

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Welcome to Academically Speaking. This podcast is designed to provide our listeners with an opportunity to engage with subjects and topics related to student academic success. How we think and what we do is important to how we become citizens of this country and of the world.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Academically Speaking. This is Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry, vice provost and dean of the College of Undergraduate Studies here at the University of Central Florida. And joining me today is Dr. Harrison Oonge. Dr. Oonge joined UCF in 2016 as an assistant dean for Academic Planning in the College of Undergraduate Studies. He oversees the Pegasus Path academic degree planning tool and that project as well as curriculum alignment and articulation agreements. He also oversees all of our efforts connected to dual enrollment for high school students taking courses here at UCF.

Before joining UCF, Dr. Oonge worked for three years at West Virginia University as a project specialist in Undergraduate Academic Affairs and an adjunct professor in WVU's College of Education and Human Services teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses. Dr. Oonge holds a BA in education from Kenyatta University in Kenya, a master of arts in special education from West Virginia University, and a doctorate in education in curriculum and instruction also from West Virginia University. Welcome, Dr. Oonge.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Thank you, Dr. Berry. I'm excited to be here.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Dr. Oonge it has been a pleasure to work with you for over the last three and a half years here in the College of Undergraduate Studies. And to help our audience get to know just a little bit about you, tell us about your background, where you earned your degrees, and specifically tell us a little bit more about your bachelor of education degree from Kenyatta University in Kenya, and how your college experience there is different from how you perceive the college experience here in the United States.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Thank you, Dr. Berry for that question. I began my journey at Kenyatta University in 1991. Let me just backtrack a little bit. The Kenyan system is designed that we have eight, four, four. We spend eight years in primary, which is primary school and also four years in high school and then four years in the university. That is the design on the book. In this curriculum, after I graduated from my local primary school, that is Monga, in 1986, I went to secondary school, Matongo and just close by within the village, a walking distance, maybe about 12 miles. I remember walking there with my

box full of stuff, and I was excited to go away from home for the first time. It's a boarding school. We went there. It's boys only, run by the Lutheran School. So I was excited about that and stayed there for four years to get my high school experience. Of course, we had breaks, we could go home and so on and so forth. After which we did a Kenya, a secondary certificate of education examination, which determines what you become. So how you perform in those exams determines whether you become a doctor, whether you become an engineer, whether you become anything that life has for you. So after I completed that, I was fortunate to be admitted to Kenyatta University. At the time, it was one of the four national public universities in Kenya. I was admitted there for education, arts. So I had selected education. Nobody told me what to do. They said we had five options. You choose several majors. One of them was education, so I was lucky to be selected to education.

I remember vividly my first day in college, we went there. There was a go-slow, like a strike. The lecturers were striking on that particular day. So our orientation basically was you come in, you sign, you register, you're assigned a dorm, place where to live. But on that particular day when I came, there was a go-slow. And I didn't get to register on that particular day, so I went back to where I was staying in Nairobi. The following day, I went back now by myself. The previous day I had gone with my uncle. The following day I went just by myself, with my bag and some few belongings and signed up for my coursework.

There was no orientation. All we were given is that this is the map for the college. This is where you find particular offices. This is where you go to get your room assignment and the key to your room and so on and so forth. So that was a shock to me at that particular time. And I just reflect on that because orientation is such an important thing in a student's journey that I was thrust into college in the university and then in orientation. I was not even given guidance on what to be doing, just being told, "This is where the dorm is. This is where the dining hall is." And then I started like that, and of course, there were several of us who didn't know anything. So we were asking each other around.

We spent several days getting lost from building to building, even getting to the College of Education where we went, and the administrative assistant said, "Hey, you, you're in Bachelor of Education Arts. This is the coursework for this particular semester. All you have to do is to go to that wall and sign up your name and your ID, and you should have been registered for that class." So that's how the process occurred for me. And I look at it as being so different from what it is right now, especially here at UCF where I see students being handheld and guided, not only on coursework, but they get a lot of support, even counseling and psychological services, which is essential. So that experience to me, what I can say was a little bit different from what it is right now.

