Liesel Reinhart: 00:04 Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mt. San Antonio College. But, everyone's welcome.

Liesel Reinhart: 00:23 Christina, you and I have just parked the vans at the end of two long, busy, interesting days, but through movie magic ... or in this case ... podcast magic, we're going to go back in time. It's actually the beginning-

Christina: 00:37 Mountie Magic.

Liesel Reinhart: 00:38 Mountie Magic. The beginning of a series of podcasts. We don't know at this point if it's one, two, three or eight, how many podcasts we're going to get out of it, because we've got such interesting material. But, over the next episode or two or three, you're going to be hearing about a really interesting program that we're trying for the first time at Mt. Sac, an experiential learning program. We're going to be doing the first day at Mt. Sac with a group of about 25 faculty, and the second day, we're going to be heading out to Palm Springs, to a hike in Indian Canyon, and to the Seven Sisters. Is that what it was called? The Seven Sisters hike.

Liesel Reinhart: 01:16 And, Christina's coming along. She's got her headphones on right now and she's been wearing them for the last two days and listening in and having conversations and also being a part of this trip with us, and I think that's been really fun. So, we want to try and give you a sense of what our experience has been and let you in on this journey, to the extent you can. Your feet won't be as dirty as ours and your legs won't be as tired as ours, but maybe we can give you a little taste of what we've experiences.

Christina: 01:48 Yes. So, this episode is going to be Part One of an experiential learning journey with Marco. I hope you enjoy coming along for the ride. We'll hear from Marco, what experiential learning is, how he approaches it, and we'll listen in on an exercise he does with the group. But first, we hear from the Mt. Sac faculty who were inspired to join this two day adventure.

Christina: 02:15 Hi, so I'm here just asking some of the attendees why they joined the class today, what their inspiration was. And I'm gonna start with you, can you just introduce yourself, tell us what you do just to get started?

Speaker 4: 02:28 Hi, my name is Franklin Reynolds and I'm a professor in the communication department.

Christina: 02:32 Awesome, and what inspired you to take this course today?

Speaker 4: 02:35 I really wanted to get into this course so I can start thinking more about how to integrate programs and ideas into the course that will make students more actively engaged in the classroom so that they stay here longer and they commit to the class.

Speaker 5: 02:50 My name is Dalia Chavez and I'm a counselor here at Mt. Sac.

Christina: 02:53 Awesome, and what inspired you to take the course today?

Speaker 5: 02:55 So, a few things actually. I'm always looking to learn new techniques to use with students and in the classroom and really get them engaged with the material. I find that sometimes you're in there and you're lecturing and you see those eyes glaze over, so it's always nice to have things to kind of brighten up the classroom and get students engaged. And really interact with the material, I find that when you are able to really make it your own and really take it on and be able to apply it, you obviously learn from it and you can take it with you in other areas of your life.

Christina: 03:28 That's great. Have you ever done anything like this before?

Speaker 5: 03:30 I have not, so I'm excited to see what is in store for us today. I'm a little nervous about all of these outdoor hiking things 'cause I'm not the best at that but it'll be great fun and a great experience.

Speaker 6: 03:43 My name is Jason Aiorda, I'm a counselor, I'm in the counseling department.

Christina: 03:47 Have you done anything like this before?

Speaker 6: 03:49 I mean I've hiked before, so I've actually been to the area that they're gonna do the hike but that's another thing that interested me but nothing in the sense of bringing the students outside my classroom. Typically, I keep it within the class or if I'm gonna bring it outside the classroom, I take them to like a resource on campus but nothing outside of that so I think that's pretty interesting or unique.

Christina: 04:14 Cool, do you remember as a student if you did anything like this? 'Cause I did and I loved it.

Speaker 6: 04:19 Only in elementary. So ...

Liesel Reinhart: 04:23 So welcome to our workshop, this is called Open That Door. And it's an experiential learning workshop with Marco Benassi from College of DuPage in Chicago and everybody make a little noise so that they know you're here.

Liesel Reinhart: 04:42 We have a really great guest for our session today and I'd like to thank you all for coming, I know that several of you have already met him as he's walking around. For me, this journey to have our event today started with someone who had a broken ankle. I think it must have been almost 10 years ago now and I was ... I've been teaching here for 21 years, I'm Liesel Reinhart from the communication department, I think I know or have met most of you. And I got a call from a friend of mine who teaches in Chicago at the College of DuPage where I used to teach, Marco Benassi, and he and I used to coach forensics.

