

## California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcast Episode 56

# The California Community College Experience with David Terry

Interim Chancellor Daisy Gonzales, PhD: Welcome back everyone. This is Dr. Daisy Gonzalez, interim chancellor for California's Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office podcast. Thank you for joining me today. If you're joining me for episode two, you already know that this series of podcast episodes feature California Community College alumni who will share their educational journey and how California's community colleges change their lives. My hope is that by creating a space to uplift alumni stories, we will more clearly see the impact of California's community colleges to the hard work and dedication of extraordinary human beings. Today's guest is Professor David Terry, who attended a California community college and has launched a career in our system having taught at four California community colleges to date. Welcome Professor Terry.

Professor David Terry: Thank you for having me, and it is a pleasure and an honor to be here today.

Gonzales: Aw, thank you. The pleasure is all mine. Thank you for joining me today. Can I call you Dave or Professor Terry

Terry: As my boss? You can call me whatever you want to call me. Yes you can. David will do. Yes.

Gonzales: <laugh>. Well, before we get started, I do have a series of questions to ask you and thank you for sharing your story with our students, with our system. I wanna share a little bit more about your biography so that all of our listeners are caught up and they know who you are. So let me first do that. Straight out of high school, David Terry joined the United States Marines and honorably served his term of duty as a military police officer. He then enrolled at Shabo College in Hayward, California, where he earned a position on Lebo football team. With the football scholarship, he was able to continue his education at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio and received his BA in Sociology, another sociologist criminology and a master's degree in sociology. His experience serving his country provided the skills needed to be hired by the Alameda County Probation Department, where he was hired as a juvenile institutional officer.

Gonzales: He worked for Alameda County for 20 years, but his educational background and practical experience in the field of criminal justice led him back to California's community colleges. So we're very lucky. Professor Terry then began his teaching career in 1993 at his alma mater Shabo College. He also taught at Elany College in Oakland, California, and last Peds College in Livermore, California before being hired full-time at Delta College in 2006. As an instructor of administration of justice, history and social science, he is currently the faculty chairperson for Correctional Science and the Correctional Science Advisory Board at Delta College. And today we're going to talk about his wealth of knowledge and passion to teach the next generation of correctional professionals in the state. But first, we're gonna talk about his early beginnings. So Professor Terry, welcome again. I wanna thank you for serving our country for all of your

hard work to serve our students in different communities. I actually went to Laney College when I was at Mills.

Terry: Oh, excellent institution as well,

Gonzales: <laugh>. So I know that this work is deeply personal and just in our first meeting and reading your biography. So let's start from the beginning. You are a proud alum. How did you find California's community college? What was it like?

Terry: Well, that's a great question. And even thinking about it, I think my main priority was football. Cuz when I was in the Marine Corps for those three, almost four years, right after high school, I knew deep down inside that my personal dream was to play college football. And even though I loved the Marine Corps and it gave me everything that it said it would, and they only promised you two things in the Marine Corps, a rifle and a hard time <laugh>. And they delivered on both. But deep down inside, I would watch people on Saturdays playing college football that I knew from high school. So I knew that there were some other things that I wanted to do in addition to the Marine Corps. So when I got out, I immediately contacted the coach at Shabo College and he remembered me as he had recruited me in high school.

Terry: So he opened his arms, opened the door to me, and Terry Kagan, Coach Kagan really was influential as a PE instructor and head football coach at Shabo College in the success that I'm having and many of his other players have had. So I'm really thankful for that pathway to kind of get me into the college mode. And from there it was fantastic. I enjoyed it. I, I didn't wanna stop. And so to an extent, I guess I haven't stopped cuz I've been, you know, teaching for almost 28 years. So I kind of fell in love with summer vacations and, And the whole school calendar. Yes. <laugh>

Gonzales: <laugh>. So let's talk about that. You're currently a full-time professor and as I was reading your bio, you had an entire career in the field that you are now advancing. Yes. Uh, you are now the faculty chairperson for correctional science at one of our colleges. It's a topic that our board of governors is deeply interested in and, and that I think has really great impact on our society and where we're heading both in our state and nationally. Tell us a little about that work. How did you end up choosing coming back to California's community colleges and going from your journey as a sociologist to what you do now?

