**Continuing the Conversation: Moving from Burnout to Resiliency with Chisa Uyeki, Collection Development Librarian Faculty at Mt. SAC Episode 195**

00:00:00 **Chisa**

This feeling of like nonstop, we've got to go, go, go. We've got to constantly be engaged. If we're not working all the time, we're not working hard enough, for some people that's not at all the case. Some people are very good at not listening to that message in our society, but for a lot of us it's really hard. So, I think really interrogating urgency and timelines is something that I've been able to do that's made a really big difference.

00:00:33 **Christina**

Hi, and welcome back to the Mt. SAC Podcast. As our host, Tania Anders catches up with Chisa Uyeki to have a deeper discussion about her recent presentation from Spring Flex Day 2024 on her findings regarding burnout during her sabbatical. Here's Tania and Chisa.

00:00:54 **Tania**

Welcome listeners to the Mt. San Antonio College Podcast, my name is Tania Anders, your host for today's episode. My guest is Chisa Uyeki, professor and librarian, and our keynote speaker for the most recent Flex Day. Chisa completed a sabbatical last academic year on the topic of burnout, which was also the topic of our keynote address, which we are featuring in a separate episode.

00:01:18 **Tania**

Chisa, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me for a follow-up conversation on the topic of burnout. It's great to have you here.

00:01:27 **Chisa**

Thank you, Tania.

00:01:29 **Tania**

So, let me start with what led you to the idea of doing a sabbatical on burnout?

00:01:34 **Chisa**

So, really where I started with it is that I wanted to be able to continue to do work that I think is really important at Mt. SAC, but I was experiencing burnout and it just really didn't feel sustainable. I did have a colleague who's since retired who told me like, "Balance doesn't exist. You give and give and give, and that's just the way it is ." And I was really hopeful that that wasn't the case because I knew for me that wouldn't be sustainable. So, that's where it started from.

00:02:08 **Chisa**

And when I started kind of chatting with people and mentioning it, every single person I talked to about the idea of looking at burnout for my sabbatical said, "Oh, my gosh, we need that so much." So, I could tell that it was something that people were interested in. I will say too, as good research works, I thought I knew more about it than I did going in, so I learned a lot, which was terrific.

00:02:36 **Tania**

No , that is wonderful. That's what a sabbatical is all about, to learn more. And I think certainly from the amazing feedback we've gotten from your keynote, like you said, people really wanted to hear about it. Can you just remind our listeners who have not had a chance to listen to your Flex Day presentation, what defines burnout and how does one recognize it?

00:03:00 **Chisa**

So, importantly, there are three components to burnout and burnout is talked about as a work-based syndrome. So, it's a combination of different symptoms go together to create a syndrome, and the dimensions of burnout are overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from one's job and a sense of ineffectiveness and a lack of accomplishment.

00:03:28 **Chisa**

During the keynote, I asked folks to tell us what burnout meant to them, and we heard a lot of exhaustion. That was one of the main things, overwhelmed, depression, fatigue. So, that's what it feels like, but that's not necessarily what causes it.

00:03:47 **Chisa**

And so, what causes it importantly is stress that is not managed, that happens over a period of time due to the environment. So, the causes of burnout are all connected to the work environment. And so, one important thing to tell folks who may be feeling burned out is that it's not your fault.

00:04:12 **Chisa**

It really is a issue of the social environment in which people work. That is how it was defined by Maslach and Leiter who are two of the big researchers in burnout. So, the workplace is a social environment, and when it's experienced by us and we are constantly faced with stress, then that can lead to burnout.

00:04:38 **Tania**

Thank you. So, what are some advice that you have for our listeners who feel like that they might be suffering from burnout or are clearly suffering from burnout? Are there some simple techniques that you can recommend to address and just , and importantly, to avoid burnout?

00:04:57 **Chisa**

A really important thing to recognize, and this is both at the individual level and the institutional level, and I may have said this in the keynote, it was one of the things I read that really stuck with me, which is that a healthy environment follows a healing environment.

00:05:12 **Chisa**

So, if you're experiencing burnout, you've got to take the time to really recover. So, I highly recommend reaching out and asking for help, not ignoring your symptoms. I think particularly we're on this academic calendar, and so there's certain times of the year that are more stressful than others, and a lot of times we just decide we're going to push through.

00:05:33 **Chisa**

I encourage us to stop and really look at, "Okay, where are the stress points? What is making me stay up late or not get enough sleep or worry too much? And what can we do to change that?" I definitely suggest talking to your primary care doctor and your mental health providers.

