

NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 365 Transcript

OTC From The Field: Discussing NASFAA's PEP Work with Sheila Meiman

Allie Arcese:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to another episode of Off the Cuff. I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Sheila Meiman:

Hi, I'm Sheila Meiman. I'm on the policy team and I specialize in prison education programs.

Rachel Rotunda:

And I'm Rachel Rotunda also with NASFAA's policy team.

Allie Arcese:

Welcome, ladies. Thanks for joining us. We're doing a special episode today to talk about some of our prison education work. The grant that we have been working on that we receive from Ascendium. And our prison education specialist here, our guru, Sheila, is ending her time with NASFAA, but for a happy reason. You'll be retiring, right? It's bittersweet.

Sheila Meiman:

Yeah. I'm trying not to smile too much. I have loved it here, but I'm retiring.

Allie Arcese:

Any fun plans for the first bit of retirement?

Sheila Meiman:

I have way too many hobbies. And the list is stacked up. And about 14 different volunteer things. And I'm going to take one week and sleep in and then hit the ground on it.

Allie Arcese:

Oh, I like that. Yeah. Definitely need a week to just recalibrate, right?

Sheila Meiman:

Yes.

Allie Arcese:

Well, for our listeners who may not be familiar with your background, your journey, can you tell us a bit about your professional journey and just how you ended up at NASFAA?

Sheila Meiman:

Sure. Academically, I'm an engineer. And I worked in the tech industry for a couple of decades. And I lived a road warrior life, lots of traveling. And I after a couple decades decided to find a different way to live without being on the road all the time because it's exhausting. So, I started teaching college math.

And I was home every night, which was pretty cool. And then I joined a small group of professors in 2009, that decided to try teaching a degree program at a nearby carceral facility. And I discovered the joy of working with these students. It was an extraordinary experience to have the caliber of students that I was working with inside and the commitment from those students.

And so, I started administering a program that was rapidly growing. Started doing a lot of federal and state advocacy for the return of Pell Grants to those students. We succeeded in becoming one of the first round Second Chance Pell sites. And then I realized I had to personally administer paper-based financial aid with over 500 students the first semester of Second Chance Pell, which was a little bit of a, "Oh, whoa, what did I do," kind of moment. And so, I'm a bit of a geek. I'm an engineer. And I spent an inordinate amount of time, personal time on the NASFAA website.

Long before you knew who I was, I was lurking and learning and teaching myself as much as I could learn about financial aid, and trying to integrate that with the environment we were now implementing aid in. And I realized what an intellectually cool field financial aid is. And that's honestly due to all the resources that I was accessing as a NASFAA member.

Allie Arcese:

I think many of our members would agree, intellectually cool.

Sheila Meiman:

It is.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Let's talk a little bit about the work that you've been doing here. And maybe Rachel, you can chime in to give us some background. What first led us into the PEP space and led us to finding Sheila and bringing her on staff?

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah. It's a great question, Allie. And it feels like it was a really long time ago, but it was really just, I don't know, like five or so.

Allie Arcese:

A couple years ago.

Rachel Rotunda:

Five-ish years ago that we first kind of got engaged in this space. So, NASFAA had not been super active in the prison ed space. That was not an intentional choice. It just was something that hadn't really been part of our portfolio of work. And so, prior to Pell Restoration, which was part of the FAFSA Simplification Act that passed at the end of 2020, our board voted to adopt the restoration of Pell eligibility for incarcerated students as part of our policy position. So, prior to that happening, that was a part of the FAFSA Simplification Act that we were very supportive of, along with many groups that had really been working on this for truly decades.

As Sheila mentioned, this is something that there have been groups that have been pushing for this to happen ever since Pell eligibility was taken away back in the '90s for this group of students. So, after the bill passed, that was one of the things we're really thrilled that was included and we realized this is new territory for a lot of our membership. Most of the financial aid community had not been working in a

prison setting for decades. And so, we pulled together a working group of members that included folks that had been part of Second Chance Pell schools, including Sheila.

She was part of that working group, as well as members that really had no experience in prison education, but had an interest. Because we felt like both of those perspectives were really necessary as we figured out what do we need to do to support the aid and prison ed community. So, that working group, gosh, Sheila, I'm thinking that it was maybe 2021 to 2022-ish.

