



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

Release Date: February 28, 2022

Episode Title: 13 - Dr. Slandie Dieujuste

Summary: We chat with Dr. Slandie Dieujuste, Vice President for Student Affairs at Springfield College.

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B E G I N T R A N S C R I P T

Stuart Brown: Welcome to Student affairs One thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shaped your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. On our pages, we have the most cost effective job posting board, listing hundreds of open student services positions, a wide range of webinars and a virtual exhibit hall.

I am very pleased to have Dr. Slandie Dieujuste, Vice President for Student Affairs at Springfield College. She was previously the Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Dean of Students at Massasoit Community College and was the Associate Vice Provost for Residents and Greek Life at Illinois Institute of Technology, among other positions. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Thank you, Stu.

Stuart Brown: So, Slandie. What is your one thing?

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Well, my one thing was coming to the realization and accepting the fact that me holding a leadership position or occupying a certain space is proof enough that I belong there. It was coming to terms and rejecting the notion and desire that I have to continuously prove my competence or my worthiness. You know, oftentimes I'm around the decision making table and there aren't a lot of people that look like me. I'm a woman. I'm a person of color, Haitian immigrant who speaks with a slight accent. I look younger than I am. You know, I come from a low income family, first in my family to have gone to college. And so there are a set of assumptions that are sometimes made about my leadership skills and who I am and so I had to learn, and I continually continue to learn, this lesson that the fact that I am in a space is proof enough that I belong there.

Stuart Brown: Did you come to this realization from some incident in your past or is it just something that has evolved over time?

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Oh, there was a specific incident, believe it or not. I keep going back to this every time that I need to. As you know I was a student at Boston College, I received my undergraduate and my master's from BC and my PhD was from somewhere else. But as a first year student at BC, like many other students, I struggled with my identity as an immigrant. And so my first semester at BC there was an incident that occurred on campus, a racial incident. We had elected for the first time an African-American male, I think his name was Alvin, to be the student body president. And soon thereafter Alvin received some you know racist emails and graffiti. And there was a huge outcry on campus. A lot of people talking about the incidents. A lot of students were upset and felt that the administration was not doing enough and I was a work study student. This is my first semester at BC and I went to work and in that office there were a number of students talking and staff and I didn't say anything. I was just listening and the program director turned to me and said Slandie, What do you think? Well, that was an easy question for me because I just pulled from my mind and my experience what I've always done in those situations. And I looked at him and I said, 'Well I'm going to do my very best. I'm going to work really hard to prove that I belong at BC just like anybody else.'

And I have never forgotten his answer. He looked at me and he said Slandie, you don't have to prove anything to anybody. The fact that you're here is proof enough that you belong. And I have never forgotten that conversation. In fact, three years ago I looked him up and I said hey do you remember this conversation? And

he said I do and I said you have no idea what you've done for me because not only have I used that in graduate school but I continue to use it throughout my career.

Stuart Brown: Was there a time in your professional career where there was an incident or let's say an episode that you had to face that self competency question again sort of at a different level than when you were an undergraduate?

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Oh, absolutely. It happens every time I moved to another position. Not only do you have to contend with the fact that it's a new institution and you're meeting new people. But I also have to contend with the fact that this is all of me, my identity right and have to combat the desire to feel that I need to prove that I was the right candidate. It comes up every single time that I moved to a new position. It takes some time.

Stuart Brown: Was there a specific episode?

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: I can't recall a single episode since that episode I had at Boston College. It's just something that I go through each time that I transition. But there have been times, maybe it's a presentation or training that I have to lead. Maybe it's a task that I have to lead that I sometimes you, no doubt, that I'm able to do it. Or maybe it's something that someone says sometimes and I've had this happen to me to so many times. I would walk into a room with a staff member and people would assume that they're my supervisor and not the other way around. And so, you know, you have these moments over and over again and some people would describe them as micro aggression that you have to keep pushing through.

Stuart Brown: What would you say to graduate students, new professionals in the field with what you went through and what would be, in a sense ,your conversation that you would have with them that you had with that supervisor so many years ago.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Well, you know, and that's the conversation I have now with staff, with students is really the reminder that you are more than enough. That really is what it boils down to, that we have to resist the temptation to allow people to put us in a box that we can't do certain things just because of our experiences or identity. I encourage my students and my staff, particularly new professionals, to believe in themselves. That they were hired for a reason, that they're at the institution for a reason and that we believe in them. I find that to be very, very powerful, especially for first year students who oftentimes struggle with aspects of their identity, trying to find belongingness, especially in this age of pandemic when we are so disconnected.

Stuart Brown: And I imagine that is not always something that is easy for anyone, whether you're a first semester student, whether you're a staff member to really feel comfortable that you can say that to yourself.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Oh, yeah, no, absolutely, absolutely not. It's something that you shy away from, you don't think about, you know, it's there, but it's something you've learned to live with. But I always find that and the people who have had the most impact on my life have been the people who have noticed things and have entered into conversations with me and allowed me to pull those things out of me and that's what I try to do. I try to notice, I notice people, I noticed students, I noticed struggles, I notice shyness, I noticed talent and I say something about it and have conversations with people about it.

Stuart Brown: So I'm taking two things from your one thing. I like that, that you notice students because students don't think people notice them and going back to that first semester that your supervisor noticed you and instilled some confidence in you that I think we don't always think about when we're working with students that that one little sentence or something here, you are remembering that and that is part of maybe a guiding force all these years later. So I think when we're working with students, we have to realize that we do have an effect and that it is something we should notice students and not just take them for granted as their a work study student or they're in a class, but to really reach out to them.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Yeah, no, absolutely. Everyone, especially students are looking to be seen, They want to be seen and they want to be understood and they want to be accepted and celebrated and that's essentially what we do in student affairs or in the academy. And so I do make a point to do that.

Stuart Brown: Slandie, thank you so much for sharing your one thing. I think this is very important because it's very easy to not recognize students, not to notice, not to say we have very busy lives and sometimes, we just don't do the simple things that can stay with a student for a very, very long time.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Right? No, absolutely. And here's the hard thing about the work that we do, right? We oftentimes don't get the thank you for students. That individual at BC had no idea how impactful that was until I reached out to him years later. And so we pour into students and we don't sometimes see the result, but I have faith that whatever seed that I planted actually will grow and sometimes the student doesn't know the impact that you have on their lives until much later and then they don't have the opportunity to say thank you. So extremely important, the work that we do. I continue to plant those seeds and will continue to do that for the rest of my life.

Stuart Brown: Slandie, and I want to say thank you.

Dr. Slandie Dieujuste: Thank you.

Stuart Brown: I've been speaking with Dr. Slandie Dieujuste, Vice President for Student Affairs at Springfield College.

You have been listening to the Student Affairs One thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - What is one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I've been your host, Stuart Brown, the founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing.

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