00:05:52 **Chisa**

It's also important to address that root of whatever the stressor is that's causing the stress. And there are lots of stress management strategies that we can use individually, and that is really individual. So, I do something where I have a list of things that I think of as the things that feed my soul that I know if I spend half an hour doing these things, I will always feel better.

00:06:17 **Chisa**

And so, for me, that's going for a walk, writing in my journal, working in my yard, reading for fun, so then I can go back to that list. And that really connects us with what our purpose is. So, managing our priorities and our time and our energy so that we are feeding our energy and feeding our souls rather than feeling like we are just being depleted.

00:06:44 **Chisa**

But I really encourage folks who are experiencing burnout to talk to other people about it as well. Because connection is one of the main things. There was a model that was developed by an academic whose name is Pope-Ruark, and she wrote the book, Unraveling Faculty Burnout, which is a great book and is helpful because it's very specific to the academic culture.

00:07:08 **Chisa**

So, what she looks at are four areas to address faculty burnout. They of course work for other folks too . The book is focused on faculty and those are purpose, so meaningful work and a meaningful life. And we get to each define what that is.

00:07:28 **Chisa**

So , spending some time and really thinking about what is your purpose, how do you want to contribute to your community and in the context of Mt. SAC to the college community and then compassion. Compassion is very important, and that means not just how we treat other people, but how we treat ourselves as well.

00:07:51 **Chisa**

And self-compassion is something that when you develop self-compassion in lots of ways, it really simply means giving yourself a break or treating yourself as you would treat a friend of yours. So, when we have compassion for ourselves, we're able to have compassion for others. And so, you can think of that as we're able to be more compassionate with our students.

00:08:13 **Chisa**

The third component of addressing faculty burnout is connection. So, connection with people you trust and people who care about you. Burnout is very isolating that you start to feel like you're the only one who is in as deep as you feel like you are. And there's a whole component for some folks of imposter syndrome, of feeling like, "I can't tell anyone that I'm feeling burnout because then they will think I can't do my job, or I am not doing a good enough job."

00:08:44 **Chisa**

So, connecting with people that you trust and who care about you is very important. Then the fourth component that is recommended as part of how you address burnout for faculty is balance. So, when we think of balance, I think a lot of times we just think about setting boundaries. It's not just setting boundaries, but it is also connecting with your outside of work identity and your outside of work hobbies and pursuits.

00:09:14 **Chisa**

That kind of falls back again to purpose. That you look at what is most important and what your priorities are, and how do you sort of right size your time and energy so that you are meeting those priorities that you've created yourself.

00:09:29 **Chisa**

I do want to also say about setting boundaries. That was something we talked about for a little bit in the breakout, which was really great. And it was great to hear from folks who are good at it, that boundaries are not just saying no, they're also saying yes, but in a way that works with your capacity and your time and your energy. So, those are the four components. So, purpose, compassion, connection, and balance.

00:09:55 **Tania**

I really appreciate you sharing that because I know not everybody had an opportunity to attend your breakout and for you to share that here now, this whole works model to addressing faculty burnout.

00:10:08 **Chisa**

I just want to add one other thing about balance, the other piece of it, and I did say this in the keynote, I think that this is a place that we could really reflect as faculty that part of that for some of us is contributing more or contributing in a different way, really looking at what are your strengths and where are you giving your best and being your authentic self. So, that is a important component of that as well.

00:10:35 **Tania**

Thank you so much Chisa for sharing that, and I hope we have the book in the library and otherwise maybe we should consider it. I think it would be wonderful to do a faculty book club maybe even, and using this book. So, it sounds really, really interesting and so needed, and I appreciate you adding the component of your personal life.

00:10:56 **Tania**

We always just think work burnout, then we think everything work, work, work. But like what you shared, no, what helps me is to do my gardening or journaling or just reading whatever book to then recharge my batteries to be able to give for work.

00:11:12 **Tania**

So, for a moment here, I'd like to go back to something you talked about in your keynote. Can you please explain to us the interconnection between burnout, wellness and oppression that you mentioned in your keynote?

00:11:25 **Chisa**

So, I think it's really important, again to state , I have this feeling and many people do that burnout is an individual issue. It's because I'm not managing things well enough. But the reality is that burnout is not an individual issue, it's a systemic issue , and it is an institutional issue.

00:11:44 **Chisa**

So, it requires a systemic and an institutional solution, not just an individual solution. As individuals, we have to recover from burnout, but systemically and institutionally we need to rebuild how we approach work. So, that is workload, reward, distribution of workload, fairness, all of these components that lead to burnout.

