Episode 128: Jesse Nelson

# KL: Katie Linder

# JN: Jesse Nelson

**CMH:** Chrysanthemum Mattison Hayes

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode one hundred and twenty-eight.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast about topics and issues related to research in higher education featuring experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, a national leader in online education. Today’s episode is part of our four part back to school miniseries to help celebrate the release of our new edited collection, high impact practices in online education. In this miniseries, I have the privilege of interviewing some of the contributors to our book, who our experts on high impact practices and effective classroom practices. Our edited collection is a first of its kind look at how to apply high impact practices to the online classroom environment. You can learn more about our book at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/hip. Thanks for helping us celebrate our book launch! Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On today’s episode, I am joined by Dr. Jesse Nelson, who serves as the Associate Provost for Academic Achievement at Oregon State University. He holds a Doctorate in Education Policy Studies from Indiana University, and an MBA from Oregon State University. Professionally, he has worked with the University of Utah, Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis, Central Washington University, and Oregon State University. Throughout his career, Jesse’s focus has centered on issues of teaching and learning, diversity and inclusivity, and student success. In addition to administrative responsibilities, Jesse thoroughly enjoys being in the classroom. He has taught graduate courses in research methods and higher education and undergraduate courses in leadership and student success. With his wife and two teenage sons, he enjoys gardening, outdoor adventures, good books, and board games.

Thanks so much for joining me in the studio today, Jesse!

**JN:** Happy to be here. Thank you for having me Katie.

**KL:** Okay so, I really want to dig into this concept of student success. I know it is a huge part of your job, and I also feel like it’s one of those things that, especially in the last maybe five to ten years or so, has become a huge buzzword in higher education. So what are some of the factors that comprise the larger concept of student success as you think about it in your own work?

**JN:** Yeah. It really has become, I think, the focal point of so much conversation in higher ed, and it strikes me – in some ways it would be like asking a social science researcher, “What are the factors that are part of the human condition and how do you break that apart?” so it is tricky. I think certainly at the newspaper headline level, student success still is sort of trapped in this notion of graduation rates, maybe retention rates, but certainly are students getting through to degree. But those folks across the country who are working in this issue know good and well that it is much more multi-layered, more holistic than that. And so when we talk about student success, I think we’re really looking at is the student having the opportunity to grow and develop in all of the fascist of their life? So academically, emotionally and physically. How are they doing in terms of progression on whatever professional goals they might have as well? So there are certainly a variety of factors that influence that overall experience a student has when they hit the university.

**KL:** Mhm. Well and I find this really interesting. We’ve been talking a lot about this from the online perspective and how student success is define in different ways from different modalities. We have a lot of students who come to online courses, and their goal is not to get a degree. Like that’s not what they want. So that sort of headline level understanding of this, may not serve them in terms of – retention maybe, but graduation rate is not always as applicable.

**JN:** Oh absolutely. In fact, we hear that so much from our community college, 2 – year partners who say, “we’re kind of tired of being judged so much by our two year graduation rate” when in reality many students are coming there with really concrete knowledge of, “I’m going to be here for a year or 18 months, because that’s what I need to meet my goals.” So how do we evaluate institutions when they are serving the role that the students intended when they came to that institution?

**KL:** Right. Okay. So with such a multilayer definition that’s growing increasingly complex, as our student population is growing increasingly complex, how do you choose where to prioritize student success efforts at an institution like OSU, which has such a huge diversity of students in terms of modality and a range of other factors?

**JN:** Right. And I think you hear so much right now about predictive analytics ad big data, and those folks engaged in big data would argue that sometimes even at the biggest of universities, we struggle to actually appropriately fit that definition of big data, but certainly this concept or the principle of data driven prioritization, I think is applicable here. I think it’s – but it needs to be a combination of anecdotally, what do you hear from your students? And where do you hear about gaps where maybe stated values in an institution aren’t being experienced by certain populations of students? So being open to that. And that’s very qualitative in nature. Certainly in the data point of view, I think looking for areas where there’s variance – and so are some populations of students having great success where others may not be? And that flags an area that perhaps there’s something systematic going on that the institution can take a look at.

**KL:** Mhm. Yeah I would imagine that bottle necking is a big part of this. Like where do you see situations where there seems to be – even for a certain population of students, or for all students, some kind of bottleneck in their experience.

**JN:** Yes that’s very true, and in fact I think that’s one of the challenges that you start to – when you start to dig into this idea of student successes. You’ve got various lever points. And so administratively, if you’re an academic unit, and you’re looking at how many courses or sections of a specific course do we need to offer, and do we need a trailing course? So if it’s a – we’re on a quarter system here at Oregon State, and if it’s a chemistry series that has three courses in it, but I don’t start until winter term – do I have access to that third course in the sequence the following fall or is there only the first course of that sequence offered in the fall? So there’s certainly – we look at climate issues with student success, we look at the student experience, but then there’s some stuff that’s just really kind of technical nuts and bolts administration pieces too.