Liesel Reinhart: 05:21 The speech team, for many years. And he said I know this is kinda crazy, which is really how half of conversations with Marco begin. I know this is kinda crazy but I'm teaching this class and one of the teachers broke his ankle and I need a co-teacher for it. I thought, well that's usually something that's surmountable, to put on a cast and teach a class. He said it's in Kauai.

Liesel Reinhart: 05:46 I said what? He said yeah and it's in like a week. And we're gonna hike and we're gonna camp but I need somebody who's got credentials to teach communication because it's a credit class and we're gonna ... And I said, okay. And I had no idea what I was getting into and I have since done three official and two kind of unofficial trips with the College of DuPage field studies program through the College of DuPage to take students to learn communication courses in Kauai.

Liesel Reinhart: 06:22 And it really changed everything about my teaching, even though I have yet to find a way to get my Mt. Sac students to Kauai. And as we'll talk about later today, the idea of the experiences that I observed and was a part of and got to help teach through those programs, really made me reframe a lot of how I teach even within our campus. And what I think about as a great experience for our students, so let me tell you a little bit about Marco and I have to go to my notes here because I've mostly known him as one of the most successful speech and debate coaches in the country, but after he retired from that, which was like 20 years ago ...

Liesel Reinhart: 07:01 He went on and has become one of the nation's most prolific field and experiential studies faculty, he has designed and taught more than 150 field and experiential programs with the award-winning College of DuPage field and experiential learning program. He is a community college student himself who began at the College of DuPage and had his life transformed by a teacher and then later moved into the office next to that teacher.

Liesel Reinhart: 07:33 Which is something some of us have experienced ourselves as faculty. So, he believes in the transformative power of community colleges and he is past winner of his college's professor of the year and was their 2015 distinguished alumni as well. Without any further ado, let me introduce Marco.

Marco Benassi: 07:55 When Liesel mentioned that a teacher or that a person at a community college 'cause I know a lot of you are counselors and it could be a counselor as well, has such incredible impact and power to transform me, which is what happened twice. Twice, once it happened as a student and once it happened as a faculty member. The time it happened as a student was a speech teacher who had such an infectious energy, I had already dropped out of college twice and went away, dropped out, went to the College of DuPage. Dropped out in the middle of the semester, all F's on my transcript. And then I came back in the fall and by the sheer luck I took this one section with this one teacher, who ended up being one of my best friends.

Marco Benassi: 08:40 And I got involved in the speech, I went up after class and I asked him about the speech team thing he talked about and I got involved in the speech team. Which was an unbelievable experiential opportunity. All of a sudden, I was doing, for the first time in my life. He saw potential in me and he worked with me and I became part of a team and I started going to all these tournaments and that transformed my life. That's what led to me becoming a teacher at the College of DuPage.

Marco Benassi: 09:02 The second time was a man named Tom Limblade. He came up to me as a senior colleague about the third or fourth year that I was at the college and said I think you'd really be good at teaching experiential education. And I taught a speech class as part of a cohort, we were corters at a time of an entire program that had a biology course, a speech course, a psychology course, and PE courses as well, all working together, 15 students and then we all went ...

Marco Benassi: 09:29 Actually at the time it was 22 students and then we all went on a eight day backpacking adventure. Building up throughout the entire semester as well too. That transformed my life, I had never gone anywhere, I never camped as a kid, I had never done any of these kinds of things. And it taught me about expedition behavior, psychology in the field, and group dynamics in a way that I had never learned before.

Marco Benassi: 09:50 So, those two men really transformed my life. I wanna ask you who lit the match for you? Who lit the match for you in your life?

Marco Benassi: 09:58 When I start thinking about what's the real goal? It's so easy to get side tracked into the minutia of like creating a program or doing experiential ed or learning this exercise or those things that we forget the real overall, the overarching goal. And how incredibly blessed we are.

Marco Benassi: 10:14 That we're here, even on a Friday. That we're here because we teach, we counsel, we work with people to try to help them follow their dreams, achieve their dreams. We wanna lite the match for other people and what a great gift to have that as our ... As part of our journey. To help other people and just to shout out to those people that helped us in our journey, that lit the match that created that sense of positive momentum that moved us forward as well too.