Terry: Yes. Well, actually what happened was when I finished my studies, my master's at Ohio University, I came back to California and I was thinking about teaching and I knew that for the most part, in order to teach I needed a master. So I knew I had that accomplished already. And so the natural landing spot for me was back at Shabo College where I knew people, I knew I could get support and assistance. So I started teaching and coaching at the same time in 1994. And that is also the first year that I started with the Alameda County Probation Department. So I didn't have two careers separate, they overlap, they ran concurrently, if you will. So it was tough to work those two professions at the same time. But what was refreshing about it was, on the one hand I was dealing with people who were in the midst of their trauma and situations, but on the other hand, I was around young people who were on the way up. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So

it did give me a healthy balance and maybe more importantly than balance, it gave me hope and optimism. So I do know that several of the youth at the facility at the time did go on to enroll in college courses and I even had a few of them in my courses as well over time. So it was really beneficial to be in that space at that time for those many years. Yes.

Gonzales: So it's almost like you were meeting people on their worst day. Yes. And then maybe on one of their best days. What has that been like as you're thinking about going from, you know, you were a student athlete to now serving students in our system and what you're seeing in the classroom, and especially with college affordability. Tell us a little bit about

Terry: That. Right. It generally gave me was confidence number one that this is a legitimate pathway to success. I like to really call it a bridge because a bridge can be many things. So it can take you over troubled waters, if you will, to get you to where you want to go. It's part of your destination. So Shabo College lost Peds College, both of them in particular lost peds. I had a great professor there, Maria Elena, she was a sociology instructor and the Spanish instructor. So I had her, those were my first two classes at Lost Ped College, My first two college courses in general. And she was an inspiration. And the thing about sociology that drew me to it was that I could see sociology in my community in action. Yes. I couldn't really see physics or I guess I would need to look closer to see physics and any other topics or subjects. But the sociology just became real to me in my home, in my community. So I was hooked from day one and I obviously chose that, or it came to me in my professional duties as well, obviously as a good feather in my cap. So I'm pleased. I've never looked back and I would certainly give confidence and praise to anybody who's considering sociology as their major

Gonzales: And a California community

Terry: College at a California community college, especially

Gonzales: While we're on this topic and I'm thinking through the correctional professional, so that you now educate, right? That you are helping enter a pipeline, but with a very specific skill set of being able to see the worst day and then maybe build the next generation of optimism right Through the service, through their service to the public. This is a topic that our board is very interested in. We started this work more deeply and uh, with a lot more commitment. In 2020, we had a call to action and it specifically asked for our system to address systemic racism in our society and to really take on the challenge of what is our role. And as a part of that, we started to really tackle difficult conversations. Everything from our role in educating the next generation of first responders to our own campuses, Public safety on a campus, campus and classroom climate. I know you have led a lot of that in the communities that you have lived in and the classrooms that you inhabit. Tell us a little bit about some of your work. And I know our board recently passed Public safety regulations, campus climate regulations. Any thoughts on that?

Terry: Yes, certainly. Anything that enhances or increases educational attainment among police officers, correctional officers, law enforcement, first responders is a good thing. I think when you know better, you should then do better. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So

obviously knowledge is power. We're in the empowerment business. So I think unless we want to continue with the way things have been going, then we need to change. So this is change. Change can be difficult, it can be scary, but it is necessary. And I think once people really understand what the chancellor's office is talking about, they'll get on board a lot sooner and they'll see that we're all in it for the same reasons, which is our communities. And we pride ourselves on being community colleges and should continue to be reflective of that. Literally, that we're gonna grab hold to our communities and engage them. They have things to say. We have things to say. And it's always better when we're communicating

Gonzales: Than listening to each other. Right?

Terry: Yes, yes.

Gonzales: Thank you for sharing that. I'm thinking through your own work in public safety, any kind of advice that you could think of for the colleges as you're engaging the professionals. And you talked a little bit about that trauma, right? And the trauma that they see.

Terry: Yeah. So on a micro level, what I'm trying to do is create, produce empathetic, professional correctional officers that know the trauma of the people that they are now tasked with providing care, custody, and control over that they can be empathetic, not sympathetic, and just understand that this is part of the rehabilitation process, right? Healing for that trauma, it's difficult because it's new for this particular profession. It's a new take on old things. So with that, trying to heal or at least get the officers to engage in looking at their own trauma so that they could better understand the trauma of those that, like I said, they'll be caring for in the future. And then as a bigger picture, the macro CDCR as well as the county agencies, the federal agencies, they employ a great deal of our students as well as our community members. So it would behoove, that's a word my grandmother used to use, <laugh>.