After I graduated from Kenyatta University in 1996, I was fortunate to get appointed as a secondary education teacher at a rural school in Kissi called Nyabigena

secondary school. So 1997, January, I went to that school, and I was assigned to teach Swahili and geography. I taught there for eight years. It was a wonderful experience. On my seventh year at Nyabigena, I happened to meet a friend who was at the time studying at West Virginia University, and we met in a church function. And during that, the brevity after the church service, everybody was wanted to say hi because he had come from America. And well, I went and said hi to him as well. And because he knew me, he asked, "What are your goals?" I said, "I teach in high school. I'm comfortable. I have a wife, two kids."

He said, "What are your really goals? Do you want to go back to college?" I told him, "Yes, I've always wanted to go back to college, but I don't know whether I can get permissions from TSC, the Teacher Service Commission, to do so." He said, "I've seen people do it. You can do it." And he gave me his information, and he said, I want you to come to my place so that we can talk more about this, so I went back. I forgot about it. A few days later, I got a phone call. By that time, of course, there were cell phones. I got a phone call from him. He said, "Hey, Harrison, you didn't come to see me as we agreed." I told him, "I know you're a busy man. I didn't want to come and bother you." He said, "No, I want you to come. Come and see me."

So I made arrangements and went to his house in a different town, so it was a day trip. And when I got there, he said, "I am in this university and I would want somebody from my village to join me here. So here are the forms. I want you to fill them out today before you go, and I can take them and submit the application." So I completed those forms, gave him all the information he wanted, and then he proceeded to go and submit the application at West Virginia University. So I chose special education because I was interested in that field at that particular time. That's how I got to West Virginia University and got to my graduate school. I earned my MA in special education in 2018. No, December of 2017.

After earning that degree, my graduate supervisor at the time posed the same question, "What are your goals?" Because my family was back in Kenya, I wanted to go back. That had been my goal. He said, "Does your journey end here?" And I said, "Well, there's need to know more." And so she talked to me about different options, and we settled in curriculum and instruction. So I applied for that program and was accepted. I earned my doctorate in education in curriculum and instruction from West Virginia University in 2013. So that's how my journey has been from the village in Kissi and then to the hills of the West Virginia.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It's a fascinating journey, and it really speaks to the importance of two things that you talked about. The first of which is what it means for students to experience orientation and the importance of being oriented to the college experience and all of the resources that we now have available to students that neither you nor I had the opportunity to have when we started college. Because, like you, when I showed up

on the college campus, it was move into the dorm, stand in line and sign up for your classes. Hope that you've signed up for the right ones because you don't know because no one has talked to you about what classes you should sign up for. You just know, "Okay, this is my major, and these are the classes that are available, and I guess these are the ones I should sign up for."

And then when I was in school, by the time you got to the front of the line, you had to hope that spaces were still available in those classes, right? Because if not, then you just start over again. And it could be very frustrating. And there was really no way to sort of figure out how do you navigate that. But the other thing that you talked about that we also offer to our students here now that is important in relationship to your journey and was important in my journey, was mentorship, someone who was able to help you think beyond your current circumstance about all the possibilities that are in front of you and how you can achieve those possibilities. And without having that person to have that conversation with you and to insist, having that encouragement to sit down, fill in your application and submit it to me right now.

And having that kind of encouragement makes all the difference in the world. And many of our students today have access to that kind of mentorship and support and service, and some of them take advantage of it quite well. Others of them are a little slow to do it, and others of them completely ignore it for a variety of different reasons. And so as we continue our conversation, I want us to revisit the significance of the orientation experience and mentorship for college students. But first, I want to talk to you a little bit about your research. Tell me about the kinds of things that you've researched in the past and the things that you're interested in researching now.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

While pursuing my doctorate in education at West Virginia University, I had the opportunity to adjunct as a graduate teaching assistant and later as an adjunct professor within that college, within their five-year teacher education program. And during that time, I had close interactions with the prospective teachers or pre-service teachers, and I developed passion for action research. And while I was at West Virginia University, my focus was primarily around the kinds of questions or the kinds of inquiries that pre-service teachers do when they're learning to become right, and therefore learning the tools of the trade as well as preparing themselves to go into the field as teachers when they graduate.

