, Raven, thanks for joining us today and sharing already just a little bit of what you're doing here at the university, especially language classes. I mean, I can't imagine it's easy, just learning any language can be really challenging and hard.

Now I'm curious, are you guys yet teaching both to kind of in person classes and all my classes as well?

>> Yes, yeah. So all of our faculty teach on both campuses, the Ecampus and the on campus, which I think it's good because at first there was a lot of resistance to teaching online as you can imagine.

I mean, most people when I tell them I teach a language online there, they don't believe that's even possible and how admit that I didn't either when I first started OSU, I never taught language online. And when they said that's part of my contract, I was like, no, that's impossible.

Once we've all access to so many resources through Ecampus and we get a lot of support. And once we got going, it was pretty exciting to see that it works and to see students make progress and actually learn a language online, then you just want to learn more.

So, it's good that we all do it because then we're all on board and we understand what it means to teach online.

>> Yeah, and what does that, I guess, look like? If I was like an Ecampus student taking like a Spanish course online, what would that look like for me?

>> You would spend a lot of time in front of a camera and you would see your instructor on a camera a lot. So I think most people, the hardest part is wrapping their head around the listening and speaking part. So for example, we recorded a lot of little skits with our faculty.

The beginning level for example, it's just like us introducing ourselves and here's my colleague, and this is my friend and so they have to listen and respond to questions. And then they do what we call video logs a lot of those in online Spanish where they're working with a theme say giving advice about a job interview.

And so then they have to use these structures that are really common in Spanish for giving advice, and then they have to create like a little video about how to do a good job of an interview in Spanish. That way they're using their speaking skills, they're applying their knowledge about different like thematic units, vocabulary and structures to do certain tasks.

>> Got me all excited about taking a language course even though.

>> I know, I kind of just want to take one now.

>> I don't know, I've worked out in German before in my college years for obvious reasons.

>> Wait, what? Obvious reasons.

>> Obvious reasons. It's very funny.

>> Now I'm intrigued.

>> Now you're intrigued.

>> Well, my last name is obviously German, it's Anglicized German. I come from a German-speaking grandparents. They speak German, but inside information here, I actually have underdeveloped speech since as a child. I didn't start speaking until I was three and so I have incredibly underdeveloped phonics skills and so it's really hard for me to take on new languages and take on new sounds through repetition.

So I did not really put those pieces together until I was forced to take a foreign language for my undergraduate degree. And then I was like, I actually can't figure this out. Let alone I'm not sure how I picked up English as a first language initially, but I was also in a speech classes for the first 12 years of my life.

>> We could chat because I have a student in a similar situation and wanting to know how to help them learn, but I need some resources.

>> I'd be delighted to have that conversation.

>> Look at that, building bridges.

>> That's right.

>> Anything I can do to help.

>> It's very funny though cuz I have an English degree with them. So it all came full circle. With kind of the nature of language classes, I think a lot of us when we think about the narratives around what does it mean to take the language and to hopefully learn the language.

So much of it is practice, and with kind of the type of work that you just detailed in the Spanish speaking courses, do you feel like students, because they're kind of forced through and create products, recordings of themselves. Do you think that kind of very intentional practice leads to kind of better learning, better retention of the language, more kind of end of practice with pronunciation and do you feel as an instructor you're able to provide better feedback with those kinds of assignments?

>> Yeah, it's interesting cuz I teach on both campuses so like doing an assignment like that would be something casual I might set up in an on-campus class like, let's practice this. So get with a partner and tell them like give them some advice about a job interview.

But some students might not do it, I might not make it around when I'm circulating in the room. I might not really be able to hear if they're able to communicate what I'm trying to get them to communicate because it's a casual in-class activity. But an Ecampus environment, I get to listen to a recording of every single student in the class and give really individualized feedback, which I almost never get to do that on speaking in the classroom.

It's like a big practice session. So it's really interesting to watch Ecampus students make progress because they do get that individualized feedback from me. They have less like informal practice time but they get really individualized feedback. So I've noticed that our Ecampus students progress more quickly than I ever thought would have been possible online, so.