Sheila Meiman:

That sounds right.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah. And like I said, Sheila was part of that group. We put out a report, we had recommendations, we had things for schools to think about. But really, through that work, I feel like we just sort of like opened, I don't want to say a can of worms. But we cracked the lid, I think, on realizing how very much there was going to be that needed to happen to get these programs off the ground. And so, just through some conversations that we had with other organizations working in this space, with some funders, we had this idea of like, what if we pursued grant funding to be able to really build out some resources that would particularly help schools that were trying to get programs off the ground or make that transition from Second Chance Pell to a prison education program? Sheila could probably speak to that. That I think a lot of folks are like, "Oh, if you had Second Chance Pell, you're good to go." It's a very different experience.

Allie Arcese:

And especially with the restoration of Pell Grant, it was just a catalyst to open up this natural progression that financial aid needed to step back into the prison education space.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah, exactly, exactly. And I will say just on a personal note would be, so Ascendium has been an amazing funder to work with. They funded a lot of really incredible work in this space and are continuing to. And when we first started talking with them about what this work might look like, we realized we needed more capacity and we definitely needed more expertise. We have folks on our staff as NASFAA members know who are incredible and so smart and just know everything. It feels like they know everything about financial aid. We didn't really have someone who had a lot of prison ed experience and financial aid in a prison setting.

And so, when we were talking about bringing someone on in a full-time but temporary capacity, I remember thinking to myself like, "We need someone like Sheila Meiman." It would be so great if we could have someone like Sheila. But I knew she had retired and maybe wasn't going to be working full-time. And we were just really, really fortunate as we started actually looking for the person to fill this role, that Sheila was willing to come on and really lead this work. And then I think our members who have worked and used our resources, they know that Sheila has really been the engine of our entire prison ed portfolio for the last few years.

Allie Arcese:

And we're lucky that you agreed to delay your retirement to come on with us.

Sheila Meiman:

Rachel called three weeks after I retired and then just dropped, and by the way, could you start in three weeks in a different state to fly to maybe that morning?

Rachel Rotunda:

I'm sure Sheila regrets taking that call sometimes. But there's no doubt in my mind that she's been the right person for the job. I think folks in the field know it really is a unique skillset and a unique perspective. There are a lot of folks who know a lot about financial aid and there are a lot of people that know a lot about prison education, but finding someone who has both of those-

Allie Arcese:

That overlap business segment.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah. There's not a lot of people. I do think, Sheila, I love your perspective on this. I do feel like as the field has grown over the last few years, there are more people who now have that because we have more programs, which is an amazing thing. I think it's so great for our community. But especially at that time, I don't think that that brain trust existed in the same way that it does now.

Sheila Meiman:

Yeah. And I think it's also been a goal from day one, Rachel, to not help people build just prison ed people who knew financial aid. But to create a partnership, a strong partnership between the PEP people and a college and the financial aid people, so that both understood the other's perspective because you end up with a much higher quality product for the student then.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah. That's central for sure, for like really the whole life cycle of the grant.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. And I wanted to just briefly before we get into some more of the PEP work and what we've done and what things look like moving forward, can...? Sheila, maybe you could talk briefly about just pre Pell Grant restoration, what did financial aid in the prison education setting look like?

Sheila Meiman:

Well, are you talking pre the return of Pell officially or during the Second Chance Pell experiment or before that?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Maybe before Second Chance Pell.

Sheila Meiman:

Okay. Because in the '90s, you could administer Pell Grants inside prisons. And there were Pell funded programs throughout the country. And some of them were unbelievable high quality, very committed. Others were... How do I say this without being pejorative? Probably not the most recognized degree

granting institutions for legitimacy. And the Get Tough on Crime Bill passed in the mid '90s and instantly no Pell inside prisons. So, programs that were running stopped instantly. And we were down to maybe 12 programs in the country that were able to keep going either with institutional funding or with philanthropic money.

So, you had people partway through a degree who now all of a sudden their college didn't come anymore. And that went on obviously for decades, until the concept under the Obama administration of Second Chance Pell was created. But the thing is when you administered financial aid back in the '90s, it was normal on campus that students filled out paper facets. And normal that they filled out paper college applications and normal... Well, that hadn't happened for decades. Just finding at the beginning of Second Chance Pell an actual PDF of a current FAFSA was not easy. And there were no structures. There was no concept of what some of the questions meant, because typically, people doing financial aid work in colleges weren't providing the advising about how to complete the FAFSA in many cases. That was often done in high schools or by families or whatever.