So I was exploring the types of questions that pre-service teachers ask during their action research projects. I primarily focused on that. And later when I transitioned to UCF, my interest shifted a little bit towards transfer student success. And that pivot towards student success and access was actually my focus for my dissertation. I did my dissertation that focused on access, success and progression of marginalized

students in Kenya. And therefore, I had now the opportunity to revisit the same issue on student success, but now in the higher education field, not in the K 12, but in higher education, and now with the focus on transfer student success. Currently, I'm exploring faculty perspectives on curriculum alignment and as that relates to transfer student success.

We have the idea. When you mentioned curriculum alignment, one of the things that comes to people's mind is that what about my academic freedom? What about my individuality in teaching and my resourcefulness in teaching? But again, it's about how can you make curriculum be accessible to all students, and in this case, to transfer students. So I'm kind of looking at exploring that, the faculty perspectives on curriculum alignment, on course coordination and such kinds of things.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And I think that's an important question to ask because first of all, both of us have backgrounds in curriculum, and I'm more sort of a theoretical person when it comes to curriculum as opposed to someone who deals with development and design and implementation. But the baseline question is still always the same. What do students need to know? And what's important about that is in relationship to your work, we're really examining, understanding what the key student learning outcome is in any given course, but recognizing, going back to the questions related to academic freedom, that every faculty member is going to get to that student learning outcome in a slightly different way that's going to allow them to be able to express their individuality and relationship to how information or knowledge is acquired. And so my research really deals with notions connected to knowledge acquisition and knowledge construction and knowledge production. And so when we think about how faculty members want to be able to maintain academic freedom, but want all of our students to reach the same student learning outcomes, it's almost like the variety of different roads you can take to get to a destination.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

That is true.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And engaging in that work is so important because all of our students, particularly our transfer students, come to us with a variety of different experiences in relationship to the teaching and learning. And they also come to us with a variety of life experiences and how they value what's important to learn and how they access that information. But we want to be able to help them to scaffold that information from what they know to what they need to know in a way that's meaningful to them. And so the work that you're doing is very important and having those very meaningful conversations with faculty across the state, now that we have agreement through institutions across the state around what it means to align curriculum so that

student learning outcomes are the same so that students do well in subsequent courses, but still allow for that academic freedom that faculty are entitled to have.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Right. And I like the point you've put across that different roads, but the same outcomes, so the same with learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are really key, but faculty have leeway on presenting content and materials or learning experiences to students in ways that they can achieve the same learning outcomes. So it can be one course, several sections, but if the students are exposed to the same learning outcomes, it prepares. One, it levels the field, and two, it prepares them for success for what is next. And that is really important in this work that the courses for which we are focusing on in curriculum alignment are gateway courses that students really need to master the essential skills they need for success. So that's why we have to engage not only with our partner institutions, but willing institutions across Florida.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And the thing that's really significant about that is understanding that there are notions of equity and equality built into this notion of curriculum alignment, right?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Because the equality is about making sure that every student gets to the same learning outcome, that mastery, but the equity is acknowledging that students are different, that faculty are different. And that difference doesn't mean that students still can't get to the same student learning outcome.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

And in our work, we also acknowledge the fact that curriculum is influenced by different, let me say, layers. At the core of any given curriculum, the faculty individuality will affect the kind of curriculum they choose. The disciplinary knowledge that is required will affect. Outside that there are kind of institutional-level factors that would include what are the missions of a given institution? We have accrediting agencies. We have professional bodies which also contribute that we have these layers.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And they influence what happens in the classroom, right?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yes. Yes. It does.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Absolutely. And even as we think about all of those external influences that impact on the way in which knowledge is disseminated and knowledge is acquired and so forth and so on, we also have to take in consideration that at the end of the day, these students leave those classrooms and have to be prepared to go to the next class with the knowledge and skills that will help them to become successful.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

That is true.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

All right. So as assistant dean for academic planning, you focus on providing students with pathways to succeeding at UCF. Can you share why planning your time at UCF is so critical even before you get to UCF?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

That's really an important question because if students don't plan, they're likely to miss out on several opportunities available to them at UCF for any given major. And I would pivot to an example of my daughter. When she was graduating from high school, one of the things that I asked her was, "What are your goals? What do you want to become?"