>> That's not a sterling recommendation for Ecampus language programs I don't know what it is.

>> It's not for everyone, I mean some people really struggle with time management and everything is just sitting in a canvas shell or learning platform. And if you are someone that works better with a human being telling you the homework is due tomorrow when you're in class, then you just have yourself whatever other systems you set up, and that can be really hard for some students, but if you can make it work, you can definitely learn a language online.

>> Yeah, my question. You've obviously been with the university since 2013. So you've been here some time and I guess I might. I'm curious to know, how has your approach? Well, maybe to start off with what is your approach to teaching Ecampus students, because people always say it's obviously a lot different than versus being in person.

And already you've shared some things about how the course is structured and what that looks like, but are there any other things that you do when working with Ecampus students in that virtual space?

>> Yeah, definitely. When I first started I just had no idea what I was doing, so I just sort of did what was already set up in the course that I was handed.

And I really didn't know how to teach online, I didn't know how to connect with students. And the reason that I left teaching is that human connection piece and I was just in the dark. I would type my responses to their work, and grade their papers, but it felt very hollow for me and I'm sure it did for them.

I wasn't very technologically savvy either and so it took me a while tools that I felt helped me build better human connections. So now on most assignments, I give video feedback instead of written feedback. So I just there's a media button and media response button or media comment button on the grading platform or the grading pages on our learning platform.

And so I use that and give feedback and it has different advantages. One is here, more Spanish. They see my face pleased to hear my voice, and I'm saying their name, and often they'll respond back to me. And so then, like, we might get into more of an informal interaction through the grading platform, which seems weird, but I actually find it's one of the best places to build that connection.

So that's something I've gotten much better at and my job is more fulfilling. And I hope that my classes are more fulfilling for my students now that there's, like, a bit more have that connection built in. So I think that's probably the biggest change is just learning how to be a better like present human being in an online environment.

>> So I think it is super interesting. And I want to go back to something that you had said right at the beginning for a little kind of behind the peak for our listeners. You said that you were handed a course yeah. Can you tell me a little bit more about what that means?

You, yes, so the campus crushes are usually completely built before they even start. And so someone has to do that work but that someone might not end up teaching the class. So for example, when I sent her to OSU, a colleague had created a Spanish course and it was just passed off to me.

This is your course, which is actually pretty uncomfortable if you're used to teaching in the classroom, and you design your lesson plans, and so you have to adapt in it. It can be really hard to make it your own, and it's hard to know how to make it your own when you're first starting.

So I think something that changed for me also is, now when I do get just handed a course, I have my ways of going about making it my own. And it's a lot of work, you have to go through and delete things and add your own bits and pieces.

But yeah, that's an odd thing about Ecampus teaching.

>> Yeah. And to add more text there for our listeners, the development cycle to get a course like from design and development into your hands takes approximately two years to get that off the ground from at, like getting it from the course catalog, having an appointed instructor produce content and provide curriculum for the course.

And then our production and instructional designer teams work with that faculty to, to develop a course for launch. And then once it is built, it might be assigned to a faculty member. That might not be the person that created it because the development process is so long. And also, that faculty might be required to teach different courses since each faculty member is certified or better suited for different courses.

And so, I think that's a much more common occurrence than folks think it is. And I just, it's really common clarifying because there is a huge amount of classes offered at Ecampus and there is a lot of manpower that goes into making them and kind of manning them and teaching them and so definitely a good thing to be thinking about, especially if you're like, this doesn't match with the tone of the instructor.

And it's like, sometimes that instructor just could assign that course and that's a very common practice. It's just the nature of teaching with us at Ecampus, which I think is really exciting because then anybody can kind of come in and not have to develop a course from scratch, which we all know is a lot of work.