Marco Benassi: 10:40 So, we're gonna spend the next day today working on experiential education. I'm gonna put you in the place of your students sometimes too, so you can feel that sense of uncertainty, comfort zone challenge as well too. To really put yourself in their place, to walk the walk that they go through when you put them in an environment that's new to them, that's fresh to them. And the sense of excitement that comes along with doing something new and different and working with other people on that as well.

Marco Benassi: 11:08 What's the issue though? What's the problem? The problem is and I know this 'cause I've worked on this with other people and other schools and a lot of people look at these posters and they're like well we can't do this. We can't go here, I am the king of getting the no. I told this I think to Chan or somebody in the beginning that I have probably had no said to me more times than anybody that you can imagine at the College of DuPage. And I kept asking and I kept asking and sometimes my deans were more no people and sometimes my deans were build people.

Marco Benassi: 11:40 But I just kept asking and when I had no people, I would ask three times as much. 'Cause they would only give me one of the three so I still ended up doing as much as I was planning on doing but I had to get all these other no's. We're all different too, counselors continuing ed with non-credit courses, people teaching transfer courses, so this relates to everybody in many different ways. People ask me what is experiential education? It's doing, it's doing and sometimes that includes doing more in the classroom which a lot of you already do, sometimes it includes going outside, sometimes it includes leaving the state, leaving the country, sometimes it could be short team. It could just be for an hour, sometimes it could be for an entire semester as well too.

Marco Benassi: 12:20 I feel really privileged to be representing the College of DuPage because since the late 60's, they've really valued this level and supported this level even though individual dean's and individual departments from time to time may be more difficult to navigate so I want you to forget about the no. I want you to forget about the oh I'm not sure we could do this or we can't do this and I just want you to open yourself up to the possibilities of what you could do if you really wanted to do it.

Marco Benassi: 12:46 If you really dreamed in terms of what you really wanted to do for your students because you believe your students would really value this, do that. So everybody put your hands up like this too, shake out the no, shake shake out the no, and open yourself up to the possibilities.

Marco Benassi: 13:04 I wanna put you in a situation to do something experiential, this is a hula hoop and you know some of you may have done this before. I'm not sure what you've done with it, but we do a lot ... In experiential education, there's a whole movement in metaphors. And that's in looking at some specific activity and how it relates to other activities as well and the hula hoop's a good one and this is something that you ... Feel free to use it. Sometimes teachers will tell me oh can I borrow your hula hoop? People buy hula hoops, it's a really simple activity I don't remember where I learned this but I've been teaching this hula hoop exercise for 20 some years as well too.

Marco Benassi: 13:40 Alright, let's get up and go outside. So this is a hula hoop drill, I'm gonna show you how it's set up. Let me see, we have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... Okay, so let's have group two come here.

Marco Benassi: 13:54 Put your left hand on the hula hoop, you're not gonna do anything yet, left hand, left hand, left hand. So everybody's gonna put their left hand on it and then you're gonna take your right finger and put your right finger under the hula hoop. And then, don't move. So the goal, the task and we're gonna break it up 'cause I want all three groups to go at the same time so 'cause once one group goes it'll change the dynamics.

Marco Benassi: 14:19 The goal of the group is everybody's left hand must come off before you start to move and then your goal for your group is to lower the hula hoop all the way to the ground with everybody's hand touching the ground at the same time without anybody's finger coming off of the hula hoops. So, if your finger bounces off right then we start over and it's okay to start over.

Marco Benassi: 14:41 But we'll talk about that as well too. So, once the group breaks that thing that if they don't accomplish the task, just hold up until all of the groups are done. So we'll have all three groups ... But hey, before we get started metaphor. What's a metaphor for this?

Speaker 8: 14:56 Jumping through hoops.

Marco Benassi: 14:57 Jumping through hoops, it could be jumping through hoops right? School of life. It's togetherness, it's equality, right a circle? But what's a negative connotation for a circle?

Speaker 9: 15:09 In and out.

Marco Benassi: 15:10 There's in and out.

Speaker 10: 15:10 Going in circles.

Marco Benassi: 15:11 Going in circles, the karmic circle too like continuing to make the same mistakes over and over again like Einstein said. That kinda thing as well too.

Marco Benassi: 15:19 Begin.

Speaker 12: 15:19 [banter amoungst students during exercise]

Liesel Reinhart: 15:19 Christina, what's happening right now?