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I hear some similarities.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

"What do you want to become? And so then what is the likely major that can help you move towards achieving that goal?" The other question was what experiences do you need to prepare you to for what you want to become? And I think that is really important. If the students can ask themselves those questions prior to coming to UCF, it'll be easy now to choose the right major. And after choosing the right major, even taking the right coursework, that is not enough. They need to plan ahead so that they can take advantage right from the get go of various opportunities available, whether it's undergraduate research, whether it's service learning, study abroad, even within what the College of Undergraduate Studies has kind of pioneered, study away. Taking advantage of experiences that would help them to be ready for what is next, that is really important.

That is the flip side. If they don't plan, they'll arrive to UCF. They'll be told, "Take this coursework." But along the way, they'll miss out on these engagements. And during their senior year when they realize that, "Hey, now you start career planning and all that," that's when they realize that, "Oh, I needed these experiences," and then it's too late. So planning is important so that they not only take the right coursework, but

also the right experiences that they need for what is next, whether it's that they want to go to professional school or whether they want to move right into a career or even to graduate school, that they need to do these things ahead of time.

And I think that's really important for students to understand that academic planning isn't just about the coursework. And this takes us back to something we spoke about earlier, the significance of orientation and understanding that the orientation experience isn't just about sitting down with the advisor and planning the coursework. It's about opportunities to be exposed to all of the things that the campus has to offer that will enrich and enhance that academic experience and prepare students for the next step. It's interesting because I was sharing with Dr. Gilbrook in a podcast I did with him that I have rather eclectic taste in my television viewing. And so while I am a huge Star Trek fan, I'm also someone who watches a variety of different other kind of programming for different reasons.

And so there's a program that I binged watch one weekend called Sweet Magnolias, about these three women sort of journeying through life. And one of them has a high school senior in the household. First, three years of his high school life, he focused only on baseball, and he was going to go to college on a baseball scholarship, get into a D1 school, and never once talked about what he wanted to study, what kinds of experiences he wanted in college. It was always about baseball. And as he was about to end his junior year, he gets injured. And so he has no plan B, and no one's having the conversation with him about what are your goals? What do you see? Where do you see yourself? Because all he ever focused on was baseball.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Baseball, yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And so he didn't know what to do. And now for a number of weeks, he's wearing a cast on his arm, and he's a pitcher. So that's a huge problem, and his pitching arm is injured in a car accident. And he's in this car accident because he's made some other choices that was not so great. And in the meanwhile, he comes out of the cast. He's in physical therapy, and he's pondering now what his life should be. And at one point, he gets so frustrated with his father who always pushed him into baseball, that he makes the declaration that I don't want to play baseball anymore.

But now he really doesn't know what to do. And he walks into his senior year thinking, "I don't know that I even want to go to college," because he hadn't had time to have a conversation about who he is as a person and what his goals are. And we have a lot of college students on this campus or many college campuses across the country, who aren't having the conversation with a mentor or a parent or someone about who they are as individuals and what their goals are. And so this notion of



academic planning on a campus like UCF is significant because sometimes it is the first time that someone is asking them, "What are your goals? What do you want to do?"