**KL:** Okay so, that’s a lot. And I think I know the answer to this next question, but I also feel like it’s shifted over time – which is, who is responsible for ensuring student success? I mean, I think a lot of people at one time thought, “Well that’s the student affairs folks” or that’s faculty, or that’s a very specific stakeholder group within higher-ed, or even just it’s the student’s responsibility to figure that out. How have you seen that kind of shifting over time in terms of who’s responsible for it, and what is the idea now in terms of who should be engaged for this work?

 **JN:** That is a good question. I mean, I think that in reality most folks in higher-ed now are probably on the same page that, you know, it really is the village, and so everybody has a role to play. I really – that came front and center for me earlier this year, I was visiting with a student regarding a different issue with transfer credits for her. As we were talking I said, “Well how’s your experience right now with Oregon State?” She identified some areas that were going really well. She said, “You know, I’m having a great experience in the residence hall” and I said “That’s wonderful” and then she went on to say though, “But I’m not planning to come back next year, and there’s just some things with Oregon State that I haven’t appreciated.” And so I thought, this is interesting now because she has only identified one positive piece – let me dig a little bit deeper, and so I did. I asked her, let’s follow up a little bit – so I said, “How about any engagement outside of the classroom. Have you found any clubs or student groups that you’re apart of?” and she very enthusiastically shared a couple of different groups that she’s a part of. And I said, “Well how about your classes? Are you enjoying your classes and how’s that experience going?” and again, really enthusiastic. So at this point I was beginning - my curiosity was through the roof, and I thought, where in this system of student success is this student not experiencing something positive? And she ultimately got to this point, she says “You know, I just – I don’t feel welcome in my academic unit as a whole.” And so it was this sense of belonging tied to her sense of academic identity, and potentially professional identity where there was a gap. But so then again, who owns or who is responsible for student success? Well if you simply had a matrix for all of the different factors, you could have started for this student checking off a lot of things. Her residence hall experience? Good. Experience with her instructors? Good. Outside engagement? Good. But who’s responsible for helping students that have a sense of their academic and professional self - who’s responsible for helping that to feel fulfilled when they show up on campus? And that’s where the gap was for this student.

**KL:** Okay. That’s really fascinating, because would imagine that in some fields it’s a disciplinary issue. It’s not even an institutional issue. It may be like a larger disciplinary, cultural problem of who feels like they can belong and who doesn’t.

**JN:** Absolutely. And so – and then all of a sudden you have to start looking at, well how are we organized and discipline wise is that the responsibility of the faculty – that discipline? But we have a lot of responsibilities in the faculties and that discipline. And so, you know, starting to tease out how does the university find ways collectively to support students with that piece of belonging?

**KL:** Okay so, I feel like you’ve already shown us that there – this is a challenging issue. But I’m curious if there are any particular challenges that you’re currently exploring related to student success here at OSU? Maybe what you’ve just described or other things that you’re really digging into.

**JN:** So here’s uh, here’s another example that I think speaks to some of the challenges associated with this topic. We called together, a couple of month ago, a group to look specifically at student success through the lenses of our Native Americans in the population. And we had a couple of faculty and staff who right out of the gate said, “You know, before we start talking about programs, I would like us to look at how we collect data?” And I was chairing this particular group and I thought, you know, I like data, that seems like a fine thing to do, but it also struck me as a little bit odd that there was really a strong desire to by-pass some of the pieces that we most immediately look at, whether it be problematic mentoring and that sort of thing. And so their point was that there have been so many changes to federal guidelines related to census reporting that maybe our storylines related to this population, have been distorted in recent years. And what was fascinating, I mean, I’ll get to the – so here – here’s the headline, is that we currently report seventeen, roughly seventeen Native American new freshmen each year. And so that storyline is, wow, there’s not a lot of native students coming to OSU. But when you break out either folks – students who identified as multi-racial or students who identified as Hispanic and Native American, what you find is that we actually have over 125 students who identify in some way as Native American every year coming as first year freshmen. Well all of a sudden that shifts the story, and potentially shifts resource allegation and just over all sort of inquiry to support that particular population. So one of the pieces, to get to your question of what are some of the challenges that we’re doing right now, we’re wanting to look at how we have collected and talked about the data that we’re using right now. Just basically, a quality control check to see have we – are we making decisions based on the best data we can get or have we maybe missed some things? And with that we had missed some things.

**KL:** Well we’ve found in some of the research that we’ve done here in the research unit, some of the institutional data, and I think this is across institutions – I don’t think it’s just at Oregon State, primarily is student self-report, and so if students don’t know the answer to the question, our data is only as good as their knowledge. And so some of the things around first generation, or Pell eligibility, and that kind of thing, we’re not ever really sure when we’re reporting those numbers, because it comes straight from student report. And many of them just don’t answer, because they don’t know. So it does create kind of a situation that’s like – it’s not always on the – it’s not the responsibility necessarily of the student, but I think it raises a really important question about the kind of quality of data that we have and what we can really glean from it when we’re not sure that we can do that kind of quality checking.