And so, how we do that when students don't have access to the other resources, it was just an awful lot of learning. So I think we really needed an experiment because there were stumbles. I mean, at the first semester of Second Chance Pell, I think I had a 96% verification selection rate and it hurt. So, we went from Pell funded with not many structures around it, no Pell, and a vacuum in most prisons, to learning to do Pell and Pell coming back adding structure around it to make sure the programs were of high quality. And so, that's the historical journey.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. And how else has the landscape of prison education changed in recent years?

Sheila Meiman:

The change going from a program that was solely funded by philanthropy or volunteer efforts, which is what was happening, to one that's Title IV funded, it's been fundamental. Because it's not about the money, it's not just about the funding sources. It's a juxtaposition between academic or passion driven learning programs to compliant credentialed programming. And those two things look fundamentally different, and have fundamentally different outcomes, and different quality expectations at times. So, that is a fundamental shift from a learner perspective. And there's been significant growth. I mean, these programs are scaling and the field is scaling. So, early procedures had to morph into processes that have a secure enough framework to support sizable growth.

And you know from a process development perspective, that's a big change. And they're new roles. Colleges are used to being overseen by accreditors, by Department of Education, by state departments of education. But now for prison education programs we have another player. And they're called the oversight entity. And it's actually the correctional authority that is housing a student. And that adds an entirely different layer. As well as what's called the best interest determination, a very formal assessment of programs using a lot of different unusual metrics to make sure the programs are in the best interest to the student.

And I think some of that best interest looking and oversight conversation has actually fed the new stuff that's coming out in OB3, with how processes are working for Workforce Pell and other things, to have that. And with the accountability stuff to have that focus on program quality and outcome quality.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. You touched previously about the impact that that sudden disappearance of Pell Grant eligibility had on students. What was the significance of bringing that back of restoring Pell Grant for the students specifically?

Sheila Meiman:

Well, first of all, it was interesting. You had learners who had been in education programs in the '80s and '90s, who had been waiting, some of them for 30 years, to be able to finish their learning. But during that time, many of those people engaged in a lot of self-study. And so, when we hit that first group of students going in, it was like, whoa, maybe they should be teaching us. Some very learned people inside, but very suspicious. Because when something's given to you and then something's taken away, you're not full of trust that it's going to stay. So, the migration of it being a Second Chance Pell initiative that had no certainty of continuity to a standard program, led to a... There's a lot of optimism now that these programs are here to stay.

And the guardrails for quality help ensure that you're not going to be looking at these in 10 years and saying, "We're wasting federal money. These programs are not delivering something of value because the value measurements are in place." Does that make sense?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Can you speak a little bit more about that, the value measurements?

Sheila Meiman:

Yeah. The best interest determination is something that the department requires for every program that is a PEP, that's administering Title IV. I think the most important words in it are that things are substantially similar. The experience is substantially similar to on campus. So, your students on campus have tutoring, how are you doing that in the prison? Your students on campus have career advising. How are you doing that in the prison? How are you doing reentry prep? All kinds of things are getting measured. And there are mandatory measures and there are optional measures. And all of those are around, are we treating these students with the same care and quality, even though it might be administered a little differently, as we are our main campus students? These students are not meant to be afterthought students. They're meant to have the same quality of educational experiences on campus. And I think that has changed the tenor of these programs quite a bit.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. That makes sense. So, as you've seen this work progress over the last couple of years with the restoration of Pell, the, like you mentioned, changes more coming from OB3, what do you see that institutions are still struggling to understand with regard to compliance, administration, implementation, things like that?

Sheila Meiman:

Well, this is a completely new kind of program, new environment, new controls, new measurements happening at the same time as FAFSA simplification. Massive FSA system overhaul, sweeping force reductions, OB3, et cetera, et cetera.

Allie Arcese:

Okay. So, no big deal.

Sheila Meiman:

No problem. So, it's really been challenging for schools to build this new kind of structure when the foundation they're standing on in general is shifting. So, remember, this was part of the FAFSA simplification bill. And it had just passed and we didn't quite know what it was when I started. And it went, "Oh, God, what did we get into?" Because it has been an incredibly challenging three years since the return of Pell. And we're almost at the three-year mark since it became legislatively available. What a crazy time to try to be building a new program that's almost orthogonal in how it's managed.

