Female: First of all, the title really attracted my attention. So, I really want to make a difference in the life of my students. And I think it started from one student at a time, and I look forward to getting more information and learn about it because when you have so many students in a classroom, it's really hard to build that one on one connection. I try every time. I do a lot of discussion. I do a lot of corporate learning and all that, but yeah. I look forward to learn more.

Male: I just love the title and the thought of being able to connect with the students right off. I'm hoping to understand some, get some techniques that I can use to be able to connect with my students, and to help them feel comfortable in the class, and to help us both to do a good job together. I'm new. I'm a new faculty, first semester, so I think I need as much help in this area as I possibly could get.

Christina Barsi: Hi, I'm Christina Bari.

Sun Ezzell: And I'm Sun Ezzell and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi: Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell: We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Male: And I know I'm going to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Female: She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Pol Pomona. Psychology major, English Major-

Sun Ezzell: From transforming part-time into full time.

Female: I really like the time that we spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi: Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Male: To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi: We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected to each other. I'm Christina Bari, Mt. SAC, alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell: And I'm Sun Etzel Learning Assistants Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator and this is the magic Mountie podcast.

Christina Barsi: Hi, welcome back. It's Christina here and today we are talking about validation. Turns out feelings of validity can heavily influence how we do at the things we attempt like attending college. Therefore establishing a validating environment in the classroom can be life changing. Presenters Emily Versace and Richard Meyers facilitated a breakout session at Fall Flex Day called Change Your Students' Lives in the First Two Weeks of Class based on what they learned from Laura I. Rendon's theory. Stick around and discover what is behind that catchy title. And just a quick note that there were many interactive exercises in this session that we couldn't capture on audio for the podcast, but I hope you enjoy this abridged version of this very validating session.

Emily Verace: Welcome. Welcome. There is nothing I enjoy more than a room full of faculty who are excited about helping students change their lives. So I am a counselor. I just got tenure. Yay!

Audience: Yay!

Emily Verace: I see some of my fellow faculty that were in my class that got tenured at the same time. Very excited to be here. I love equity. I love interactive teaching and I'm happy to be here and this is Richard.

Richard: You would completely understand the futility of standing up and using a lot of difficult words to explain your syllabus requirements or your course requirements. In 2019 we might be facing with incoming students, they lack the soft skills, they lack the social skills to process an awful lot of what you're asking them to do. We're quite good at setting the bar and explaining what they should reach for. We sort of assume that they know that they need to do that, but an awful lot of what we may perceive as lack of interest or apathy. It's just that inability to process what is needed in the college classroom.

Emily Verace: And just that it's a new language and a new culture and they're adapting to it. I have a master's degree, like many of you. Some of you have even more than that. And I tried three times to register my daughter online for the afterschool program at her school and I failed at it and I found out I failed because I called and was like, "How come I can't send the money?" And they're like, "You're not even in the system." I'm like, "What?" So I did it again and I still hadn't and I had to go in person and get help. So why is it? Because I'm not smart? I hope not. No, it's just cause I didn't understand the system. I didn't know the steps. I wasn't familiar with the website. And our students are in a similar position. They're coming, they're new to college.

Emily Verace: Everything feels a little scary for some of them. And we want to help demystify that so that they, smart as they are all that they bring, they're able to succeed in our classes. So we're talking about Laura I. Rendon's validation theory. Both Richard and I went to NISOD last year. And part of us going to NISOD is that we would bring back some information for you that we learned. And this was the first time I had heard about Laura. I Rendon's validation theory, but apparently it's really famous. So probably people in the room, this is not your first time hearing about it. I really, really liked it. And so Richard and I decided this is what we would kind of base this around. She talks about how college was really designed around a student body of privileged white males. That's how the system was designed.

Emily Verace: And as we accepted more and more people and changed our mission as institutions to accept more people, not all the structures changed. And so non-traditional students, and we might also say equity students, often have specific needs that we as a college need to proactively meet. Not just say, "Oh I hope they figure it out. It's on the website," but actually move forward and help them with. And what helps turn a student who doubts their success into a student who believes in their ability to learn? Validation in and out of class. And one of the things that really blew my mind as an educator is in the past I had this thought that what helped you do well in college was if you're talented, if you're smart, if you're good at learning. I thought those things meant you would succeed in college, but I have been blown away by how big an effect your belief in yourself has. That if you're scared, if you think that you won't succeed, it's so easy to give up.