**JN:** Yeah absolutely. I mean - I think, you know, just quickly another topic for me that is not an easy one to tackle, not withstanding there being a fairly wide spread support for it, and that’s the classroom experience. So how do we – how do we support faculty in the training and support necessary to create inclusive learning communities, to really understand what inclusive both pedagogy and curriculum development look like, and that’s a challenge because; A.) given all of the demands on faculty, and the fact that really it’s not like – there are very few programs throughout the country that are preparing faculty in that piece of their future teaching career prepared to meet that. And then secondly, we’re not organized in such a way that even a department chair can go and say, “You must do this.” In some cases, there might be some ways for that to happen, but largely what we’re trying to do is we’re trying to provide enough information so that those faculty who maybe have some self-awareness to as there’s an area of growth for me, that they have access to the resources that would help them. But that’s a convoluted in some ways area to address the classroom experience.

**KL:** Okay, so that’s a perfect segue into our next segment. We’re going to take a brief break, and when we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more from Jesse about diversity, inclusion, and student success. Back in a moment.

Here in the Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit. We have been working on a special first of its kind project that advances the field of online teaching and learning. Our new edited collection, *High-Impact Practices in Online Education: Research and Best Practices* brings together 23 experts in the field of higher education to share how high impact practices can be shared in online environments. Whether you’re a distance education administrator, faculty member, faculty developer, or someone just interested in research on teaching and learning, we hope you’ll check out this new resource. Learn more at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/hip.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Jesse, as we ended segment one, we talked a little bit about this issue of diversity and inclusion with student success, and I’m wondering if you could talk a little bit about how efforts supporting university inclusion have changed or influenced the student success conversation more broadly.

**JN:** Yeah. I think uh – boy that’s – it makes me think about identity development. And I think one of the things that the diversity and inclusion efforts have helped inform us on is really the various diversity out there related to development, and how that presents itself in a classroom. And so, perhaps maybe more than anything, it’s realizing that there’s not a one size fits all student success intervention that will be the magic bean for whatever problem you’re trying to solve. Um you know, I’m thoughtful of – or mindful of this idea that when we really started getting into the literature in the early 80’s related to student success, some folks interpreted theories of integration. So Tinto’s work largely at the outset in the late 70’s and early 80’s as being simulation to nature, and as we got into it we realized that some of the applications of those theories could easily get us there. To this idea that we’re asking students that are coming from diverse backgrounds to assimilate the majority culture at an institution. And so we quickly realized that that’s not the path that we need to go, and I pay tribute to those who are very engaged in diversity and inclusivity work for helping the field to realize in relative terms early on.

**KL:** Yeah I mean, this is such a challenging issue, and I’m going to ask you a question where I feel like I’m asking you to come up with a magic answer – but I want to kind of discuss it. You know, like – what are the ways that we can ensure student success across a student population? You know, if we know that one magic bean is not going to work, how do you do this in a way that is even remotely efficient or sustainable when every student could be coming in with a different pathway for student success? I feel like that’s kind of an impossible question, but I’m curious what your thoughts are on that.

**JN:** Yeah. You know, one of the things that has always struck me is that students are pretty good about gaging whether an institution is trying or not. So one of the things that I’ve tried to hold myself accountable for is, would students that have stepped up to be leaders in some of these areas, would they have a sense that I was actually trying? That there was a good faith effort on the part of the university and the administration, whom ever, to move forward. So I think for me, one of the great approaches, and it’s actually not profound, it’s not technically savvy necessarily – it’s simply, have we set up enough time to listen to our students and to hear what they have to say? This – that experience really hit home for me this past year too, I work as a co-advisor to our student’s with autism community on campus, and we decided to take – we meet weekly. We decided to take one of those weeks and just ask them, you know, “tell us about, what are thing you would address for improvement? Anything related to your experience at the university.” And it was really interesting what they came up with. They really got honed in on the testing center, where some of them are able to have accommodations for testing. And I thought, “Okay that makes sense” it didn’t come out of left field for me. It felt fairly straight forward or a reasonable connection point, but where they went with that blew me away. And one of the students said, “You know, the biggest challenge going to the testing center and that impacts my ability to do well, is the color of the desktops that I have to use in the testing center” and all of the students were like, “Yes. That’s a huge challenge because it’s almost a white opaque desktop, and when I put my testing paper on top of it, my brain has a really hard time even focusing on the words that are on the page, because of the contrast of the paper on the desk.” And so here was a situation that resonated for a population really powerfully, and absolutely was impacting their student success, even the traditional metrics of student success, like GPA, it was having an impact there, but we never in a million years would have come up with that as an issue had we not taken time to talk to students.

**KL:** Okay so. I’m curious, in your role as an administrator, and you mentioned you’re kind of chairing these committees, and we talked today about how you’ve been all over campus for meetings today. How are you finding time to listen to students? What are some ways that you have built that into your role, your job, you know, the kinds of things you are prioritizing? Because I can see how it’s huge in terms of trying to understand such a diverse population.