>> But I have a funny story about that actually. So I had the opportunity to redevelop a lot of our courses after I'd been teaching for a while. And so I recorded tons of electures on different grammar topics and all these skits with my colleagues speaking Spanish and interviewing people in Spanish and sometimes when I'm walking around campus, this happens pretty frequently, people are like, Raven.

And I'm like, I have no idea who you are. And they're like, you're in, wait, I mean, you're not like, you're, the video's from Spanish class! Or they'll be with other instructors. We have so many Spanish instructors and even our on-campus instructors now use the videos we built for Ecampus because they're an effective way to, assignments for students.

And then some Sometimes I get students in my on campus classes and they say, I feel like I'm talking to a celebrity because they've seen me for maybe two years worth of Spanish classes and videos. So it's pretty funny.

>> That's actually really cool to hear just because I mean this, you know, the process of developing courses and, you know, structure that's behind it to be able to also hear the kind of creativity behind it in the effort that y'all are put.

Putting in the teaching is awesome because I think it shows just off the effort and then you know you're kind of rewarded by students are actually recognizing that and I imagine that's really exciting. So yeah, that's actually a really cool story. I'm like no, I definitely want to take some Spanish class just to see these videos.

>> 100 percent also skits like it's probably like, is there like overarching narratives in those in those skits? Is it like same characters? We have a pretty small program, so there's a lot of the same characters because we don't have a large faculty in Spanish program.Some of them have moved on, but they live on in our videos, even though they've left OSC, which is nice too.

>> yeah

>> Previously, when you were talking about your assignments, you had talked a little bit about kind of accountability and the time management piece for Ecampus students. What kind know of learning strategies as well as overall kind of student skills. Do you think like is that something that you're thinking about when developing assignments?

Is that something that you're thinking about when you're running an Ecampus class, when you're teaching an Ecampus class? And what things would you name or identify that would be important for our listeners or Ecampus students to know about?

>> How to, like skills?

>> Yeah, just like what do you notice in whether it's things that our students might not be thinking about, or prospective students that are like, is Ecampus learning for me?

What would you want them to know about that?

>> Definitely time management is a big one. I noticed that some students are really good at they have, I don't know what their methods are, but I think they have calendars, they use agendas, or they use their phones to set up their calendar.

To set reminders, I've had students tell me that I set myself a reminder to work on it. Or they set up time like from 10 to 12. I do Spanish homework on Tuesdays. So just treating it like as if you had a schedule. If you're on campus, you'd be like Spanish is Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9 to 10.

So a lot of students have told me that works best for them if they schedule their own actual schedule time. That's the same every week or whatever fits with their schedule so that they just know that they're going to do it and they have the time built into their schedules.

I think an insider tip, I mean this is hard because I know my philosophy is really different than a lot of instructors, but you know I have a pretty flexible policy on late work and I'm also even more flexible. Even more flexible if students reach out to me and let me know the situation.

But I know that's not comfortable for a lot of students, and they would never reach out because it's like, well, the policy is this, but policies are flexible, and almost all the instructors I know break their own policies when a situation arises. And I feel like some students are more active I have to take advantage of that than others, which isn't really fair, because those are the students that get special treatment.

But I think it's always worth asking. I had a professor when I was in graduate school that said, which is like there's always a solution. Because I was such a high strung student and I was like, my gosh, I'm sick and this and that, and I would just figure there's nothing to be done.

I'm just going to get an F or whatever. And so, I finally reached out to my Professor in grad school and I was like, I missed the exam because I was sick. And you said there's no makeups, and I just wanted to let you know that I do respect you and your time, but I couldn't come, I was really sick.

She's like, but there's always a solution. Come on, Raven. And so that stuck with me and I wish that students knew that. There's always something to be done. You might get that really rigid professor, but it's always worth asking. It won't hurt your grade to ask, so.

>> Absolutely, that's something I tell students all the time as a success coach.

And that's something I really made clear when I was teaching composition, was just like, these policies are here for all of us to agree on, which I think is important to highlight as the syllabus is something we both work with. It's there just as much for the faculty or instructor that's running the class as it is for the students.