00:12:11 **Chisa**

And the way that that connects with oppression and wellness is that in the workplace, we really have to address oppressive systems that are in our culture and reproduced in our institutions. And that is what's necessary to reduce the prevalence of burnout and to have a healthy environment or an institution that values the wellbeing of the people in the institution.

00:12:45 **Chisa**

So, we can't address mental health and we can't address burnout without addressing the systems of oppression. And one of the challenges, I think when we're talking about, we talk about data , we talk about diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism and accessibility. And I acknowledge we're trying to work on many fronts at the college to address these issues.

00:13:11 **Chisa**

I think one of the things that we have to be really careful about is not doing work that's just performative. So, work that looks good or sounds good, but is not having a deep, real impact. And also work that doesn't take the time and have place for healing, as well as ensuring that we're really listening to the voices of folks who are maybe oppressed or marginalized, or whose voices just haven't been heard and haven't been brought to the table or to the conversation.

00:13:43 **Chisa**

So, I think we do often tiptoe into conversations or actions to address inequity because we don't want to upset anyone, we don't want to upset the status quo, but the reality is that we can be so adverse to conflict that we don't actually address the root issues.

00:14:02 **Chisa**

I'm not saying they're not efforts on that, there are efforts on that, but I think it's really important to see that connection that for us to be a campus that prioritizes wellness, we've really got to be addressing oppression and we've got to be addressing the way that our policies and procedures and sort of the way that we do things, how much that is centering traditions or ways that we've always done things, rather than looking at addressing those inequities that exist .

00:14:40 **Tania**

I completely agree. So, at the keynote, one of the questions was if the system is rigged and how to unrig it, what does that mean for a system to be rigged for starters and do you have suggestions about working towards a solution?

00:14:59 **Chisa**

I was talking about systemic causes of burnout. So, there are the workplace causes of burnout and those have to be addressed as the core reason that people are getting burned out. But we've got to also look at the systemic piece.

00:15:15 **Chisa**

And so, the system being rigged is that we may feel like I'm doing everything I should be doing, I'm taking care of myself, I'm doing my yoga, I'm doing all of the things I should be doing, but I'm still not maybe feeling good, I'm still not maybe getting ahead.

00:15:32 **Chisa**

And the reason for that is that really what is leading to the types of environments which enable burnout to continue to happen at its high rates are systems like patriarchy, white supremacy, and academic capitalism. For instance, let's talk about academic capitalism. That capitalism puts profit first. And so, when we're looking in that in the view of the academy, what we're saying is you need to be productive.

00:16:05 **Chisa**

And that can mean all kinds of things. That can be looking at enrollment, like you've got to get as many students into your classes, teach as many classes as you can. Of course, the goal that we talk about is serving students, but when we let the economics of it drive decision making, that is where we have a disconnect between what our values are.

00:16:28 **Chisa**

And that is where, if student's trying to take a class that isn't offered very often, they're doing everything they should be doing, but they're just not going to be able to get that class. So, when we say that the system is rigged, it means that it's working the way that it's meant to work.

00:16:47 **Chisa**

So, when we look at white supremacy and how that impacts access to education, it is working the way that it's meant to work when access is not as easy for folks who are not the dominant value in the culture. So, what we have to do to address the rigged system is address the inequities. That is the bottom line.

00:17:12 **Chisa**

We have to address them not from a white centered lens. Caring more about the care of the entire community than those who might have their feathers ruffled by an approach or by a conversation, I think is vital. Particularly in an environment like Mt. SAC where we are a very diverse community.

00:17:34 **Chisa**

I always say we're a demographer's dream . We've got such a diverse community, it doesn't make sense for us to center our solutions or our thought processes on ways that maybe things have traditionally been done in higher education.

00:17:52 **Tania**

Thank you so much Chisa for that. I think you really gave our listeners a lot of food for thought on this and how we can all contribute to making our institution better and to ultimately serve our students better then. For a moment here, I'd like to turn to you personally. So, how has your life changed based on what you learned from your research on burnout?

00:18:22 **Chisa**

I think the biggest change for me is pace. So, really just kind of slowing things down, not resisting urgency. So, not feeling like I have to respond to every email as soon as I get it. Recognizing, "Oh, this could wait till tomorrow, I could respond to that tomorrow, or I could do that thing tomorrow."

00:18:42 **Chisa**

Looking at what realistic timelines are. So, I think a really important part of, you know how I was mentioning the system being rigged, part of that is this grind culture, this feeling of nonstop, we've got to go, go, go. We've got to constantly be engaged.

00:18:59 **Chisa**

If we're not working all the time, we're not working hard enough. For some people that's not at all the case. Some people are very good at not listening to that message in our society, but for a lot of us it's really hard. So, I think really interrogating urgency and timelines is something that I've been able to do that's made a really big difference for myself.