**JN:** Well I think years ago as I decided to kind of go all in to administration, if you will – so I realized that was a path that I was going to move forward on. And at that point I kind of made a commitment to myself that every year was going to be at least a co-advisor or an advisor of a student group. And that student group might change over time, but that connection point has proven to be truly valuable in ways that have gone well above and beyond what I had thought or even anticipated. I think the other thing too is, there’s an element of finding faculty and staff who are connected to students, and have tremendous trust with the student body, and who tend to be the go to people for students, and being able to connect with them and to give them the opportunity to be voiced for some of the voices that we don’t always hear, I think that’s a really critical intentionality that we can do on a campus.

**KL:** Okay so. I’m curious for people who might want to learn more about diversity and inclusion, and specifically how it relates to student success – what are some of your favorite go to resources or things that you’ve found helpful in your own experience of learning more in this area?

**JN:** So again, this one – that feels like a big question, even though I know it’s not. It should be probably easier. You know, I think certainly in terms of resources, taking time to visit with students – I can’t hammer on that enough. Even if it’s saying, “You know what, I’m going to find out – I’m going to reach out to the Black Student Union and see if there’s a time that you can go to a meeting” and maybe you have questions from your department that you are looking for feedback. And so engaging with student groups in that way certainly is important. You know, if somebody were just starting in this – kind of down this path of inquiry, I think a good foundation point would be Peggy McIntosh’s work with privilege, and getting a sense of why diversity and inclusivity matters and how it impacts the student experience. That at least would give one some initial prompts that would probably prove nurturing to new paths of study. There was – boy. Early in the 2000’s, I actually think it may have been 2004, there was an article in the Journal of Higher Education called “A Fly in the Buttermilk”, which did a great job of looking at from a phenomenological view, the experiences of black students a predominately white – a large predominately white institution. And it did a nice job, a really relevant job looking at the mutlifacets of the student experience, and how diversity and inclusion played out for a specific population. So again, what an article like that would do is say, “Here are some conceptual points that would connect as starter points for further study.”

**KL:** Okay so, I’m also really curious – how in this area, because it feels like a jobs that’s never done. How do you stay motivated to keep kind of engaging in this? I mean, obviously our students are a hug motivation, but I could also imagine, like, it may feel like the needle is never being moved. You know, like what is the motivation you have to keep working in these areas?

**JN:** That’s – you know, that is something I think about, and I think especially just depending on the person’s role on campus. I think that our staff and faculty that have a chance to work relatively on a daily basis – uh directly with students, some of that motivation comes at various points in the year when it’s clear that you’re making an impact. Certainly at commencement time when you’re seeing the amazing stories of accomplishment and achievement. And so that’s – hopefully in some regards that’s very encouraging and affirming. I also hope that as institutions, we’re doing our part to support and affirm the faculty and staff who are serving in those roles, and recognizing the tremendous impact that they’re having. I think for some, and I would say my role right now is a bit like this, where for all intents and purposes, I am a step removed from the day to day work with students. In some ways, it becomes tricky not to have it not just be a numbers game. So you don’t just want to see, oh wow retention ticked up buy a percentage point this year, yay! I mean – for those who are really committed, I don’t know if that’s motivation enough. So – for me, I guess all that I can speak to for me – I’m really invested right now in systems change. And I want to – I go to the commencement celebrations at the end of the year, because that refuels me. But what I’m really intent on – hoping we could make some change on, is working with our faculty and staff and to have them mirror back, “You know what? This particular process on campus change” or “This particular – on boarding experience for students who are coming as transfer students” whatever the experience or process has been, are we seeing changes in the system? And that to me feels like it’s a sustainable kind of long term impact, and I would love to see us as an institution working that way, because the faculty member who’s the go to for a particular population of students, isn’t always going to be at the institution, and so we’ve got to put this into the brick and mortar.

**KL:** That is – makes so much sense. We’re going to take another brief break, when we come back we’ll hear a little bit more from Jesse with his experience working on our recent edited collection on high impact practices. Back in a moment.

# Segment 3:

**KL:** Jesse, so one of the ways we got to work together in the past couple of years actually, was on this edited collection on high impact practices in online education, which has been super fun (agreed)! Yeah, really have enjoyed this. And I would love to hear a little more from you about what it was like to write this volume as an administrator. I mean, I’m always kind of – I mean, even though I am an administrator, it’s like my full time job to write and do research. So I always love talking with other administrators who – that maybe isn’t your full time job, but it’s so important to be sharing your perspectives in these kinds of pieces. So what was it like?