The application process is different. It's multi-step, multi-organizational approvals. It's not just the Department of Ed. There are multiple application levels. It culminates with an EAP submission, just like any new program does. But it's the same EAP that supports research and personnel changes. And just given the timing of the changes in the financial aid world, for a lot of schools, the PEP application was the first time that the schools were using the new Partner Connect system, based that EAP. And it's a steep learning curve. So, they were experiencing at the same time they were trying to figure out how to propose this new program in the EAP. So, adding a PEP to the EAP can still be a little complicated. Schools are still experiencing that. But other than that, just the word paper. There's still many, many states do not allow the engagement with the electronic FAFSA.

Even if they have some level of internet, the two factor authentication is very complicated inside. So, we're still dealing with paper in many environments and there are a host of things. I mean, as the main world has progressed very farther from paper than we were at the beginning of Second Chance Pell. I mean, FAFSA simplification made much, much more integration with technology necessary and we don't have it. So, the paper world for our aid offices is crazy. And even if they are able to do the online FAFSA, you still have technological challenges.

Allie Arcese:

Do you see that changing at all, by the way, with the paper FAFSA? Is that something you could see?

Sheila Meiman:

It is. Some states are doing electronic FAFSAs, but it's not as clean as you would like it. When students have access to do a FAFSA quickly and that's the only electronic access, their continual engagement with the financial aid systems is different. They may not have an email to ever get their FAFSA submission summary. And I think you also have to understand when the students happen to be under 24, happen to be married, et cetera, you've got somebody on the outside who would need to be engaged in the FAFSA. And that kind of integration is one of the things that our aid offices have had to put a lot of thought into, to make that happen.

The need for professional judgment is sometimes significantly higher. Thank goodness, over the last three years, they've greatly simplified verification because that was a nightmare for offices. But there are enough schools doing this now that are getting their hands around how to do it and how to communicate to students.

Allie Arcese:

It sounds like, I mean, the technology is a gap. All the layers of administration sounds cumbersome. What would you say to a school that's considering getting into the prison education space? What makes this worthwhile in your opinion?

Sheila Meiman:

I think that every school that I know of that's engaging in this has found it to be one of the... their faculty will tell you it's one of the best teaching experiences they have and it makes you a better teacher. I've had lots of teachers I've worked with over the years. And they're used to on campus with tons of tech and tons of... To go back to natively just teaching without technology. And most of the time we're talking adult learners, and adult learners who have had opportunities to do a lot of self-reflection and a lot of self-education ask really deep questions. So, first of all, faculty is typically beyond thrilled with the teaching experience. But schools find that it becomes a very mission-driven, mission connected thing for a lot of schools and a priority for them. They still struggle with the financials, because regardless of anything, these programs can be more expensive to administer because you're taking the college into a prison and that's expensive.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. There are things that we do because they make sense financially, administratively, whatever, and there are things that we do because it's the right thing to do.

Sheila Meiman:

Yeah.

Rachel Rotunda:

Sheila, to echo that. I do feel like you're much more invested in the world than I am. But it's something that has become very clear very quickly to me is that the schools that get these programs off the ground and really see them thrive are the schools where this is part of their mission. There is an institutional commitment, there's a commitment from leadership to want to have these programs and want to serve the student population, excuse me, where we know there are huge gaps in access and attainment. I just want to underscore that. I feel like that was clear even in our first working group four or five years ago. And that has really stuck with me. You can really tell the schools where they have a provost or a president or a chancellor who is like, "We are doing this and we will make some institutional... We'll make an institutional commitment and make the sacrifices where we need to ensure that this program is able to thrive and serve the students that we're aiming to."

Sheila Meiman:

Yeah, I agree. And I think it is also helping schools when they make the decision to engage in this work. The amount of technical assistance out there has blossomed in the last three years. They don't feel as hesitant because it's such a great unknown. There's a lot of material out there. There are a lot of organizations that are... support organizations like ours that are becoming literate in this and they're there to help. They see colleague institutions doing it, so there's a little more reliance. They see state consortiums forming, regional consortiums forming. And I think it feels a lot less lonely than it did.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. That's a nice segue back into just some of the work that we've been doing in this space. If there are schools listening right now, Sheila, that are thinking about getting into this space, can you speak a little bit about what resources do exist now and maybe like the community that we've been trying to build the last few years?