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

That is true. And I think we've made available various resources, particularly from the College of Undergraduate Studies. We've made available some planning tools to enable students map out their... Help them kind of figure out in entirety what that experience might look like so that they can make informed decisions, something which you and I, like you said, we never had when we went to college.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So as we think about this notion of students being prepared for college, we also have a degree mapping program for transfer students, some of whom started at a state college somewhere in the state thinking, "I know what I want to do. I know where I want to go. This is my plan." And somewhere along the way, they take a course. And you and I have talked to these students, where they suddenly realize, "If I'm not doing so well in this course, I don't know that my plan is going to work." And so for instance, I'll use myself as an example. I started out with a major in music, the voice major. And Dr. Oonge has had the privilege of standing next to me, listening to me sing.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Just once.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Just once and he still talks to people about today. And I'm just like, "Stop telling people about that."

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Just once, yeah.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And I was very new to the university at that point, but somewhere along the way, as much as I loved what I was doing with music, I thought to myself, "How am I going to eat in 10 years?" And that was really my father's voice in my head because he was very practical man, who served in the military, whose parents immigrated to the United States. And so all of the practical things meant something to him in relationship to how do you survive in a new space with a new culture and make sure that you have what you need? And that was part of his journey and his story.

And so at some point I'm realizing, while this is all great, and I'm singing in a variety of different venues, and I get my first musician's union card, so now I have access to

more opportunities and so forth and so on, I also realize that it's a lot of work just to get a job, to make some money singing somewhere. And then you get paid that one time, and it's done. And so at some point I realized I need something else that I can do that will help me move along in life. So initially my answer to the question was, "Oh, well get a concentration in conducting because then you can do some things with choirs and orchestras and so forth and so on."

But then I had an internship working with a local symphony orchestra, and I'm basically handing out sheet music. And I was like, "This is not going to work. If I have to start here, I'm going to be in real trouble." And then I picked up a second major, and then I picked up a minor and another minor and thought, "Oh, I'll get into sound engineering and do music for television programs and music for movies and those kinds of things." And I transferred from one institution to another in the midst of all of that. And I had to be able to articulate to my advisor and to my faculty advisor what I was hoping to be able to do at this institution with all these things in my head. And as a 19, 20-year-old college student trying to articulate what I thought would work, talking to someone who had been in the field, in the business for at least a couple of decades, I'm sure I did not sound very coherent to that person.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

I can bet.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And at some point, I had to figure out how to make this transfer experience work and to make sure that, one, all the credits I had taken would transfer from one institution to the other, that they would make sense. We didn't have systems then that we have now that make that a little bit easier to do. And then how do I take what I perceive to be my goal and fit it into this new institution versus what the previous institution offered? So when we think about Success Pathways for our-

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Transfer students.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

... transfer students, what's the significance of Success Pathways in relationship to the orientation experience? And what advice do you have for our transfer students as they prepare to do their academic planning and transfer into UCF?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Well, I'll begin by already explaining what Success Pathways are. It's a resource that we've built in concert with all the programs here at UCF and with our state college partners and other colleges that were expanding out too. And in each of the pathway, we've explicitly indicated the admission requirements of any given major at

UCF, that if you are transferring from whichever institution, you want to go into accounting, that at least have this GPA. And also, we've included the common program prerequisites, critical courses, and lower-level courses that they need to complete as they earn their AA. Because at the state level, all they need to do is just earn an AA, and they can transition to the university.

Why the Success Pathways are important is that for a prospective student who wants to come to UCF, if you follow the coursework, if you complete the lower-level requirements on the common program prerequisite that you need for your expected major at UCF, when you come to UCF, you'll be major ready, major ready in that you'll be admitted into the major. You'll also have access to upper-level courses that you need for that particular major. With respect to orientation, why this is important is that if you just come in with 60 hours and an AA, all that UCF will acknowledge is that you've completed the GEP requirements. But for that particular major that you need, the advisors will have to evaluate and see what else do you need for the particular major, especially if you did not take the right coursework for that particular major.