**JN:** Well it was a joy first of all, to be able to jump back into more of the literature than you sometimes get to do as an administrator, and to have colleagues like yourself and others where we were at least thinking and having discussions about this topic. I think, you know, one of the thing I realized at some point a couple of months into it, was that I had to go back to dissertation mode a little bit. where when I finished my doctoral course work I actually went back to work full time, and it took me a while to figure out in that environment how to have a rhythm to finish my dissertation, and I was actually able to employ the same strategies here, which is basically you have to take a vacation day from time to time to just be a writing day, because even though you’ve blocked off two hours in a work day maybe to work on some scholarship, it’ very hard to make that happen. And then I was really fortunate with the timeframe of this particular volume to have two conferences that I needed to go to that were on the East Coast, so that was a lot of travel time, and that was wonderful to devote really those travel days entirely to writing.

**KL:** Yeah, I’ve found plane writing is some of the most magic writing (Yeah), or like hotel room writing right before the conference starts (Agreed. One-hundred percent yes). So your chapter that you worked on was around diversity and inclusion practices with – as high impact practices, and I’m wondering if you could talk about if you found certain kinds of these practices that were most useful in online environments and modalities? Because that’s really the focus of our volume, and I know a lot of the focus in HIPs is more in the traditional classroom. So what are some of the things you found that were specifically related to online?

**JN:** You know, I think certainly there’s – maybe the low hanging fruit is seeing the faculty that takes some time to be reflective about identifying really diverse pieces of content and curriculum to bring to the course, and that certainly has an impact, and that’s something that I think faculty can do relatively easily – that it’s a very doable thing. The piece that we saw considerable impact on that is a little harder to even define and to write a road map for how to do it, is this idea of how do you create an inclusive environment in the online setting? We know that different senses of academic identity will – will have a student engage in the online environment maybe in ways that they didn’t – or they don’t in face to face environments. And so how do you have an instructor create an environment that then acknowledges these various identities that are showing up? And whether that be in synchronous times or asynchronous times, and so again, that’s the rough concept. So the question for me is, so then what? How do you help faculty in that situation? And I think acknowledging or being aware that incredible intentionality to the environment, the learning environment, is critical. You don’t necessarily have the benefit of non-verbal cues. Sometimes you have the situation of what feels like perhaps a little more anonymity in an online – asynchronous space especially. So maybe folks are presenting and sharing opinions that might be stronger in their phrasing than they do in the classroom. And so having an instructor that goes into the experience aware that the dynamics are going to be different and is intentional about trying to create and shape that environment so that students know what to expect. So they can expect, this is going to be a place where we’ll have hard dialogues, but these are the ways that we’re going to do that, and here’s how we’re going to process and debrief after the fact. Clarity on that is really a tremendous skill and goes so far in creating an inclusive experience.

**KL:** So one of the things that I’ve really thought was interesting in the past few years that I’ve worked here with Ecampus, is the kind of benefits that you have for diversity online that are just kind of baked in. And I think, for example, you have students from all over the world who will come into a class together, and yes it’s asynchronous and are on all these different time zones, you know, like we have to figure out that kind of logistical piece out. But you have people who are coming from a really wide range of perspectives, and it’s just kind of something that’s built in a little bit – and also we typically have more adult learners, so people who are over the sort of traditional college age. I’m wondering if you see other kind of baked in things to the online environment that are kind of bringing that diversity to the classroom that students can encounter, and how can we kind of leverage that in a way that is really positive?

**JN:** You’ve identified some real pluses I think with online experiences related to learning. And if you think about this idea that you’ve got students from multiple communities, so the simple fact that points of references will be diverse, I think has tremendous potential, and so when we ask students to consider their own lived experience when considering what the content of the course might be during that process of application, drawing from the communities in which students are living, which might be diverse. Not just one college campus that every student in the classroom is living on, now all of a sudden you’ve got 30 different communities, which provide a pretty exciting constellation of reference points, that then for an instructor who’s – who’s comfortable maybe going with the flow a little bit on where that might lead, some tremendous experiences in learning can come from that.

**KL:** Alright, so I know this is an area where this is still a lot of questions and issues to explore, and especially as we look at high impact practices online, a lot more research that still needs to be done. What are some of the questions about diversity and inclusion online that you still want to explore? That are kind of the most interesting to you? Particularly after having worked on this chapter.

**JN:** Yeah, I’m – well I do appreciate kind of clarity on, here’s some nuts and bolts pieces that an instructor can employ. And so for me, my head is still playing with this notion of facilitating the creation of the inclusive learning environment online, and that one still resonates pretty powerfully for me. So still very much curious and thinking through, what are some very concrete steps? So uh, leading up to the proverbial first day of class, um like pre-term beginning, what are some things that an instructor can do to really set the stage for the type of dialogue that would be healthy, and inclusive, and really shape the learning experience? But then also going into it, like how in an asynchronous environment can one encourage difficult conversations? And then also kind of moderate and help the group process that, when it’s asynchronous and there’s not non-verbals. I mean, there’s a lot to communication skills in place there that still has my head spinning. In ways that I think is exciting. There’s a lot of work to be done there, and a lot of good work that’s already happened.