Emily Verace: And so by validating our students, research has shown that it does transform them from people who doubt into people who believe that they can succeed and do succeed. Just a couple of days ago, a faculty member shared a story where she had a student who was thinking about dropping out of her class. And she talked to him and really showed that she believed in him and said, "No, you can do this. Let's keep working on it." And then he was able to pass that first class and I think if she had not taken the time to do that, would he still be a student at Mount SAC? He obviously had the talent, he obviously was able to learn, what was he missing? That belief in himself. All right. So this is what validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in and out of class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.

Emily Verace: So that is what we are starting with today. We need to show them that we believe in them and model that so they believe in themselves and I really love what Doctor Frank Harris III said this morning when he said, we don't need to look at these students and think they're the deficits, they're defective, they should know. They are operating in a system that has undervalued them and underestimated them for years and years and years. We need to be part of undoing that damage. And as an institution instead of being geared towards the privileged white males be geared for everyone, so everyone can be successful. Non traditional students do need active intervention. And I wouldn't say every single one. You've got some people who they succeed no matter what, but for many of them they need active intervention. Our validation can help students change their mindset. And their success.

Emily Verace: It is not easy for non-traditional students to navigate college and to get involved. They often, not always, but often they will need validation to figure it out. If I think of myself applying for the afterschool program with a master's degree and an ability to navigate the internet and I couldn't do it, these students who are going through the process, they're going to need some help at different points. They're going to need the orientation. They're going to need some education planning help. They're going to need academic support. They're going to need teachers that they feel comfortable talking to.

Richard: They used to in a very sort of adult and mature way, assume older students who are in charge of themselves. Self determination and I would announce the last date to drop with a W. and what I've learned, and I'm sure some of you have mirrored this experience, is the people who probably should consider the virtues of dropping are completely, utterly clueless about this and they don't drop. They just sail right ahead. What do you mean I'm not doing well? Have I turned in anything bad? No, you haven't turned in anything at all, but every semester I would get two or three students who would drop. Now, most of the time I would never see them again. A year ago, actually a year and a half ago, I run into one of the students who dropped who was getting an A and I said, "Why did you drop?"

Richard: And she said, "I thought your class was too hard." And I said this was a case where she needed some validation. She was doing excellent work, but she was convinced that she wasn't good enough. So far it's worked for a year, but I say, don't drop unless you talk to me and find out how you're doing.

Emily Verace: All right. These are some of the needs they need to see themselves as able to learn and contribute. So how can students see themselves learn and contribute? If you give them opportunities to do projects where they work with each other and other students are able to say things like, "Oh yeah, that's a good idea." "Yeah, let's do it that way." They're seeing, "Oh look, I have something to share." When you give them opportunities to talk in class and they make a point and you say, "Yeah. Great point." They're like, "Whoa, I can contribute. This is amazing." Right? So there's many, many ways. Those are just a few examples to feel connected to the college in and out of class. They say that just having a teacher know their name can be huge, right? That someone at some point in the day says their name, they're like, "Oh, someone here cares that I'm here."

Emily Verace: "They don't think of me as just a number, just another student." So you want them to feel connected in and out of class. So letting them know about clubs and other opportunities. Even special programs like EOPS, any of those could really help them feel connected to the college representation in class matters. What does that look like? In your pictures, in your PowerPoints? Do you have a diverse group of people or does everyone look the same? In your scenarios that you give do the names all sound like just one type of person? Maybe white people. I don't know. Or do you have scenarios and examples that reflect the broad and wide diversity of our campus? Because it's important for students to see themselves as a college student and see that what we're teaching is relevant to them and you want to make the class feel like a warm environment and like the instructor cares about them.

Emily Verace: I care about all of you and I hope you feel that okay? But you want it to be a warm, happy place. Some of our students do not get validation at home. At home they hear, "You're dumb." At home they hear, "You're lazy." How about if they came to our class and felt like a better version of home? Like, "Oh, I can't wait to go there. I can't wait to share my ideas." And then finally a faculty and college that are proactive and consistent in creating that validating environment. So it's up to us individually, but it's also something that we want to see as a culture change right on our campus or many of us already have that culture, but bring others along.

Male: Going back to something that we brought up previously, the non-traditional student. So that term non-traditional, I'm not so sure how I feel about that. I don't know if that's appropriate. It doesn't include the diversion. I'm wondering why that term was selected.