But those things are not necessarily negotiable, but it's just like we can talk about them. For example, I had a pretty strenuous attendance policy because attendance was a big issue on there, at the university that I was working at. And it was like a three strikes you're out sort of situation.

But I always had a caveat. I was like, if you tell me that you won't be in class and send me an email before the class starts, okay, it doesn't count towards your three strikes. Clear and present communication often is the most effective. And I think finding the solution, I'm always of the mind that like, you don't know until you've asked.

And the worst thing that an instructor will say is no. And it's like, at least you know that it's a no. But especially when it does come to things like late work, especially if the policy does seem or appear, or is communicated as very strict. Don't be afraid to ask for those things because at the end of the day there are real life people like Raven running these classes.

And they work with Ecampus students, and they understand that this is not just the only thing that you're working on, not the only thing that you're participating in, but that there is a very full life happening outside of these courses. And it's about just being willing to communicate.

You don't need to share all details. I'm always encouraging you share whatever you feel the most comfortable with, but don't be afraid to send that email. Worst thing they'll do is say no and they'll refer back to the syllabus, which is fine. But don't be afraid to advocate for yourself in that capacity, especially when working with faculty.

>> Definitely, yeah, that communication piece is huge. And doing it sooner rather than later. If you reach out to me and it's week six and you missed two weeks and a lot of assignments, I can say, okay, let's agree on when you think it's realistic for you to get it in.

If you reach out to me and it's week nine, and you've missed four weeks because you missed two and then you just were too stressed out to think about it, so you pushed it to the back, and I only have one week to get in final grades. It's going to be a lot harder for me to work with you to find a solution, so.

>> And speaking of communication policy, and I think it's great the message that we're sharing of, reach out if you have questions. And kind of thinking about my own experience too back both in graduate and undergraduate, to me that was hard. Because some faculty kind of their presence just was a little intimidating for me.

So, I'm curious, Raven. Do you have any thoughts on maybe why some students are less likely to reach out? And then maybe what sort of things can we be doing to maybe alleviate some of those feelings of uneasiness with reaching out to faculty.

>> Yeah, unfortunately, I think a lot of it has to do with just systems.

I mean, there's the traditional model of a university is almost military. It's like us against them. And the professors have to set up these rigid policies. And no one's going to get away with cheating or, this is my policy and you better not break it. And I feel like that culture is slowly changing, but there are a lot of faculty that still sort of, have that approach.

And if you point it out and have a conversation with faculty, it doesn't feel good and they don't want to do that. But it's like, that's the environment that they came up in academia, which is a very hierarchical system. They might have been in grad school with intimidating professors that were like, you have to suffer before you'll get to the top of the ladder.

So we're fighting against that. And one thing I always try to do is really focus on the tone of my syllabus, and like my welcoming video and all of that, just keeping it very friendly and open and trying to set a tone that doesn't set up the class right from the start.

I think about the language like in late policy, instead of saying, you will be penalized, I'll say, if you're not able to turn in on time, you have these options, which is a simple change in language. But instead of being penalized, you have the option to turn in work for a few less points or whatever.

But I think language, and back to the communication thing, is huge. Just like the way we set tone for our policies and for our courses, I think it's really important.

>> Yeah, another thing too, that as you were talking, I was thinking about is our Ecampus students, and just anecdotally from working as a success coach and other stuff colleagues have shared.

Students who are typically learning online also have very complicated lives, and that they might be active duty military or they're raising a family and working full time and all that sort of stuff. So I feel like part of it also is just that I think what you were talking about flexibility.

So I guess I'm curious to know also, what's typically your approach when also just being available? And what are the types of mediums that you offer once a student does want to maybe have a conversation. Because sometimes we hear it's a faculty member might only be available or only might be willing to connect over email, and so for some students that might not work.

So I guess, yeah, I'm just curious to know what does that look like for you and how are you, yeah, meeting with students?

