

NAME

## Alondra Morales Interview

DATE

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DURATION

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2 SPEAKERS

David Elithorpe

Alondra Morales

### START OF TRANSCRIPT

#### [00:00:01] David Elithorpe

Hello, my name is David James Elithorpe, and I am taking Historical Methods with Professor Laura McEnaney during the Fall 2020 Semester. Today is Monday, October 19th, 3:02 p.m. Today, I have Alondra Morales, Assistant Director the Center for Advising and Academic Success, with us to talk a little bit about some of the perspectives and challenges on transitioning to distance learning for both students and faculty. First, I wanted to say thank you to Ms. Morales for joining us today to offer some perspective to future researchers, students, and historians about this topic. Thank you so much, Alondra, for joining us with us today.

#### [00:00:38] Alondra Morales

Thank you, thank you, glad to be here. May I tell others a little bit about myself?

#### [00:00:42] David Elithorpe

Yes, of course, go ahead, please.

#### [00:00:44] Alondra Morales

So like you said, my name's Alondra Morales. I currently serve as one of the Associate Directors for the Center for Advising and Academic Success, also known as CAAS. I oversee programs such as tutoring, student athletes, peer mentorship program, and academic success program. I help support these programs with the help of our other associate director. I'm excited to talk a little bit about our transition these past few months with you.

#### [00:01:18] David Elithorpe

Thank you so much for introducing yourself, and as always, thank you for being here with us today and also servicing our students and our faculty and staff on-campus. We really appreciate it! My first question for you today is what were some of the specific challenges that you had faced being a part of CAAS, and with helping students during this transition during Covid-19?

#### [00:01:44] Alondra Morales

That's a great question, because I think there were a lot of obstacles and just a lot of challenges transitioning online. One of them being the communication between our team. So within CAAS, we are a very close team, we communicate a lot, especially when we were in person and if we had a question or a student needed a referral, we'd walk to each other, and check in with each other often. And it was a very fast process. One of the main struggles is that transitioning to online communication takes a lot longer, especially within our team. We have our forms of communication like using Skype and Zoom, but it's not as quick as it could be, especially because we need to communicate back to the student and then come back. We have so many questions, so it's not a direct line of communication. In addition to that, one of our other struggles in relationship to communication is that our form of communication used to be through email. Currently, we send all of our communication through the public newsletter or the update for students. So that is, of course, on the time of the communications team. I think it's a great way to get information to students, but I think it also is very different for us as an office and a space that usually can communicate with students directly relating to academic programs, so that has been an issue altogether. This is one of the struggles with communicating with students and even with our team. I think another one of our major struggles is our tutoring program, because our tutoring program, as you may know, is typically in person. Usually it's always in person and transitioning online this past semester has changed this. So last semester, a lot of students were aware that tutoring was continuing, or they weren't so sure where to find the information or who to contact, so a lot of students didn't end up attending tutoring sessions as often. Now, this semester, it's picked up a little bit. There are now more students who do show up to tutoring, and because of the communication differences, there's still some struggle with students logging onto Zoom--they're not sure of how to find the schedule, and maybe they don't know who to ask or by the time they get a response, the tutoring session is over, so it's very hard to be able to provide those services because, again, we're not in person. So that's been one of the struggles. And then another one is that for our academic success program. For example, one of the struggles has been that we can't see our students like in person and advising. When you're sharing with students or students or sharing with you, it's very important to be able to create that

relationship with the student. And so it's been a little bit hard because other students don't turn their cameras on or we can't read body language or we can see if they're thinking about the question just asked. So it creates a little bit of a struggle with being able to gather the right information or enough information to help the student appropriately and holistically. So I think that's been a major struggle as well. So I think those have been the major struggles as a team, and then also with working with students or helping them and supporting them during this time.

**[00:06:08] David Elithorpe**

Yes. Thank you so much, especially for your response. I think when we think about specific challenges, it also leads us to some of the resources that the college has been offering. Thank you for your first response to that question, it was very valuable! My second question is what were some of the resources and potential resources that were in consideration when transitioning to distance learning and your opinion and your perspective about those things?

**[00:06:39] Alondra Morales**

So you're asking specifically about the resources that we offer, correct?

**[00:06:42] David Elithorpe**

Yes, of course!