Christina: 15:45 Alright so it looks like we've got three groups trying to balance hula hoops on everyone's fingers. And the interesting thing is that a lot of them end up going further up instead of down, the goal is to go down. So we've got one group doing really well, we have one that seems to be starting over a lot, we have one still at the ground conversation stage. Yeah, it's interesting to see it working ... Everyone trying to work together.

Liesel Reinhart: 16:14 And they're laughing and they seem to be having fun although a couple of them look very analytical I think like they're concerned about the task.

Christina: 16:22 Yeah, some are very worried about the precision of doing it correctly and some are having a little more fun and honestly I think the ones having fun are doing a better job at the task, interesting.

Marco Benassi: 16:45 Okay, let's stop for a second, let's stop for a second. Put the hoop down, somebody grab the hoop and bring it down. Somebody grab the hoop and bring it down. Maybe I didn't explain it ... Maybe I didn't explain it well enough.

Marco Benassi: 16:58 So what's ... Before we ... And here's a big part about experiential education, gotta explain why. You gotta make some points otherwise it just ends up being a funny crazy thing, right? What can we learn ... What is missing so far from your group communication?

Speaker 13: 16:58 That, communication.

Marco Benassi: 17:18 That, communication. What else?

Speaker 14: 17:19 Agreement.

Marco Benassi: 17:19 Agreement, which means you need to have what?

Speaker 15: 17:22 A plan.

Marco Benassi: 17:23 A plan? Right, so learning about having a plan?

Speaker 16: 17:25 A goal.

Marco Benassi: 17:26 A goal, right. But you know group communication and collaboration is such a huge thing in all the stem fields, they're talking about that students are missing these kinds of things, they have the technical knowledge but they don't know how to communicate and connect as well too. So these are the kinds of things that I'll draw out of students to talk about. But you guys ... You're sort of straddling the line here. I'm not treating you like students, I'm treating you like students that I want you to fully understand the process that I'm going through as well.

Marco Benassi: 17:51 And it's tough, it's brand new. People don't know each other well. Sometimes if people know each other, it's even worse. Right? We tend to treat the people we know really horribly and say things and start blaming and criticizing, but everybody was pretty positive here.

Marco Benassi: 18:05 So let's start again, left hands on, left hands on. Before you get going to the task, just talk for 30 seconds at least 30 seconds before you start, before your left hands come off so just talk.

Marco Benassi: 18:21 This yields so much, specifically for you as opposed for students but here's a processing of that. First of all, how about a hand for the group? This group, right? It's a great exercise in listening and this does force everybody to listen and one person to talk at a time. And that's tough until you've developed some relationships with people. But how many you your families, everybody interrupts each other all the time?

Marco Benassi: 18:45 And I'll talk a lot to students about it's really hard for you to change somebody else, but you can work on yourself. And you can grow, you can be a better listener, you can model what you want other people to be that's much more likely.

Marco Benassi: 18:55 You know a lot of this is how do you relate to your own discipline, your own field and how do you look for ways to draw out different information so that students feel more connected? So they're not just connected with the information intellectually, but they're emotionally taking it in as well and understanding the context for what it means. The world view of what all the work that you're working actually how it fits in.

Christina: 19:19 Okay, so after the hula hoop exercise everyone headed back inside to hear just a few highlights from Marco with his PowerPoint, which will be available in the show notes, if you click the link you'll be able to watch the extended version of the slideshow but we feature just a few highlights from his DuPage program here and I hope you enjoy.

Marco Benassi: 19:43 I'm gonna show you a presentation that introduces you to our program.

Marco Benassi: 19:46 This is French country cooking, our culinary program, goes to France. And teaches country cooking in France. This is the trip that Liesel has done with me, this is Kauai up on top of Waimea Canyon.

Marco Benassi: 19:59 Challenge by choice, not everybody does all these hikes sometimes we stop in different places and give different people outs, we have multiple leaders. I'll have assistants sometimes and some people will go and do something a little more adventuresome, some people will stop a little bit short. They've reached that point.

Marco Benassi: 20:14 Maybe one of our most successful programs is storm chasing. We have a meteorology department and people come from all over the country and the world to go storm chasing in the summer, they actually have ... Those two vehicles are state of the art equipped vehicles for chasing storms and students had to have a passport because they go from Texas 700 miles, 800 miles up to Canada.