>> Yeah, I don't set up virtual office hours because I find that it's just, like you said, people's lives are so complex. And my office hour is Tuesday, Thursday from nine to ten on Zoom.

And no one is going to come because they work, they have families and maybe they're in Europe or in Asia, and nine to ten Zoom couldn't work. So I just have Zoom office hours by appointment. And not a lot of students take advantage of that. But when they do, it's always really valuable.

And so the students that I really remember and feel like I have the strongest connections with, because we actually had a sit down together even though there was a screen between us. So actually, that would be another, I know I'm kind of jumping around, but that would be another great recommendation for students.

Occasionally, I have students that reach out and say, I would just like to meet you at the beginning. I like to meet all my professors at the beginning of the term. And that there's nothing on my agenda, I just want to connect. And I love that. Those are the students.

When I go to write a letter of recommendation for those students, I know who they are, I have a face. I remember their voices. We have this human connection that makes it so that I'm always going to remember them. Whereas if I only connect with you via email, I will probably have to go back in the Canvas course and be like, okay, maybe watch a few of the videos they did.

At look at a few assignments, you go, okay, now it's coming back, I remember the student. But if you connected with me on the Zoom meeting, I'm going to remember you, so.

>> Yeah, wow, so many great topics here.

>> I like, it's like pinball machine.

>> And that's really the definition of this podcast, I feel.

>> But I think something that you both have touched on, especially with working with faculty, and we'll talk about kind of rapport building shortly. I think the key thing that I want to kind of put out into the room is asking for help is very vulnerable. And a lot of Ecampus students are transfer students and have made a very clear intentional decision to come back.

Or pursue their education for the first time or in your department and program might be coming back to just study for their passion. I have a friend of mine that's actually getting a German degree through Ecampus because they were like, I just want to go back to school and get a degree.

And because they've made that choice because of where they might be at in their journey, both in education and in life. That it is sometimes insanely difficult to muster up the true courage to send an email of, like, hey, I've been out sick this week, I'm not able Able to submit the video.

And I just want to encourage folks that there is a lot of empathy and compassion on the other side of the computer and that it is really scary to open yourself up for that assistance. But especially, the not knowing is sometimes just as hard as knowing, so don't be afraid to do that reach out.

I know that instructors have that air of authority because, at the end of the day, it's someone that's evaluating you and grading you. But at the end of the day, these are people that just happen to hand out grades, because of the system that they're in. That they're really here, because they're excited to work with students.

And so, yeah, and I think talking about kind of that relationship piece and that especially in Ecampus courses, everything's a little bit more democratized, I think, because you're not standing up in a classroom. As I point to Raven as the instructor, it's not standing up in a classroom.

There's not those usual physical cues for that relationship that. You're not able to put kind of face to name and have that kind of more social interaction that it can become very isolating. But also like, you're just sending an email to a nice person for the most part.

Again, Raven is not every faculty member, everyone has their own personal style, everyone's an individual. And so every instructor is going to be different, which is what I tell students all the time. Everyone's a different person, they might do email, every email will have a different tone because everyone's got a different tone.

But definitely if that ask is worth all the reward, whether you need help with content, whether you have a question about an assignment, whether you need an extension, depending on what the policies are, depending on what time of the term is. Hail Mary's in week ten can get very dicey.

And don't be afraid to make that ask and communicate and make that connection because we've got tools for that. And so you had talked about folks that take advantage of those face to face meetings. The most common question I get asked, especially for folks that are coming back to finish out a bachelor's degree is that most often they're thinking about graduate programs.

And they're thinking about post, undergraduate degree work, whether that's internships or professional certifications, because we're still working in academia. The biggest thing is letters of recommendation, and students, day in and day out, asked me about how do I get letters of rec from my Ecampus professors? And I say, if you need to meet with them, you need to talk to them.

But I also don't want to take away from the fact that the work that you produce as an Ecampus student, the way that you show up for those assignments and discussion boards. That's also a big form of communication that your instructor, as you mentioned, Raven, can look back on and be, yeah, the student had clear insights or that they thoroughly engaged with the material.