**KL:** Yeah it is always interesting to me the range of skills that go into online teaching. One good example that I always come back to is technical writing. You know, that we’re not necessarily employing in traditional classrooms, and I think it does take a totally different skill set when you get into those modalities to make sure people do feel a sense of inclusion and belonging.

**JN:** Yep. Absolutely.

**KL:** Well Jesse, it was super fun working with you on this project, and also so much fun to have you

in the studio with me today. Thank you so much for coming in and sharing your experience.

**JN:** I really appreciate you having me on today, and it was a joy to work with you the book. So thanks so much, Katie!

**KL:** Also, thanks to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of research in action. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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# HIP Bonus Clip #2:

**KL:** In this second bonus clip for our back-to-school miniseries, I chat with my co-editor, Chrysanthemum Mattison Hayes about our experiences communicating with contributors. You can learn more about our book, High-Impact Practices in Online Education at Ecampus.oregonstate.edu/hip.

**CMH:** Okay Katie, I have a question for you: So you have done four edited collections now—you’ve edited four collections—I was wondering how you go about structuring your communication with the various authors and at what stages you find it really valuable to maintain that communication with them and what that looks like.

**KL:** Yeah, so in the first bonus clip we had talked a little bit about templates of emails for this and I definitely think there are stages in the pipeline that are very clear in terms of when you communicate with authors. The first stage is typically the invitation and, in this particular edited collection, I was doing personalized invitations. So this did not have a call, like an open call, for contributors. I had specific chapters because it was on high-impact practices and we knew each chapter was going to be on a high-impact practice, I wanted to seek out specific experts that could address each topic. So, I actually cold-emailed people that I knew, that could be good, and many of them I had never met and did not know me. So the first stage is really just reaching out to them and seeing if they’re interested in engaging in the collection, getting a little bit of information about them about what they might include their particular chapter, their bios, things like that that could be put into the proposal that goes into the publisher.

The second stage is, I think, when the publisher accepts the proposal and offers a contract. So confirming to everybody who is contributing in the collection that, “yes, indeed, we have a contract, we are moving forward,” and we’re kind of reminding everybody about the timeline. So the timeline piece I think is huge for communicating with authors and always giving them the entire timeline so it’s not just what is the next deadline, but what is the entire timeline that we’re working on with the series. That was something that you and I kind of outlined from the very beginning and we had to tweak it along the way, and we built in buffer times for people being late and things like that. But being able to communicate that in the initial email that’s kind of confirming we’re moving forward was useful.

So then there is, kind of once that launch email goes out saying, “this is what we need from you next,” basically, which is the first draft of their chapters. Then there was the reminders, which are super important. And typically we would send them out like a month away from the deadline, and then like a week away from the deadline, just to let people know like, “hey, we’re expecting this review and if you can’t get it to us, let us know like now and give us a revised timeline.” And, like I said, we built I buffers just for this situation we knew people would potentially have things come up. But, actually with this collection, there were very few people who were late. I mean we were really lucky, I think, in terms of who we had contributing.

So then we have the first round of emails come in of the drafts, and then we’re responding to those—like confirming receipt, letting people know when we’re going to have the feedback back to them—and then sending back that initial round of feedback and reminding them of when the deadline is for the next round. I mean it’s really just kind of this cycle of what is the next step, when is it due, sending a reminder, you know, making sure that everybody is getting the information they need. And then I think there are also a series of communications that get sent out to the entire group. So, for example, recently we decided who was going to be writing the foreword for the book. Actually it’s someone who has been on the show, Kelvin Thompson from University of Central Florida, and I can link to his episode in the show notes. But Kelvin is going to be writing the foreword, so I sent an email out to the entire group just kind of letting them know that we were welcoming Kelvin to collection and kind of giving them some updates on how we were working toward our book promotion ideas. When we had the cover designed for the book, we sent an email out to the group to let them know—so kind of the bigger milestones of the process—there was a group email that would be sent out. But I think that’s the part that can get a little bit lost in the shuffle is like you forget it’s not just your book, it’s everybody’s book, and everybody’s going to want to know like, what’s going on with release date and when it gets put into the catalog. You know, those kinds of things—when the book website is available of the publisher website. So I think that noting those major milestones with a quick email to the group, just like, letting everybody know also ends up kind of creating this group cohesion where everybody kind of understands you’re kind of in it together with the group. And they’re not just working with you and I, they’re working with this team of collaborators.

So those are some of the different stages and now, we’re at the stage where we’re starting to work on book promotion, so we’re getting like headshots from authors and a little bit more additional information so we can include it on the book website. I’m sure as we continue promoting the book over the next year or so, and beyond, you know we’ll be talking with people about what conferences they’re attending and can we connect face-to-face. So it’ll be kind of an ongoing connection. Once you publish with someone, you’re kind of like connected for life. I mean like their name is on your CV—it’s a big deal. So, being able to develop those relationships over time I think is really important.