Terry: It would behoove them and us to really partner around these issues. Because at every level, at every agency, there's a crisis in recruitment and retention of law enforcement, correctional personnel. So the community colleges, California community colleges are a great source for employees. And if, if those agencies would dig down and and really put some effort into recruiting our students, I think that they will be rewarded. And so I see that as my duty to reach out to them and to partner with them. And thankfully they've been receptive to that partnering and some of the results are starting now finally to really speak for themselves.

Gonzales: Mm. So you're seeing a need or an interest in hiring students who have empathy as one of the core skill sets?

Terry: Yes. And not only is it sustainable for them as an employee with those agencies, it's sustainable for their careers as well. Because when they are empathetic professionals, they'll understand the small picture, the big picture, and they will be less likely to stay in one particular assignment for 20, 25, 30 years, which really influences or leads to

burnout and poor health outcomes. So not only by either starting at a California community college or returning while they're in the workforce, returning to a California community college for more education, not only is it gonna put more money in their pockets, it's gonna help them live longer. And I don't know, two other things that a person would want besides more money and living longer. Right. So I think for those two reasons, this partnership makes sense. And like I said, the fruits are starting to bear themselves, if you will. Yes.

Gonzales: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you bring up really important point around social mobility and what our system does, I think really well, you also mentioned the changing economy, right? This idea of having to find a job, come back, and then be retrained. Yes. Then find another job, learn a new skill, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, a lot of that has shifted in our economy. And I think we see that more and more, especially because of the pandemic and what has happened to most industries, right? Right. In the early months and year, really of the pandemic, we saw who was essential, who was not. And so it makes me think about where I wanna go next with this. Okay. Which is, we play such a critical role in California and the lives of our students. And I think one of the things that we need to figure out how we do better is tell that story. How do we tell that story of a changing economy, about the service that we provide to California to entire communities and families? So here's where I'm going with this. I hear from so many alums about the stigma, the fear of even saying to an employer, I'm an alum, or putting it on their resume. And what I wanna tackle here with this question is, what message should we be sharing with our state and federal leaders about the talent that our students are bringing to employers and to the state?

Terry: Well, I would express surprise and shock in all actually to those statements that our students have some anxiety about listing that they are community college alumni. And so I'm shocked by that. I would be even more shocked if I heard that from an agency or an employer. But it is an opportunity, a teachable moment, because ignorance exists in space where there's nothing else. So it's a space for us to get in and change their views,

Gonzales: Tell our story,

Terry: Tell our story. We have the data, we have the anecdotal stories, the success stories. So I think it's really easy to tell our story because there's so many people to tell it. And that helps. So again, probably the best advice for our agency or organization is just do a little survey in your agency and find out how many of your current employees were actually ever attended a California community college. And I think that in and of itself will tell our story as well. Mm-hmm.

Gonzales: <affirmative>, I love doing that in a room full of people, by the way. Yes. Pre pandemic, especially <laugh>. Raise your hand if you went to a community college, you know, third of the room will raise your hand, Raise your hand if maybe a family member or your child, raise your hand, Raise your hand if you had a best friend or someone in your life. The entire room puts their hand up. Yes. So I completely agree with you. It's just about empowering them. And earlier you use the word agency and as a sociologist, I caught onto that. I think it's that agency of empowering alums to not be afraid to be extra loud and to bring leaders, community college leaders together.

Terry: Yes. And they're everywhere. I mean, they're not only on the community college campuses as now professors and deans, but they're all throughout our communities. And the research is very clear on the potential earnings for people that only have a high school diploma versus just spending one day on a community college campus in a class. You can dig that deep into the data and find out that people that had spent just even a day, preferably a whole semester, right, of course. But even their life chances and outcomes are drastically improved. So it makes sense financially, it makes sense in terms of convenience with the explosion of online teaching and all of that. And it makes sense in terms of employment. So again, we're preaching to the choir right now, you and I, but I think maybe it's just a matter of reminding California about our value in the community colleges and kind of just recouping some of that value cuz it's here. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And it's not going away.

Gonzales: Thank you for that. I wanna end, you know, most of our podcasts have been ending the same way and I got some feedback from the first one. And so I wanna end with just two really quick questions for you. It's gonna bring you back to that community college experience that you had. And I wanna end with an optimistic message. And so let me just ask you the two quick questions. The first one is really, as you think about your community college journey, I want you to think about one person that you met during your community college journey. Who was it? And tell us how they changed your life.