The work that you produce is a part of that rapport for an instructor, but that face to face human connection can be really paramount and just providing personalized references and also clear references. For those students that you have provided letters of rec for, what are kind of inside baseball but like, what would you say would be the difference between a student that you've met with via Zoom and over email?

Versus a student that may or may not have worked with you kind of simultaneous that just asked for a letter of rec because they maybe were in the Spanish sequence for two years.

>> Yeah, so I think I mentioned this earlier, but when I've met with students, it's just easy.

I can pull out of my mind things I want to say about them in the letter. And if I haven't met with them, I can still do it and I'll say yes. It's just going to take me longer because I'm going to have to go back through and look at.

And I'll do this with a student that I met with, too. I'll look at the quality of their work. One thing I always also look at his the discussion boards and not the way they interact with me but also the way they interact with each other. So if students have been very active on discussion boards, offered great insight, been very collegiate with their classmates, then that's something I always look at, too.

And when I'm writing a letter of recommendation, if I have reflective writing writing assignments, those are great places to pull information from. So if students have been very thorough on their reflections, then I can learn a lot about them on what they say on their reflective writing, too.

But with students that I've met with personally via Zoom, like I said, it's just I have a sense of who they are. And I remember the things we talk about, which is very different from the way it. We get so much information on a flat, two-dimensional screen in our day, that it all just jumbles together.

Whereas when you have a living, breathing, moving human being, I think it just imprints on your mind differently, so.

>> Yeah, that's a really good point. Again, I think going back to what you were sharing about those students who maybe take advantage a little bit more of those meetings in the beginning of the term.

And I think that's honestly a really good idea and something. As I'm thinking, I'm like, gosh, is there a way we can kind of share it as a tip out there or strategy? Of like, hey, if a faculty is offering opportunities to me, take advantage of that, have that one on one time and really introduce yourself because I think you're absolutely right.

It seems like that can really go a long way in terms of just a maybe feeling more comfortable to ask about something later on. Whether it was, like, gosh, I didn't do so well on this paper or this exam and I would really like some help here, stuff like that.

I think that's really exciting kind of idea to maybe kind of play around with where we can kind of encourage others to do that a little more.

>> Yeah, and hot tip I always tell students, especially if they're, because the example that you provided of just like, I don't have an agenda, I just wanted to meet.

Sometimes that's super scary, too, to feel like I have to add something to talk to a faculty member about. And again, this all depends on the faculty member because again, they're all different. And the thing that I tell students, especially, with kind of the research oriented nature of Oregon State as an institution and the faculty that are here, don't be afraid to Google them and just see what they're working on.

What projects are they a part of? What are the publications that they've been doing? I mean, there's nothing more exciting to someone that's put a lot of effort into publishing an article and have someone ask questions about it. It would be like, hey, I'm really curious about these things.

Or if you see a class that they used to teach in the catalog, that's often a really good place to start to. Where it's like, I saw that you were teaching that Spanish literature course, our literature and translation course. What are their readings for that class? Even if it is those kind of questions, it's a great way to kinda just give the opportunity for a conversation to start from.

But especially if you're wanting to work with a faculty long-term, it's a great place to just start learning about them and what kind of work they're participating in. And then see if that's, I like to call it the vibe test especially if you're wanting to work with a faculty or know that you're going to work with a faculty long term.

Especially in the foreign languages or the World Languages Department, you might be working with the same instructor over the course of many terms as you work through the sequence. That it's a great idea to get to know them and put in that little bit But an effort and again it doesn't need to be a free flowing conversation I also tell students that don't, it's okay, if it just ends up being a little bit awkward, it's two strangers meeting in the Zoom room.

But that human connection even if the student might feel that, I didn't go great or man, I feel like a jumbled. The faculty member, most of the time will come back being like, wow, that was a really great conversation that student was really great, I love meeting with them because they're looking for that opportunity to connect just as much as students are.