00:19:24 **Chisa**

So, looking at my calendar, looking at my time and how I spend my time, aligning that with my real priorities in life has helped with that. And so, that slowing down is in little ways and in big ways. So, slowing down in decision making , doing things like setting meetings instead of setting hour-long meetings, set 50-minute meetings, those kinds of smaller steps really make a difference.

00:19:50 **Chisa**

I will say I'm sleeping better than I used to sleep. And I think it's all of these changes in , for me, it's really coming from a place of being mindful of what those triggers were that led me to feeling burned out and not letting myself fall into those same patterns.

00:20:09 **Tania**

Yeah, mindful and very intentional. I love your advice. I think we can all think about that and translate it to our lives, what you just shared and make a difference for ourselves. But we're all a part of a larger institution. And kind of wrapping up all the things you've said here. So, how can we all, as part of our institution, contribute to the institutional changes?

00:20:38 **Chisa**

I mean, I think one thing, and this I think is something that we're particularly susceptible at Mt. SAC, is because there's this urge to be the leaders and to be the champions, I think we find it difficult to say no to things. So, if there's an initiative, if there's a grant, if there's a pilot, we want to participate, we want to show leadership in that.

00:20:59 **Chisa**

But my concern is we end up spreading ourselves too thin and that ends up spreading the people too thin who are involved in the work. And then as faculty particularly, we may not have what we need to give to our students in the classroom, in the lab, in the library.

00:21:15 **Chisa**

So, I think that really thinking about choices that we make and how we want to spend our time is really important. In terms of individual contributions that we can make, what will change the environment is changing the culture. So, the culture is created by people, and so as individuals we can contribute to a culture that supports the wellbeing of all community members.

00:21:43 **Chisa**

So, we can do things like check in on each other, recognize that if you were supposed to meet with someone today and they just can't do it, they've got either something happened or something is going on, make time for them another time, so flexibility.

00:21:59 **Chisa**

I think I had mentioned earlier, interrogating policies and procedures for bias and for the perpetuation of the dominant culture, I think is really important. And that's not easy. Like if you've got privilege, it's hard to see that privilege because it's working for you. So, you really have to reflect and learn about it.

00:22:22 **Chisa**

So, if you're a person with privilege, you have to recognize, acknowledge and critique your own privilege and relinquish privilege so that we can contribute to the wellness of our community.

00:22:37 **Chisa**

I also think to address burnout, I felt essential to address injustice. And we all need to take visible and vocal stands to support authentic inclusion, to look at what it means to be a just college organization and contribute to the dismantling of oppressive systems.

00:22:58 **Chisa**

Those feel like huge big things, but there are ways that we can do it in our classroom, in our faculty meetings, in our campus wide groups. And so, if we're all committed together towards that, I think that we can really make a change in the culture of our campus.

00:23:18 **Tania**

Chisa, I want to thank you so much for your powerful words. I think there's a lot for everyone to reflect on and I look forward to us as a campus community to make those changes. And like you said, they start with small seeds and then they grow and then we will get to where we want to be.

00:23:40 **Tania**

I had loved when we talked about burnout and sustainability, you had this quote that I just absolutely loved. I don't know if you recall it exactly, but it would be a nice closing remark about how we're using our time.

00:23:59 **Chisa**

So, the quote, which I don't know it exact by heart, but it is essentially saying that, "With burnout, we're stealing from tomorrow to do things today." So, we're expending our energy and our time and our mental capacity in a way that will make it less possible for us to have that energy maybe the next day or the next week.

00:24:20 **Chisa**

And the reality is that is not sustainable. And that really is the same as when we look at environmental sustainability, that we are stealing resources from the future to exist in the present in a way that is perhaps not as mindful as it should be. So, that that's something that we can think about as an individual and can be as simple as, "I need to go to bed earlier today so that tomorrow I'll have the energy I need to face that day."

00:24:50 **Chisa**

So, I think the final thing that I would want to say is to really reinforce that self-care and communal care are not in opposition, but are reliant on each other. So, none of us are free until all of us are free. None of us are well until all of us are well. And so, I look forward to working with you and others to move that forward on our campus together.

00:25:16 **Tania**

Thank you again so much Chisa for your time. It was such a pleasure and I hope you get a good night sleep.

00:25:26 **Chisa**

Thank you.

00:25:29 **Voiceover**

We hoped you enjoyed today's edition of the Mt. SAC Podcast. Check back for other episodes to hear the incredible stories happening and experiences we have in store for you on the Mt. SAC Podcast.

00:25:40 **Tania**

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