Sheila Meiman:

Sure. Well, first of all, all of our work has been focused, like I said before, in trying to bring both financial aid and the PEP administrators together to support each other in this work. There are an awful lot of PEP administrators who have activated NAFSA memberships and are learning about financial aid, so they can talk to their colleagues and a lot of financial aid people who are becoming much more comfortable understanding the prison environment. We have a lot of things we've produced that are analogous to NAFSA's normal products. So, we've got webinars and targeted fact sheets and a web center. And we've integrated the topic into standard training. AskRegs has a lot of articles on prison education now. We have a PEP community, et cetera. There's some things that have been different, that have needed to be different because we've been on this growth trajectory with institutions.

We've been doing a lot of one-on-one technical assistance with colleges. It's very customized, not something NAFSA normally has done, but part of it is helping schools articulate their questions. Sometimes it's hard to frame a concise question and send it in when you're trying to figure out how to get started. And so, there have been a lot of those conversations. We've been supporting schools as they've gone through the EAP process. So, spent a lot of time looking in Zoom at Partner Connect with schools to get through. And we've been helping schools through the functional areas beyond financial aid that need to be involved for the programs to be successful. So, the registrars, for instance.

We've tried to work to integrate them into the conversation, both through organizations like Acro and via the schools themselves, because the registrars and financial aid are typically very close partners and both need to do a piece of this work to make things happen properly. We've done several fairly significant formal conferences on prison education. Rachel and I now feel very good at building conferences, a skill neither one of us would've claimed before this.

Allie Arcese:

You can add event planner to your resume.

Rachel Rotunda:

Sheila [inaudible 00:27:56].

Sheila Meiman:

I know, That's hard stuff, but we made weird rules. The schools could only attend if both financial aid and the PEP administrator came together.

Allie Arcese:

Well, I mean, I think that's fair. That goes back to what you were saying. It has to go both ways.

Sheila Meiman:

Yes. And so, it's all been focused with the goal of building this partnership in the school, because they were in many cases super isolated. I do campus financial aid. I have nothing to do with that. We're not doing anything with the prison. That's your little hobby. And well, maybe I'll do financial aid. I don't know what it means, but however I choose to do it should be fine. What's compliance? So, I think a lot of that has... we've moved the dime on that, I think, quite a bit.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. I know there can be a headache, a learning curve when you set out to collaborate on things and really bridge that gap. But I think in the end, it's worth it and you have a much better end product. Yeah.

Sheila Meiman:

I think so too.

Rachel Rotunda:

That has actually, I think, been one of the most fulfilling parts of this work, at least from where I sit, has been... Sheila mentioned we had the two convenings. And it was incredible, truly, to see even just over the course of two days, how you would have an aid administrator and a prison ed administrator who maybe had worked together a little bit, but maybe it hadn't always been the best relationship because they were coming at things from a different angle and they each had priorities. And at the end of those two days, it felt like they were hanging out and really getting along well and seeing each other's perspective. Because Sheila did a great job of building the programs for both of those convenings, to try to shed some light on like, "Here's why your financial aid office maybe says they can't do X, Y, Z." There's a reason for that, that deals with regulatory compliance or something like that.

And here's why the PEP administrator is asking for this of the aid office. They need it because they're getting questions from the state or from the correctional facility. So, I think seeing that happen to me is one of... that was always a hope for the grant and I think it has been one of the greatest successes that we've seen.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. Having that baseline of context and just understanding can be game changing, I think.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah. We used to say financial aid plays on the financial aid field and prison ed plays on prison ed field. And we need to get them playing on the same field.

Allie Arcese:

On the same team.

Rachel Rotunda:

And I do think, at least on the same field. And then I think we have seen them on the same team. It's been really certainly fulfilling on a personal level.

Allie Arcese:

That's great. So, our grant is ending, but that doesn't mean that these resources, this work is going away. Can you speak a little bit about what's next, Rachel?

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah, happy to. So, I know we've said this before, but as listeners have heard, at the start of our grant in this space, prison ed was really growing. We had just seen Pell restoration happen. So, this was kind of like a new program of sorts. As we've said, there was a lot to learn on both the financial aid and the prison ed side of the field. And so, Sydney gave us this grant, which is now coming to a close, as you mentioned, Allie. And through that grant, through having Sheila on board, we were able to get all the resources that Sheila talked about off the ground. So, we had fact sheets, we had webinars, we had the convenings. Sheila, as she mentioned, provided a tremendous amount of individualized technical assistance to schools. And so, where we are now, we have many programs that are up and running.