>> That's true. Yeah, I had a student once that asked for a meeting and they just said, I was just wondering what your favorite book in Spanish is and that was the main question. And I thought that's so that's fantastic. What a great where to start. And that was basically the only set question and then we just, it was a 10 minute check in but I still think about that student.

Another thing I wanted to mention was that apart from just l personal inclination, or the intimidating factor of engaging with instructors, it can also be something very cultural. Or for some communities or some families or within some cultures, it just wouldn't be seen as appropriate to demand time for you personally.

Or it would just be something so foreign that you might not even think of it. So, that's something I think about a lot and I don't really know the answer, but it's something that I notice too. Certain student groups tend to be more likely to reach out and ask for special situations and special help, so.

>> Yeah, I still feel silly Asking this question because overall though, in terms of the conversation we've been having, it does seem that faculty student communication relationship matters. But I'm curious, in kind of your own words, why do you think that student to faculty relationship matters?

>> I think because human connection is the center for everything, I mean, even if you think about a traditional classroom, even if you're intimidated by your professor, but the fact that you see them as a person, they see you as a person.

It's about communication and language and interacting. And without that, not much learning can happen. That's sort of the essence of learning is human connection. I mean, you could think about learning as like just observing nature, you can learn a lot. So, but if you don't do anything with that, with other human beings, it just fizzles out, right?

So, that's the way I think of it. And, maybe that's a very human centric way of thinking about it. And if you just think about what I've said so far in this conversation about the students that I remember, why do I remember them? Because we had a human connection.

If it's just words on a screen, I don't have a face, I don't have a voice, I can look back and trigger my memory but I think it's just built into to our brains and our psyches. The human connection piece is just essential.

>> Yeah, and I feel like this is really more message that I'm getting right now.

And it's awesome just because, again, to our listeners out there, we understand a lot of you are probably taking online classes. And being an online student there's already kind of this weird or possibly kind of weird feeling of everything is just kind of on my own, very isolated on a computer screen.

And what I'm hearing in this conversation is that there still abilities to have this human kind of connection and that it does play, or can play a really important role in the learning process. And just building those connections with one another, which I think, in my opinion sometimes might get lost when you are kind of in the virtual space.

So again, Raven hearing you say all this stuff is just, wow. Again, just reiterating kind of that importance of those connections.

>> Yeah, absolutely. And I love the communication element of it, because I agree, I think it does come down, when I think about teaching, it's a conversation between people, but especially for our Ecampus learners with the asynchronous nature, this very isolating at times.

But the important thing I always like to say is that that dialogue doesn't need to happen face to face all the time. Like it's preferable at times, but the way that you engage with the material, I mean, that's a dialogue within itself that is if you're like, how you're showing up and engaging with the things that are there?

The components that the instructor has made, whether that's the lecture or the assignments or the recording that you've been asked to do by Raven in one of those Spanish classes. Those things are ways to engage in that dialogue, Participate in that communication as well. And so, if you're like, I don't know if I'd ever meet face-to-face, think about the way that you're showing up to the material.

Think about the way that you're showing up in the assignments and what ways are you engaging with it can feel just as human to you because the work that you produce in Ecampus classes is you communicating. And you're participating in a really important discussion in your learning process and the way that you're showing up as a student in that communication.

So, I think that that's a very interesting question, sounds just like want to teach again.

>> Yeah, I agree. And I think also the interaction between students is just as important, the human interaction as human interaction with the instructor. And like you said that doesn't have to be in person I have my students meet either by phone or Zoom and do weekly practice, speaking practice activities, and they always dread it and think it's going to go awful.

And the majority of them build really important friendships and connections and are like, I have them do reflective writings about their partner experience because I want to hear how it went. And some of them say, what did you learn from this? I learned that it's almost impossible to connect with someone three times, ends away With four kids.

But most of them say things like, I was really dreading this, and I just realized how important it was to have someone when I didn't understand the materials is to say, do you get this? And even they'd say, no, I don't. And that would be reconfirming. Or they'd say, yeah, I do and that would be really helpful because then you'd have a conversation about it.