And therefore, it's important for the transfer students to follow the suggestions we made within the Success Pathways. When you transition to UCF, then they can be major ready and have access to the upper-level courses that they require. That ensures that they have academic momentum in terms of the coursework that they're taking, especially those who tend to be full-time, that you'll have access to the right courses. You'll maintain that academic momentum, graduate on time and save a lot of dollars. And that is always a good thing.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's significantly important because what we're really talking about here is ensuring that students have the foundational knowledge built into the curriculum from the state college so that they can transition into UCF. And we want to ensure that students have that knowledge and are prepared to move forward so that they can be successful, whether they're part-time or full-time. So let's talk about some of our students who come into us through dual enrollment. So dual enrollment is one of the programs that are in your portfolio. Can you talk to us about what dual enrollment is and how it benefits students?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yes. Dual enrollment is one of the acceleration mechanism available to high school students. Other mechanisms include taking AP credits, IB that sort of thing, and there's also dual enrollment. The good thing we dual enrollment is that the high school students who are highly qualified and were at least above, that is they've completed the fifth grade. So anybody who has completed the sixth grade, you can imagine those are very young, but anybody who has completed 6th grade but is highly qualified and can take the college bearing courses.

Now, the way dual enrollment works is that the student enrolls at, let's say, UCF course, a university course and takes that course. But we enter into agreements with the district schools, the home education, or even the private high schools to ensure that the credits students earn will also count towards their high school graduation requirements. And therefore, the way dual enrollment is working is that the students will earn credits towards a baccalaureate degree or a certificate or a minor, and also credits towards high school graduation requirements.

The good thing with dual enrollment, especially for students who are in junior and senior levels in high school, is that they get a chance to experience college in a small way, not in the full-blown, but in a small way, so that they can start learning the college culture, the pace. At the same time, they get challenged because they're highly performing students. They get challenged to do coursework that is at the college level, and it gives them a leg up. Some students can complete a full AE while at high school through dual enrollment, so for those who want to take advantage, because it's totally free for all high school students. They don't have to pay a tuition. They don't have to pay instructional materials.

That's a lot of money that they can save in their pockets, especially for first generation and students from underrepresented groups that if they can take advantage of dual enrollment, they get part of their college work done while meeting the high school graduation requirements. When it's well planned, it's that the students when they get to college, now they get to spend a lot of time now doing extra things that are available. They can engage in research. They can do study abroad or study away. They have this time because they've already completed most of the coursework they need for a particular major.

The other thing about dual enrollment is that they have support. They still have access to their high school counselor who can guide them about high school requirements. They still have access to high school activities. But at the college side, they have access to an advisor. They have dedicated advisors who work with them and have access to the library and other resources. Except, they don't get free tickets for the football games.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

No, they don't get free tickets for the football game. So in other words, when we think about dual enrollment, these are high school students, who can take up to 60 semester credit hours and complete an AA degree while they are in high school. They pay no tuition. They pay no instructional material cost, and they can start college as juniors. They still can do all the things that they do in high school. They can go to the prom, go to the football game, all of those things. They have a guidance counselor at their high school to support them. And they have an academic advisor at the university that also provides them with academic support.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Right. They also have access to tutoring services at the university.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That sounds a wonderful opportunity.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

They have access to tutoring at the university. If they need extra help, again, they can reach out to the high school guidance counselor for additional help as needed. I think it's really advantageous, but it would be more beneficial, particularly more impactful to first-generation students that you get to dip your feet in the college while you are in the high school and get to overcome some phobia that you may have regarding post-secondary education. And that is really important. So for me, I see it as an access type of mission that the university can accomplish.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. So we're going to shift just a little bit and talk a little bit about curriculum alignment. And since joining UCF, you've made some great strides working with Florida state colleges across the state as well as the university regarding curriculum alignment. So can you tell us what curriculum alignment is and why it's important?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Curriculum alignment in this context is an initiative between UCF and the state colleges to align core content and competencies or learning outcomes of select gateway courses that are critical or essential for students to succeed when they are at the university. These courses are typically offered when students are under their AA, and they are the same courses that our FTIC students complete during the first two years of their undergraduate career. Currently, we have 58 courses that are involved in curriculum alignment. When I came on board in 2016, we had five disciplines. Now we've expanded to 11 disciplines.