Emily Verace: Well, I will tell you, and I did think about that this morning. I'm like, "Huh, should I go back and change everything?" It's because I used an article by Laura I Rendon and I used her terminology. So that article was written many years ago and now when I make my own presentations, I usually say the equity student or the students who are underrepresented in college. At the time that she wrote it, I believe non-traditional almost meant anyone who wasn't a privileged white male. Right? So anyone, you could be white still, you could be male still, but maybe you're a first generation college student. Maybe you're low income, maybe you're a person with a disability, maybe you're a person of color, maybe you're a woman, in STEM. So we're just saying the college was built for the privileged white male. Everyone else it was not built for. And we want to change that. So our college is built for that.

Male: That's awesome.

Emily Verace: Thank you. So if you see any other little words or terms that are just a little outdated, just know I wanted to honor the research and so I use the terminology from the study that this was conducted about. Okay. So the timing really matters. And the first two weeks are critical. Some students will decide if they're meant for college in the first two weeks. The first year is also critical. And this is a brand new world, guys. If you've been teaching here a long time, you may never have taught a first year student because your class was not accessible to them. They had to take a certain number of math or English classes to get to your class. So you may never have had first year students, but now you do. Okay? So we want to make sure that we all think of our class as a class where someone might be having their very, very first experience.

Emily Verace: Okay. So let's get practical people. What are you going to do in your first two weeks? Well, we're going to start ... I'm going to show you some different activities. Go ahead and turn your page to the back. I actually got this tip from NISOD and from a reading instructor. And when I Googled it, I saw a lot of reading instructors use this, but it's the idea of clock partners. I use this in my class over the summer and found it worked very well. The idea is on the first day or the first week of school, you have your students make an appointment with different people. So Richard and I, we might be one o'clock partners, right? Me and Diana, we might be four o'clock partners, but we get different people that we have the same time as. Then we keep this in our notebook every day.

Emily Verace: So when I want to do a pair share, instead of you just pair sharing with the person next to you over and over and over again for the whole semester, I'll say, "Go find your three o'clock partner and tell them what you thought of this video." And then later on, like at the end of class I might say, "Go find your six o'clock partner and tell them the most important thing you learned today." "Go find your one o'clock partner and share with them one question you still have about the material." Right? So they mix up, but over the course of the semester they are seeing a specific set of people. It's a very quick transition and it helps them build relationships, which is connecting, making them feel connected to the college. Right? So that's just one idea.

Richard: One of the things we took from NISOD is that the community college in particular, a lot of what they learn, and some of you have some very subject specific topics that you teach, but it's got to be relatable to the workplace more than it's relatable to high school. I think a lot of the times the students coming out of high school, and I know that is not the only student we see, there's somewhat inured to simply following instructions. But this would be a place where you might consider engaging in class norms. So before you did something like this, you actually have to communicate to them why teamwork is of benefit in the workplace. Why? Because these are soft skills employers are looking for, which most of us don't teach directly within the classroom. And a lot of the times, as soon as you say we're going to work in teams or we're going to work in groups, "Oh God, I always get stuck with stupid people."

Richard: You get that sort of response and instead of maybe communicating the fact that this is an opportunity. You get promoted in the workplace of the 21st century, not on what you know. That's a 20th century Maxim. It's a lot more today on how efficaciously you can affect the people around you. Sometimes the people that become managers actually don't know much about what they're doing, but they supposedly are very good. Very, very good at making other people do their jobs better. And this probably needs to be the communicated or comprehended through some classroom norms. I don't know. I'm diversifying here. It's the same with things like deadlines. Before you start setting deadlines explain why they matter in the professional world, why your students when they succeed will depend on other people meeting their deadlines. So you need to get that across to them. And maybe set those again through class norms. So this is a great activity for for a meeting with people outside of their comfort group. You might want to begin by pointing out the benefits and in fact the need, the efficacy of doing so.

Emily Verace: So the clock partners are are great and they help you get to know a lot of people and you're all going to decide if this works in your discipline or not, right? It may not work in every classroom or whatnot, but having a home group of people that are their group for the whole semester. And you can choose. I recommend it. You could do it however you want. You could make the groups so that there's a balance so that you have people who can teach each other. So you have people who maybe are more talkative and outgoing with people who are less outspoken and then you encourage them. If you talk a lot, talk a little less. If you talk not very much, talk a little more and build a longterm relationship with that group is another good way. So you've got your temporaries and you've got your permanence.