**CMH:** Yeah, I’ve really noticed the continuity and the community that got built through that and I think a lot of it has to do with best practices around good communication. So, like we’re calling out to give confirmation of receipt and follow up with not just, “this is what we need from you,” but here we’re also providing you with updates and announcements and information and keeping people excited and in the loop. And I think what that did, at least from the sort of co-editor side and also someone that was contacted for some information, is I think it made people more excited and also responsive. So, when you ask for something, I mean you’re on top of it, you’re on top of making sure that this is moving forward and it creates this group bond around wanting to get this done together.

**KL:** Right

**CMH:** And that was one thing that I really appreciated seeing.

**KL:** Well and I think it also creates a slight sense of urgency as well that like we are moving this forward. And I think the responsiveness goes both ways. It was really important for me every time an author contributor reached out, that we were immediately responding to them to answer their questions. And, I mean, I’ve certainly been on the end of edited collections where I was able to really communicate with the editor very well—I mean everybody gets busy. I mean, we’ve had a lot of people reach out and just say how much they’ve enjoyed this process and that’s really the ultimate goal is to have a situation where people leave the edited collection feeling like they would definitely work with you again, they really enjoyed it, they want to promote the book because they had a positive experience engaging in the process of creating it. And all of that—I mean, what we’ve just described is relatively basic—you know, like project management, communication, just being professional. And it goes a long way.

**CMH:** It really does. I have a colleague that just contributed to an edited collection, took over four years, and is just beyond exhausted, and is like, “I will never do something like that again.” And I’m in a similar stage and I’m like, “I would totally do that again.” So, I think, yes, speaking to that process. And we were really lucky and fortunate to have such professional and outstanding colleagues contribute to the book. There was a little bit of variability though across the authors. Do you want to speak a little bit to some of the differences in working with the authors and maybe some of the, yeah, some of what you noticed?

**KL:** Yeah, I mean, I think, and actually I can bring a little bit of my experience from the other edited collection that we worked on as well that we’re still finalizing. So, this group of authors was primarily faculty because it was focused on high-impact practices in the classrooms, so we were really interested in engaging people who had taught and who were kind of using these techniques. And we ended up having, I think, a lot of people who were totally on the ball and they like understood what deadlines meant and they were very good about it.

In my other edited collection, we’re working primarily with upper administrators. It’s a collection on the business of innovating online. So, it’s a lot of really like top-level leaders in the field of online education, including people like college presidents and, you know, people who are in the provosts office, and people who are kind of in higher up positions in large companies, and things like that. And the deadlines have not been as helpful. People are just busy, like they just can’t get their stuff done in the timeline that we had, and it may have been an aggressive timeline given that audience of who the authors were. But I think that anytime you do an edited collection, you will have people who vary in terms of their ability to get things into you on time, and for a lot of reasons. We had, one of our authors, experience kind of a personal emergency during this process—a couple of them actually that I’ve worked with over these two collections—and you just have to kind of roll with it. There’s not a whole lot you can do, and of course we want to extend as much grace as possible to the people who are experiencing challenges, whether it’s professionally or personally. And that’s something I think that I’m really grateful to our publisher, Stylus, because they do understand you know, like this stuff happens and sometimes things need to be shuffled or moved around or moved back. But I think one of the most important things communicating with authors with an edited collection like this is the level of flexibility you have and just being open to, you know like I guess not being open to, but being prepared for the kinds of delays that will happen. And I think this is the thing that really sets apart people who find the process of editing a collection relatively easy and people who don’t. I’m willing to kind of just roll with it and be calm and like, you know, this is part of managing a project; there will be bumps. Other people it completely stresses them out to think that they like juggle all these people and that there could be delays and, you know, it just feels completely overwhelming to them and I think that’s something to realize if you’re thinking about doing a collection like this is if you’re one of those people that really struggles with not being in control of the process, there’s a lot of parts of this process where we’re not in control. And if somebody doesn’t give us the chapter, we either drop the chapter or we have to wait. I mean, like, it’s out of our control.

**CMH:** There’s plan B and C for everything. If you were one of the people that did not enjoy group projects, edited collections may not be for you.

**KL:** Right, right! I mean, I think also—I mean, there’s so much to learn about the process as well—but I always just think about in situations like this, and I’ve had a lot of kind of co-authoring or edited collections situations where people have completely like fallen off the map. And I’m like, I have no idea where you went, I don’t know, you know like, why you’re not getting back to me or whatever, and I just always try to like remind myself like we don’t ever know what’s going on with other people and I think we can in those moments can extend as much grace as possible and kindness and hopefully they will come back into the fold and we’ll have a chance to collaborate with them in the future. So, I mean, in this situation, like we’ve said, we were super lucky with our contributors, they were phenomenal. And we had some people who got added in a the last minute as well.