And just that human connection is was so important between students and that can be on a discussion board too. And I have also been an Ecampus student, and it was always so important to me I would put on a post and if nobody responded, I would just be like, well, that was kind of pointless.

Why did I do a discussion? I put this out there in a discussion board and no one commented and the teacher didn't follow up. So, I'm really careful in my Ecampus classes to always respond to every post, even if I do it privately, so that there's a recognition like, you show up at an engagement and if there's no engagement, it's so unsatisfying.

So, I try to make that happen. And I also make the participation in the discussion board obligatory, which can be awkward because it can feel forced. But I just think it's really important to feel like when you put something out there to interact with human beings that it actually happens.

>> Absolutely, and I think for some more context for our listeners out there if you are a prospective student discussion boards are a huge part of Ecampus learning. They're part of kind of our pillars of how we design courses and how we want students to interact and it's for the reasons that we're talking about right now, which is communication with everyone involved in the learning environment.

It's an opportunity for you to connect with your peers, which is what Eddie's job is about. Helping people connect with their peers, the institution, faculty members, and I know I work with students that will complain about the discussion boards and be like, wow this is so tasking because you're not paying attention.

Because for most Ecampus courses, you are required to post and respond to your peers. But it's an opportunity to work with them and to talk about ideas and talk about the material. And it's also a wonderful opportunity to kind of engage with folks in a way that might make more sense to you.

I tell folks all the time, if you wanna start a study group, put a WhatsApp group in the discussion board and just let it see what happens. Ecampus students are really motivated and engaged, and the beauty about it all is that it's a choice. If they want to engage, they will.

And if you're the type of person that just wants to show up, do the work and clock out, you can. But more often than not, from what I heard from students and very similar to you, Raven, is if they put it out there, students will engage, they'll show up.

I can't tell you how many discord servers, how many Reddit threads I've seen, and it's just like, yeah, I didn't know. I didn't understand this question, but someone reached out to me and was, hey, let's swap numbers and talk about it. And I think that in any class don't be afraid to go ahead and put something out there cuz most of the time folks are looking for that but they're often very scared of making the first step.

So don't be afraid to start that private Facebook group or that WhatsApp group.

>> Okay.

>> Yeah, a lot of folks like that, right, especially in the CS classes tell them all the time, put out a WhatsApp group, see what happens. I bet you five bucks, you'll get like ten people within ten minutes.

>> Great advice, Rachael. I like it.

>> Nice of you.

>> Great tip. Great strategy. Okay, well, as we come to a close, my last question for you Raven is what's a piece of advice that you want to leave our Ecampus students with?

>> I feel like it's sprinkled all throughout our conversation, but I think the main thing is the connection piece.

Make sure that you have some connection with your instructor so that when you want that letter of recommendation, they know who you are. Show up. Obviously, we're all getting pulled in different directions and I am very sympathetic to that as an instructor. It happens to me all the time.

Sometimes I can't do my best work, but do your best work when you can, reach out to your instructors, show up at office hours. And also I would say, take advantage of the resources that are available at the university, because once you're out there in the world they go away and there's so much to offer.

I mean, I started my syllabus with a list of resources, before I say anything about my class, I say, every student should know about these resources. That's the first thing they're going to read in my syllabus. The Ecampus success coaches, the cultural centers, like the Pride Center, the Centro Cultural César Chávez, the Lonnie B Harris Black Cultural Center, the financial assistance, all of it.

I just put it right up in front and I think sometimes resources are overloaded, especially for Ecampus students because that's just they don't see the poster on the wall. They don't talk to their classmate who said, hey, I just went to this center and got this assistance. But I think once you're out in the working world, you still don't have access to this wall of resources.

So I think that would be the piece of advice I would give.

>> Well, with that, thank you so much for Raven for your time.

>> Yeah, thank you so much.

>> This is a fun chat.