Emily Verace: Do you have to use your home group for every activity? No, but you can have a core group that they go back to over and over again and assigned seating can help you learn names. Knowing names is very validating. Okay. Now we're to the next activity, which is class norms. You take these sticky notes and you pass them around the class and you ask two simple questions. What helps you learn? What hinders you from learning? And you have people talk in groups and they start to come up with things like, "Oh, I don't like it when people are making a lot of noise or talking when the teacher's talking." "I don't like it when people are answering their cell phone." Or they might say things like, "I really like it when we work in groups." "I really like it when we encourage each other." And they create their own norms.

Emily Verace: And so I take all the sticky notes and then I group them. And I say, "Wow, we got a lot of people who like this. A lot of people who like that," and then I summarize them and write them down so they're coming up with the norms. Then because maybe they didn't think of a brilliant idea that I have that I know will help the class run smoothly, I'll add some. I'll say, "How about this? What if we add this to the list? What do you guys think of that? What if we add this?" And then I say, "All right, all right. Do you guys agree to do this? To support each other in your learning?" And so now they've got a lot of buy-in. They feel like I've heard them. It's a very validating experience. So you start with their ideas, add your ideas, and connect the soft skills that they're learning by doing this group work, by doing these things to the world of work.

Emily Verace: And I like to model something for my students. I like to show them that no one is perfect because perfect does not exist. And so you may find a typo on this page. I am aware of it and I will fix it for the next group, but I think it is kind of a cool activity if you guys want to look at it. I have like many versions of this and so I must have copied and pasted an old version that had a typo in it because my newer versions have not. But if you go flip through, you'll see how to communicate effectively with a college professor. And it's a self correcting worksheet, which means they can not get it wrong. They fill in the blank with spaces from the bottom. And then if you look on the second page, there's some examples of an email and they evaluate what's good about the good one?

Emily Verace: What's bad about the bad one? If you want, you can follow up by having them write an email. But in some classes, not all, it might even be good for you to teach some of the soft skills to help them get through college. So I've shown this little handout to a lot of faculty from all sorts of disciplines and they're all like, "Oh yeah, can I have a copy? I want to use it in my class." So if anyone wants a copy that spelled correctly, I will tell you that if you go to faculty toolkits MtSAC.edu/toolkits I have a toolkit on how to make a self correcting worksheet and you can download it there. Okay. So there you go. And we've got some soft skills. So another thing that's really great to do at the beginning of the class is faculty corners. This is something that bridge does a lot, but it's where the faculty member introduces themself to the class on the first day. I do this.

Emily Verace: I have a little PowerPoint, I show pictures of myself in high school theater. No one is ever surprised I did high school theater. I show them pictures of like my first jobs and kind of how I ended up being a counselor. I talked to them about some of the things I struggled with in school and how I overcame them. I show pictures of my family and I tell them why I'm excited to help them through the next semester and facilitate their learning. So this can be really good because a lot of students see teachers on a pedestal and they're scared and they're like, "Oh my gosh, they're smart and brilliant and perfect and I'm terrible and don't even belong here on this campus." And when you start sharing some things that are like, "Oh you're a human being just like me." And knowing that you got help from time to time makes them feel like, "Oh, that's what successful people do. Like my teacher."

Emily Verace: Right? So you want to do that. Another thing I do is after I introduce myself, I have the student write down answers to these questions. Their preferred name. Why did you choose this class? What do you hope to learn? So a syllabus activity that I like to do that is based on [Margie 00:22:43] Wayland's Faculty Toolkit on the syllabus. And some of you might do something like this. I put them in groups. They get six questions about the syllabus. They have to come up with them in their group. Then I give them the syllabus and then they read it and find the answers to their questions. So it's just a little more interactive way. And then as a group I'll go over any misconceptions, any questions and any points I really want to drive home. I always read my additional needs statement, welcoming all people, but also people with disabilities to let me know if they need any accommodations to learn well.

Emily Verace: And I read that out loud. I have something. It's a UDL universally designed checklist for those of you who would like your syllabus to be universally designed. We have a checklist that you can get from the faculty toolkits that shows you what you need to do to make your syllabus accessible to people with disabilities, but also welcoming to people from all groups. Okay? So check that out. Faculty toolkits. Woot. Woot. Any you used to have to log into the portal. That has changed. It is easy now. Okay. You could do a resources scavenger hunt, where you send students out to like find tutoring to find access, all the different places on campus that you want them to know about, and you can hone your list to your discipline. So if you're an English teacher, you might not send everyone to the STEM center, but if you're a biology teacher, that might be a key place you want to send them. Enjoy validating your students.

Christina Barsi: Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen. Once you subscribe, we'd love to hear what you think by leaving us a review. And don't forget to share your favorite episodes.