**CMH:** They were rockstars.

**KL:** Yeah, they did amazing just in terms of the timeline, they just did amazing. So, but I would love to hear from you, Mum, just in terms of how we communicated with our authors about feedback because I think that’s one of the more challenging things that people have concerns about with edited collections is how you give feedback in a way that people can hear it and that is, you know like we said, is kind and with grace, but saying like, “this isn’t going to work” or “we need you to change this or that.” How did you go about, like, framing feedback in your own mind as we were giving people multiple rounds of this throughout the process?

**CMH:** So, in my mind, I first tried to put myself in the shoes of someone that had put something of themselves out there, and it’s a very vulnerable position to have written something and to ask someone else to look at it, and someone else who their role is to be critical of it and to see how it’s going to fit with everything else. So, I think one is keeping in mind big picture, but then also just as important is remembering the humans that have put this forth, and so I think that goes along with the grace comment that you’ve given. And so, I know how I like to receive feedback, which is having a lot of what’s working well or what we really enjoyed, or highlighting areas and sections where we felt should be emphasized or stronger, or really, really communicating a point that we feel that the readers are eventually going to find just completely helpful and novel and all of that. And so, really paying attention to those things, as well as identifying maybe the larger problem areas. So at the structural phase being about, “okay, where do we want to go?” And I know for what we had talked about was making sure to emphasize the equity and how inclusive online education. And since it’s high-impact practices in online education, at least me coming to it, having that perspective of making sure that equity is part of it and all the authors were at least touching on what this is able to do to support that time of student—or the diverse students—and so looking for those things.

And so, in terms of giving feedback, I think I went about it after consulting with you, identifying the things that really needed to change or if there were areas we felt were really well written, but didn’t necessarily fit the rest of the flow. So, identifying sort of chunks, moving things back and forth, helping the authors to organize it in a way that matched the overall vision for the book without being too prescriptive. And this is one of the places where I struggled, I think, is editing that I’ve done in the past has been very much line-by-line, someone gives it to me and I turn it into whatever the final product is or I do a lot of the writing. And so, actually it was quite a struggle for me. I might turn it back over to you and hear a little bit more about how you approached it. This was a constant struggle. I think, by the end, I got a little better at it, but I, sometimes I think I dip a little too much into the, “I’m going to rewrite this section.” [*laughs*]

**KL:** Well some authors, I think, really like that. I mean the more detailed you can be with feedback, in terms of like, “this is what we mean when we say we want it this way, here’s an example of the rewritten form.” I actually think the real challenge of an edited collection is you have all these different voices, but the book has to feel cohesive. And so you do have people come at the book from different angles and the chapters have to read as one book, and even with different voices and perspectives. So that I think is the real work, especially at the first stage of structural edits, that’s the real work of the editor is to try to bring the book into some form of general alignment like, you know, where the chapters aren’t drastically different. And we did that in this collection through some of the formatting, we added a key takeaways feature for each chapter at the end, which kind of again, aligned all the chapters. And we also tried to keep them generally the same in terms of like length. But that is the challenge, I think, is how do you read it as a book from the beginning and try to bring the authors, given they haven’t read each other’s work. In some edited collections, you actually have to share things across the entire author contributor pool, but we did not do that. So, they’re relying on us to say, “This swings too far in the other direction and actually makes you not kind of jive with the rest of the book. So, we need you to come back, you know, more toward the middle.” Or, “We kind of need you to shift in a different direction because it doesn’t fit with what we’re trying to do here.” And I don’t remember having too many chapters where we had to kind of like really do significant changes. There were maybe like, two, three, four, from out of the eleven where I think we were really trying to get people to shift in kind of a different direction that where they originally started. But again, we were lucky. I think people really kind of came into it. And we gave them like a general format to start, but it wasn’t—like you said—it wasn’t prescriptive. We weren’t say like, “you have to have sections on this, this, and this.” We just gave some general ideas on, “it would be nice if you had a literature review in your chapter.” Just kind of offering some of the previous research on high-impact practice in this particular online environment or the particular high-impact practice you’re addressing in the chapter. But other than that, we kind of let them go and I’m so proud of how it came out; I think they all did an excellent job.

**CMH:** Me too. And I think each of the chapters presented an idea, a unique idea that was independent of all the other chapters. And I think sort of finding that unique and special element in there and helping the authors to draw that out and focus on that is one of the most rewarding challenges of this particular collection because everyone had something very, I think, important to say and they said it in such different ways. Maybe that’s why at the beginning I struggled with some of the editing because some of the editing involved maybe moving or shaving a lot of components, and other were, you know, “maybe you want to add a section on this, and this, and this, and here’s an example,” and pulling in research that we were aware of that may complement it. Directing was very different, the coaching I guess, was very different depending on how the authors arrived at the first draft. But yeah, that specialness in each of the chapters was really exciting even from early on to see.

**KL:** Alright, well, let’s wrap up this particular bonus clip. Thanks everyone for listening to more behind the scenes of editing this collection in *High-Impact Practices in Online Education.* Stick around for our next bonus clip next week where we’re talking a little bit about bumps in the road. Thanks, everyone.