



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Central Michigan University.

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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. Shawna Patterson-Stevens, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Central Michigan University. Dr Patterson-Stevens was previously an Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and Director of the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She has also held leadership positions at the University of Pennsylvania and Williams College. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: Thank you for having me. I'm happy to be here.

Stuart Brown: So, Shauna, what is your one thing?

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: My one thing is actually making sure that you have a very broad and supportive network and I, as a person of color, have been socialized over the years to understand that you can network with people in authentic and engaged ways. It doesn't have to be cringey. It doesn't have to be this experience where it's a quid pro quo encounter like you can actually develop relationships that are real and genuine with folks and that's something that I've really focused on over the years. I have not gone this far without help. I haven't gone this far without my mentors, without my sister scholars, without entities like the Pan African Network in ACPA or the SIG for the research focus on Black Studies or issues in AERA. There are a variety of different avenues for community building and coalition building in higher education. And if it again wasn't for my friends, my family that I've built or created or have been able to surround myself with over the years in higher education, I wouldn't have gained as much insight. I wouldn't have sculpted the skills I have developed. I wouldn't have moved in the directions that made sense for my career and for my ability to make change, if it weren't for the network I built.

Stuart Brown: Was there a time where you started, maybe earlier in your career that you were thinking about this or did someone say to you, let's say a mentor, that started you on that road to developing that network or was this something that kind of evolved organically amongst your experiences?

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: I think organic is the keyword. I mean I'm a woman of faith and so I don't believe things are just happenstance. I do believe that I'm put in situations that work in the best interests of myself and my community and I would say that I've been led into those relationships. It's not something that I immediately thought to do on my own. And honestly if I were just left to my own devices, I would be a complete disaster. So, you know, if it wasn't for some, I would say divine intervention, but also, you know, learning over the years, again that it takes a village, I've always leaned into that. And I've always thought, you know, I need to be reflective. I need to figure out ways to ensure that I'm being thoughtful on my approach. It's been because of those reasons that I've been able to establish the relationships I've developed over the years. I've been sculpted by some mentors of course and polished as well. But, you know, it's something that kind of did just happen organically over time, but I don't think it was without intention.

Stuart Brown: You mentioned a number of resources that you're involved in that helped you. How did you find out about those to help you, again, create this environment that, that you can flourish in.

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: I'm very observant in terms of my learning. And so a small example would be, you know, in my graduate program at Michigan State University, my colleague and my cohort member, Mark Johnson, he was going to conferences in undergrad and I didn't even know what the associations were in grad school, right? And it's not that our professors weren't talking about it. I just wasn't paying attention. It was going over my head and in class one day he was wearing the tote bag that he got from NASPA and I looked at the bag and I googled it later. So like when I would see certain things, certain signaling that folks around me, we're offering either intentionally or unintentionally. I would pay attention to that and I look into it later. Also, again, had some really good mentors that have been very explicit about different offerings as well. So one would be Dr. Camifer Trent Jones. She's very involved in the academy. She's the one that connected me with Sisters of the Academy, as a co founder, but also someone that understood that I need to have an interdisciplinary lens when it comes to research and scholarship. So it's been a combination of folks putting it squarely in my face because I have grown to learn how to read between the lines over the years. But early in my career I was very black and white in my thinking and I needed people to be very explicit with me about certain things, but I wouldn't notice things and I had researched them too.

Stuart Brown: But I think that's really important for listeners to the podcast, especially grad students, new professionals, that when you look at what is out there, especially within the associations. And we all know there are many associations, there's the umbrella organizations, ACPA, NASPA, but there are also specific ones for advising, orientation, whatever is to look to those because they do have so many resource, so many knowledge committees, so many SIGs that people can tap into and maybe they don't tap into but that like it seems with you, it really helped move your career forward.

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: Well those are also the places that then share additional resources right? Like it's snowball effect. So if it wasn't for the SIG that I'm involved in AERA, I wouldn't have known about the Hilliard Sizemore Fellowship. If it wasn't for CEP at ASH, I wouldn't have learned about the mentoring collective and I wouldn't have gained a mentor and friend to it. So all of those things came to fore. But it was because of those initial steps into, oh let me check out ACPA and see what they're about. Oh there's the Pan African Network. Let me see what they're about. You know I guess I was really curious and willing to throw myself and throw myself into uncomfortable situations. I'm painfully shy, but you know willing to explore and gather more information in those ways. There is a snowballing that does occur when we start to baby step our ways into those resources.

Stuart Brown: And I think, also just as a practical point of view, the more you get involved in those the more people know about you and as people start looking for other positions, they remember you from this committee, from that network you're now in more of a known quantity as opposed to someone who's just appearing on a piece of paper with all these attributes.

Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens: I will say, so when we get involved in these, I'll say maybe extracurricular professional development opportunities, the way that you show up does matter. So if you do volunteer for something, like follow up, follow through because to your point you never know when an opportunity will be made available. An instance is you know, my ability to teach at an institution. Gavin Henning saw my productivity in ACPA. I wanted to teach. I and he happened to reach out to me and offer me a beautiful opportunity to teach Inclusive Excellence in Higher Education at his institution. So I do think that in addition to acquiring new knowledge and resources to hone your skill sets, you do then receive professional opportunities as well that you wouldn't have realized had not been for those, the way that you chose to show up in those spaces too.

Stuart Brown: Shauna thank you so much for your one thing. I think this is so important for individuals, especially starting off in the field because we get so...people can get so wrapped up in the day-to-day. Well I have to do this. I have no time. That's always the excuse. Well I don't have time. You need to make the time because of everything you just said.

I've been speaking with Dr. Shawna Patterson-Stevens, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at Central Michigan University. You've 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 developer 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 Student Affairs One Thing.

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