I feel like especially in the last year, there's really been this, well, we're always monitoring how many PEPs have been approved. And we have a lot of programs that are off the ground. So, because that has happened, it doesn't mean that NASFAA's work in this space is ending. We know there are still challenges that schools are working through. We know that they're still going to need support and ministering financial aid to students in carceral settings. But now that this PEP work is part of the kind of standard Title IV space, prison ed programs have been integrated into this sort of... Obviously, there are unique elements of it, but it is regular Title IV administration in many ways is what we've always said and I think we've continued to see that happen.

And so, now that that's kind of the space that we're in, NASFAA's work will be continuing in that way as we transition out of the grant. Our support of financial aid administrators working in the prison ed space will look similar to our general technical assistance. So, members can still submit questions through AskRegs. We'll really be supporting members who work specifically with this population in the same way that we support members working with any other student population. And that was always the plan. That was always the goal. We knew we needed-

Allie Arcese:

To integrate it.

Rachel Rotunda:

... to integrate it, exactly. In that, Sheila has done a really intentional job over the last... particularly like the last year in making that happen, working really closely with our training and regulatory assistance team. I always chuckled at myself because Sheila sits on NASFAA's policy team. But I feel like she's become like this honorary member of the TRA team, because so much of her work is in the technical space. So, that integration I think has always really been the goal and that's the direction that we're heading. So, I guess in short, we did a lot of work to get things off the ground. And now that we're largely through this period of intense transition and growth, our work will continue as part of the typical channels of support and resources that we're providing to all NASFAA members.

So, that's kind of the short of it. We're excited to see where it goes. And I promised Sheila that we would be light on this, but I just can't tell you how I think impactful the work has been. We really would not have this body of resources if it weren't for Sheila. And so, I think we have this great foundation now that members can tap into and will have access to, and also will be places that our TRA team can point members to. So, that's where we are. And I was laughing, Sheila, when you were talking earlier about the program first became available in 2022, but there weren't that many programs off the ground. I was laughing to myself because I'm pretty sure that we had this grant. I can't remember the exact dates, but we had like an initial grant from mid 2022 to the end of '24.

Allie Arcese:

And then it got extended.

Rachel Rotunda:

And then we were like, whoa, this is going to take a lot longer because we're doing all these SAFSA simplification changes also that Sheila talked about. And so, Sheila, like I said early, probably regrets picking up the phone when I called her.

Allie Arcese:

But we're so glad you did.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yes. What was supposed to be maybe an 18 month period of intense transition, I really swelled into three years or so. But I mean, Sheila, I would love your thoughts on this. I do really feel like the field feels in a much more stable place now than it did a year ago.

Sheila Meiman:

Infinitely. Infinitely. And I think it's student voices, alumni voices from these programs are much stronger in the field. Now, I think we're starting to see an awful lot of state coalitions and regional coalitions form between the colleges, which is enormous in bringing this work on in a collaborative, not competitive fashion between colleges. I think we've seen a lot of other sister organizations of ours that have started to work in this space and integrate it also. So, the field is a much more stable place than it was a couple years ago.

Allie Arcese:

One more question for you, Sheila, as we close things out here. And it's a two part question. What are you most optimistic about right now with this work? And then if there was one thing that our listeners were to take away from this conversation, what would you want that to be?

Sheila Meiman:

First of all, the regional and state consortia are making me feel very optimistic, because one thing I encourage colleges to do when they come and say, "Can you help me figure out how to start," is let's look in your area. Is there a college that's sort of like you? If you're a community college, is there another community college already doing this? Why don't you hang out and learn from each other? And that's becoming much more formalized in the country. I think the other thing that I'm happy about are the ties, the rich discussions that are happening about the ties between education and employment, which again leads to conversations about best interest.

And I think that's a very encouraging thing. I think one takeaway, if your school is not doing this, they ought to think about trying it. Connect to one of those state or regional consortium that are doing it. Talk to the schools that are doing it. See where you could fit with your academic offerings in that space.

Allie Arcese:

No harm in being curious, right? Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Sheila, one, for joining us on the podcast, but just for all the work that you've done over the last few years. And while we're really sad to see you go, you have a well deserved and hopefully really fun-filled and adventure-filled retirement ahead of you and we'll really miss you.

Sheila Meiman:

I will miss everyone here. This is one of the most welcoming and most brilliant organizations I've ever seen.

Allie Arcese:

Thank you. Well, thanks, everyone, for listening. And if you have any questions, comments, feedback, feel free to send that along. And any well wishes for Sheila, we'll be sure to pass those along as well and we will see you next time.