Marco Benassi: 20:35 This is Cuba, I taught in Cuba a class. This was fascinating, I taught this class ... It was in the interim so a lot of courses sometimes are in the interim, in between if you're just gonna do it it by itself and not with a lot of other courses like an orientation, the class, and a post class. And that was really powerful, again like China it was completely different than most people had anticipated it being. Really friendly, really welcoming, we thought we were going and it was gonna open up after that and then it really hasn't opened up as much as we thought it would. We thought we'd be the last ones there without McDonald's and all this stuff but it's still there and the only way to get there at the time that we went like 4 or 5 years ago, was through an educational program for us to do that too. So that was an amazing experience in Cuba.

Marco Benassi: 21:18 And real powerful thing, sometimes you need you can go places and feel really comfortable with just doing research and sometimes you have to go so I wanted to always teach in Africa. So I did get a sabbatical one year to go into Africa and develop our inner cultural course, which became a core in the class. Core curriculum and inner cultural communication and I worked in a mobile clinic as part of it and this was in the bush.

Marco Benassi: 21:42 Which they call it and working with all these people that came to this mobile clinic and I was helping with AIDS and HIV testing and Malaria. And they set up a pharmacy and there were doctors, nurses, I saw surgeries taking place on a single mat right next to me like right there. People just giant wounds being attended to and sores and all these amazing kinds of things. Then, I took students. I took students on that experience, we did safari as well, but we experienced the culture. We went to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania as well too. They went to the mobile clinic, there's a hospital in Caratu in Tanzania that they actually saw and met with the people volunteering and those kinds of programs, we did safari as part of it.

Marco Benassi: 22:31 We did a comparative analysis between African culture and American culture.

Marco Benassi: 22:36 This is my son Peter, he was on that program. And Peter actually when he was 18 he went on that and he was so inspired that he took the Knoll's Outdoor Leadership in India, spent a semester in India, and he ended up getting a degree in experiential education. He's gone much beyond what I've done. And at Prescott College, which is an experiential education school, and he's 25 years old and he's taught in Africa and India multiple times. He's in Rwanda right now, teaching gap year programs for a country called Carpe Diem.

Marco Benassi: 23:03 This is Marine Ecology, somebody's a marine biologist. Who's a marine biologist? The Oceanographer? Oceanographer right here, too. This is marine ecology in the Bahamas. This is a class I taught. Anybody recognize that bus?

Marco Benassi: 23:19 Into The Wild? This is the, Into The Wild was the movie so I took a Film As Literature class to Alaska. We met for four weeks and worked on a Film As Literature objectives, prepared for the backpack, we read the book, we watched the movie, we explored the concepts of film as literature and then we went to Alaska on a backpacking trip and we hiked the trail that Chris McCandless had hiked as well too. For 2 grand, it's expensive but most of that is the flight.

Marco Benassi: 23:45 So, this is an amazing class. I was really excited to do that.

Marco Benassi: 23:50 You're in California, you're in LA. I mean I'm in Chicago, which is really cool and it's great stuff, this is like you have national park upon national park, you have so many resources here. So many cultural things, so many amazing, scientific things, I mean you have all these schools, the top schools in the country in science and animation and CalArts and it's right here, isn't it?

Marco Benassi: 24:15 CalArts and the other one, The science ... Cal-Tech. So there's so many places that you could go that are a drive away or just have students meet there.

Marco Benassi: 24:23 And just set something up that's really cool for them to see. And then, I use all the local forest preserves. This is just we have equipment at the college but you can rent stuff, forest preserves have things we go kayaking and canoeing and so ... Mars, we haven't been to Mars yet.

Marco Benassi: 24:38 But, who knows you know? Maybe someday. We can shoot for the moon, we go to the moon, we can get to Mars, we can do some really creative things.

Marco Benassi: 24:46 So, in the back of your head I just want you to start thinking 'cause this afternoon I want you to think of something local that's very realistic that you could do and a course that you can attach to it and I want you to think of something exotic.

Christina: 25:04 Alright, I hope you enjoyed part one of the Experiential Learning Course with Marco Benassi. And for that pending question he asked right at the end there, if you stay tuned to next week, you'll get the answers from the students of their dream adventures. Locally and exotically. As well as, the adventure we go on which is day two, we go on this wonderful hike so come along with us for the journey and stay tuned for next week. We'll see you then.

Liesel Reinhart: 25:31 Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments so please engage with our community. Download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, RateMyProfessor, we're there and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mt. San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.