Terry: Wow. I'm really gonna get in trouble here because someone's gonna say, Why didn't you say me? And there's many, many, even the Veterans Service Center at the time at Shabo College, Open Arms really helped me apply my resources. But if I had to just pick one community college into entity, it would have to be my head football coach Terry again. And because like I said, he remembered recruiting me in high school and then when I called him out of the blue, four years later, he was welcoming and accepted me with open arms. And from that day, both athletically and academically, my life has been changed. And the good thing is that even though I believe he's in his early eighties now, we still text weekly. And I tell him that I love him. I thank him periodically throughout the year. And again, he was a major figure in my life, both as like a coach and a father figure. And he really empowered me and I can't downplay that relationship one bit. Mm.

Gonzales: Thank you for sharing that with me. And I know we're recording live, so I get to see what he meant to you. Thank you for

Terry: Sharing that. Yes, yes. I try not to get Misty right now, but uh, yes, he's a very important person in my life, as was the assistant coach, Pete Davis. So both of them had a hand for better or for worse in the man that I am today.

Gonzales: Mm. And big shout out to our veteran resource centers out there. Any other resources that you also access while you were a student?

Terry: Oh, PE grant. Yes. I had a good friend at the time at shabo who I'm still friends with and she told me that I should be getting Pell Grant. I didn't know what Pell Grant was, but not only did I get it at Shabo College, I got it when I transferred to Ohio University. So Pell Grant was a big help or an assistance and I think it's something that students should consider and there's sometimes stigma around financial aid, but I think when students

really, especially when they see what student owns, can look like much later, that Pell Grant and that type of assistance, E O P S, all types of special programs, can really assist you in your journey. Mm-hmm.

Gonzales: <affirmative> and that's what they're designed to do, right? Yes. We're trying to close achievement gaps. These programs are very specific to supporting every student to succeed. Yes. If we have students who are listening, we wanna plug in, you have to apply for your FAFSA through the California Student Aid Commission. And from there you can access everything from a Cal Grant to the middle class scholarship to if you are an AB five 40 student, a series of number of different resources. And then certainly from there you will know if you qualify for a Pell Grant. Yes. So this is the feedback that I got from listeners and it's our final question today, and I think I'm gonna add it to all of our podcasts moving forward. But I got this feedback and they said, you know, I love listening to alumni stories, but I also wanna hear about what they would've told a younger version of themselves. So let me ask you the question exactly as I got it via email. Looking back at your experience, if you had the chance to give your younger self some words of advice or encouragement, what would they be?

Terry: Wow. Still on that journey, cuz I gotta go back further 30, 40 years ago to revisit my younger self. But looking back, I would tell myself to stay the course and to listen. Listen to those that are trying to help you. And there were plenty of people that were trying to help me that did help me. And I mostly listened <laugh>. But in looking back, I could have listened more closely and more deeply. But yes, just to stay the chorus, those who have been tasked with helping lay out your educational pathway, they know what they're doing, their trustworthy, and again, stay the course, which I did. But again, there was times when, you know, like life comes at you fast sometimes. And so there were times when life did pose some challenges for me, and I'm glad I did stay the course when it looked a lot easier just to drop out or do something different. So yes, that advice, stay the course and listen,

Gonzales: Stay the course and listen. I love that. You know, I just met with some students last week on Friday, and they asked me a similar question when I was there and I quickly reminded them that they were enough. That's what I would've told a younger version of myself, You are enough. And a quick reminder for them that asking for help is actually a sign of strength. I think 99.9% of people wanna help you. It's that 0.1 that don't. And it's okay to shake it off and keep asking for help. Right.

Terry: I often tell students that three hardest words to say in the English language are, I need help. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But when people say I need help, generally the five, six people rush up. So there are people who run to the sound of people in need. And again, yeah, I need help. Certainly is a key thing. People, all of us need to be able to say more often and easier.

Gonzales: Well, thank you so much for joining me today. It was a pleasure to spend time with you, especially thank you for everything that you do for our students, for coming back and teaching at our California Community colleges. I hope that other students are inspired that they aspire to come back and teach at California's community colleges, create a

whole new industry, introduce a concept as simple as how do we create empathy in all of our professions. So thank you.

Terry: Yes, thank you. Thank you for having me. And again, my parting shot is yes, you can go to college like the commercial says and go California Community

Gonzales: <laugh>. Thank you. I hope that you enjoyed learning about Professor David Terry and that you were inspired by his journey. Thank you for joining me for another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office podcast.

Speaker 3: Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges podcast. This has been a California Community College's presentation.