And why curriculum alignment is important, as you had said earlier, it's about the learning outcomes. If students are exposed to essential learning outcomes, it means that they'll be successful. They'll be ready. They have the skills that they need to succeed in the subsequent courses. Think of it in terms of a spiral curriculum, where concepts are progressive in terms of complexity. So for instance, if it's in math, a concept is introduced in algebra, but that skill is also essential for another course, let's say in engineering or an upper-level math course. If the students have mastered that skill, when they get more complex problem, if they have the foundational knowledge, it becomes easier for them to work those complex problems and concepts.

And when we engage in curriculum alignment, our goal is really to ensure that not only the learning outcomes are the same, it's particularly the essential learning outcomes. We know that at the state colleges, they teach a diversity of students. There are students who are tracking AA, that is they want to transfer, and there are those who are tracking AS. They want to go into the career. And therefore, the mission within the state college is slightly different because they have this other population that they have to work with. And it so happens that when we engage in curriculum alignment, we acknowledge that these are the essential learning outcomes for this given course, but we acknowledge that you have a different variety of students. And therefore, you may include additional learning outcomes to meet the needs of the other student. So we acknowledge that.

The other reason why curriculum alignment is important is because for particularly courses that are in a sequence, it's to eliminate gaps and redundancies that if we don't talk to each other, if those who are teaching upper-level courses and lower-level courses don't engage in conversations, there's a likelihood maybe that the ones who are teaching on a lower-level course will say, "Hey, this is a topic which will be covered in the next course," and therefore they'll not cover. And those in the upper-level course will say, "Hey, this is something typically covered in a lower-level course," and therefore they don't address it. Yet, they test those courses or those... No, they test those experiences or outcomes in their assessment, and the students might fail. And therefore this is more of a student success as well as an issue that it helps to eliminate those redundancies.

And the conversations that the faculties have enable them to identify where the gaps are, enable them to see where there's redundancy. They see you don't need to cover that. We cover this in this course and therefore frees room for faculty to engage more with students. The other reason why I think curriculum alignment is important is course drift. That if you've been teaching a course for a long time, it's very easy to drift away from the learning outcomes that are posted in the syllabi because of either your preferences or bias or let's say my preferences or biases. And therefore, when we engage in those conversations, our faculties kind of get recentered back to the essential learning outcomes. And that's important.

Dr. Theodora Regina Berry:

And that is important, but it also provides an opportunity to think about how certain ideas and concepts within disciplines or fields may be changing over time too. And so that's important to consider in relationship to that. You also do some work around articulation agreements. Can you tell us what they are and why they are important?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Well, an articulation agreement is kind of an understanding between a university and or one institution and another institution regarding either program or coursework or experiences that are transferable or interchangeable within those institutions. In our

case, we engage in program-to-program articulation agreements. For instance, for the honors college, engage with the state colleges to identify that these are the experiences that honors students should be completing while they're earning their AA. It's not the coursework, but the additional experiences so that when they come to UCF, that the honors program at UCF will know that the students are prepared in the same manner as our students.

So we enter those kinds of agreements. We also enter into agreements on coursework that needs to be completed. And therefore courses with similar learning outcomes at the state level or compatible learning outcomes for those offered at UCF. But they may not be the same course, but they cover the same learning outcomes. We get the faculty to talk about can we use them as substitutes? And then they engage in tweaking the curriculum in a manner that will allow the students, when they complete those courses at the state level, that they can come and be used as substitutes for our given courses. And that is really important.

The articulation agreement also helps individual programs to communicate to one another. Let's say, environmental studies at UCF engaging with another institution that they would share information and update such that any student who wants to come to Environmental Studies at UCF would have adequate information and be well-prepared to be successful. Therefore, I see it is also as a document that allows for that communication. We know that faculty change. The leadership change within programs. If some of the agreements that have been entered or contrary... Let's say that we've said that we'd accept. Let me give you an example that we have Legal Studies here at UCF and Paralegal Studies at Valencia that the chairs about five years ago, were in very close contact. And they verbally agreed that, yes, "I'll accept five courses, the courses completed as in paralegal studies at Valencia. When they come to UCF, we'll accept them."