**[00:06:44] Alondra Morales**

So one of them, like I mentioned, is tutoring. So, we've always had our tutoring program and we knew that we needed to continue, because with students not being able to physically go to office hours as well, or just a transition of learning online as it's not everyone's learning style and it's not all professors teaching style or teaching preference. So tutoring was something that needed to continue. And so we do offer our tutoring services online. They're free for all students and we have our schedule out. We hire these students as a paid position for our current Whittier College students, and then we also have academic coaches and student athletes, and peer mentors. They're essentially very similar programs. But one caters specifically to student athletes out of Whittier College. And so for these students, they meet with their mentor or coach once a week and they connect about time management, accountability, scheduling, just really being able to communicate with another student that they can relate to, maybe a bit more than us as advisers. So that is there to help them with some additional support. And so are students that are in the academic success program, who aren't in the academic coaching or peer mentorship program. Those are the students that we also hire for these two positions. And we also knew that these needed to continue. So we were able to continue them last semester, and especially this semester, it's been a little bit different, because we don't currently have students as peer mentors. That doesn't mean that we aren't providing our student athletes with these specific resources. So if a student athlete is working with us and they need a mentor, we actually connect them with their coach, so they would join the academic coaching program, which usually has a bit more coaches. And it's been a little bit difficult with our budget, of course, and for everyone at Whittier College. So these are some of the positions that we've been able to hire in addition to our student managers. Our student managers help us with the back end of things: the email, the appointments, and just making sure that all of our information is tracked on our system. So that's another that's not necessarily a resource for students, but it is a position we've been able to continue to offer. And they do communicate with our students through the email. So they are the ones responding. So that's very helpful for us as an office. So those are some of the resources. And then we've always had our workshops, which are a very huge part of CAAS. So our workshops are academic success workshops are usually live workshops. With this time around, we actually prerecorded a few and uploaded them to a YouTube page. And so they cover like academic burnout, working in teams, study skills, time management and many more topics. And then we also actually have something that we implemented specifically because of our transition online, which I think a lot of students aren't aware of or not everyone is aware of, it's something called student lingo. So all Whittier College students have access to a student lingo account that they create with your email and they have access to twenty four workshops. They are not what your college specific, but they are very helpful with, again, just general topics that may be helpful to students' success. Success is different for everyone during this time, so of course we have a lot of academic workshops, but we also have financial aid workshops on how to manage your finances, so topics like that students can access at all times, as long as you have your computer or your Wi-Fi, you can access those twenty workshops and they're free for students. They're very useful. Students also can receive a certificate of completion at the end of each workshop. If that was important to the student or to the professor. By implementing those workshops into their classrooms, students are able to talk to us about those workshops if needed. In fact, I'm actually the contact person for student lingo. So if the students ever have any questions, they can always reach out to us or to me. But these are the main services that we've been able to offer students.

**[00:11:41] David Elithorpe**

Thank you so much for your response to that. And I want to touch on a few other things. I'm glad that you made the response to this transition really well-rounded for those with disabilities, students with disabilities, student athletes, and overall, just looking out for the whole community of Whittier by putting these resources forward for them, and for their success. And that brings me to my last question, which is, what are some of the objectives and goals for moving forward during this time of remote learning, if you can kind of provide us a little bit of a conclusion about what CAAS will do about moving forward next semester?

**[00:12:25] Alondra Morales**

Yeah, so one of the things that I think is important for us to do as a space for moving forward, especially during these times, is that we need to collaborate. And that's something that we've been able to do these past few weeks with our campus partners across Whittier College, because a lot of us are asking ourselves, "OK, what can we do for students? What should we do? What should we be doing? What do they need?" And so one of the things that we find ourselves doing the work that someone else is already doing or thinking of. So one of the things that we've set for ourselves for this academic school year is to collaborate with our campus partners.

And we've already been able to do that. For example, I believe it was two weeks ago, we collaborated with the Career Center and we hosted a workshop on how to navigate your major selection. And that was, I think, very important for us because we wanted to be able to, of course, collaborate with the career center sharing about the resources for career exploration and major exploration, but then for us to also be able to voice what resources we have and relationship to that process. So for us, it's been very important to collaborate and we're committed to doing that moving forward as a team. And then one of the things that we are doing as a team is we're thinking about, for example, advertising week, like what that can look like for us, what that can look like for the campus and what our role is in that so that we can better serve our students who maybe are having a bit more trouble reaching out to their faculty, mentor or adviser, who usually helps them with their choosing courses for the next semester, which we don't usually do or we don't do. But we're trying to see what we can do to better support our students, whether that is navigating degree works or using the what if function on degree works. So that's one of the things that we've been thinking about. And I think, of course, moving forward, one of our greater goals is to not only work on our professional development as a team to better serve our students of different backgrounds and different experiences, but also to be able to provide trainings for our students that are shaped or, yeah, that are shaped by our evaluations that we receive from our students. And so those are things that we are working on moving forward as a space and as a team in collaboration with other campus partners that we, of course, work very closely with. So we really do want to be able to listen to student narratives and voices and see what's working for them, and what's not working for them. As a team, we want to apply all the work that we do, whether it's focusing more on tutoring or us as a team focusing more on our advising approaches. So, that's something that we want to be able to do and to steward those goals for students, because we are essentially the heart of Whittier College. The students are always referred to us for many different things. And we want to be able to help them with everything that they need. And if we can't, we want to be able to refer them to who can help them. So I think it's just that's one of our biggest goals because we do have a pretty new team. So I think we have to start at the bottom and kind of learn our way up together. Yeah.

**[00:16:33] David Elithorpe**

Thank you so much, I think that really helps build the foundation for the steps that with your college and also specifically Castaldi for moving forward during this time, I was going to ask, were there any last thoughts, reflections or conclusions you like to make before we end this Zoom recording today?

**[00:16:55] Alondra Morales**

No, I think I think I shared everything that I think is important to know and to document because of this experience, this unique experience. So, yeah. Thank you. Thank you so much for allowing me to share my experience and my voice and what we need to work on and all of that, so I appreciate it.

**[00:17:20] David Elithorpe**

Yeah, of course. And then, as I said before, thank you so much for being here with us. This is certainly a unique situation as it is. I think we will be able to access and be able to serve our students and then that this record will be able to help other future historians, students, researchers about what happened here with your college and our goals and our mission statements for serving students. So I wanted to say thank you so much, Miss Alondra Morales, for coming today to talk to me and also to speak to us today about some of your perspectives. Thank you so much!

**[00:18:01] Alondra Morales**

Thank you, David. I appreciate it. Of course.

**[00:18:03] David Elithorpe**

I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording now.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**