It so happened that chair moved on to different and better things, but that information was not codified anywhere. And the information being that that had been given to students at Valencia disadvantaged them because they came to UCF during orientation, as you said. They would say that I've completed this coursework, but their advisors would check and say, "Hey, you've not done this. We don't know about this coursework." So that kind of brought about issues where students complained up to the president's level saying that my coursework is not being recognized, yet this promise had been made. And so handling an agreement helps to codify some of these conversations that occur within programs and between programs.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Excellent. All right. So now we are going to enter our speed round version of our conversation. This is an opportunity for our listeners and viewers to get to know you a little bit better on a personal level. And I'm going to ask some very simple

questions, and we would like for you to answer with the first thing that comes to top of mind. Okay?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

All right. Favorite color?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Black. But let me say something. When I did my wedding back in 2000, I had green. I don't know why I chose green.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I don't know why either.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

So it's a green suit, very strange. I have that suit to date. I don't have the pants, but I have the jacket. I don't know why it was green, but my favorite color is black.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Excellent. Favorite song?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Wow. That is a pickle. Don't Stop Believing by the band, Journey.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. All right. Excellent. Favorite movie?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Well, I'm biased here. I'll go with a movie maybe you don't know. It's called Sarafina.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

I love Sarafina.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

So by Whoopi.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It was a musical first.



Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yes. Yes.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

It's okay if you're a little biased. Favorite book?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

A Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Oh, yeah. Okay. Favorite singer?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Favorite singer.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

And you can't say me.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Why can't I say you? Favorite thing, I would say Bob Marley.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Oh, yes.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Bob Marley, I think.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. Favorite actor?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Denzel Washington for me.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. If you could travel anywhere in the world and time and money were no object, where would you like to go?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

I'd love to be in Cape Town, South Africa.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That's on my list too.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Yeah, I would love to journey there because I have a bucket list of things, and Cape Town is one of those places that I want to go. And I'll also visit where Mandela was born, and kind of journey through his village, through all the places that he went to. So I'd love to do that.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. If you could have dinner with anyone living or dead, who would it be and why?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Like I said, Mandela. I'd love to know for 27 years, how did you survive in Robben Island, not being able to interact with your family. I'd love to ask those questions. I would love to ask after you got out, how did you get to forgive all the people who oppressed others? So that was really what he did.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That's an important question.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

It is an important question. What was your thought process behind that?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

So I will ask one more question, and it is based on a television program that I watched. I have very eclectic television viewing experiences. There's a show that is on Max, entitled If We're Being Honest with Laverne Cox. It's a talk show where she engages with up and coming artists.

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

I'm not an artist, so go ahead.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Actors, musicians, those kind of artists. And during her interview, she always ends with asking whether or not there was something that she should have asked that she didn't ask. So I am asking you is there something that I should have asked that I didn't ask that you would like to share with our audience?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

I think, why UCF?

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

Okay. So why UCF?

Dr. Harrison Oonge:

Why UCF? I think I've come to love UCF because of its diversity and the opportunities that it provides. Particularly when I talk of diversity, I think in terms of my children. I lived in West Virginia. In Morgantown, West Virginia, we had little opportunities in terms of activities that the children can engage in. But I got a chance to come to Orlando, several activities, not only for children, for adults too. But most importantly within UCF, there's a lot of diversity, people of different walks of life and if you are doing a project, the kind of support that you get from different offices, each one being ready to help and chip in. So I thought that's what has kept me going here at UCF. I love it. It can be hard, but I love it.

Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry:

That is a great way to end our conversation. Thank you, Dr. Oonge, for joining me today, for engaging in a very intriguing and enlightening conversation. And it is my hope that our audience will gain some benefit from your wisdom and experiences as a professional here at the University of Central Florida. And thanks to our audience for joining us today. This is Academically Speaking, and I am Dr. Theodorea Regina Berry. Have a great day.