



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

Release Date: November 21, 2022

Episode Title: 27. Dr. Elizabeth Thomson

Summary: We chat with Dr. Elizabeth Thomson, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs / Director, Equity, Diversity & Intercultural Programs at the University of Minnesota Morris.

» studentaffairs.com/podcast/onething

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 shape your professional career. I'm your host Stuart Brown, the developer 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 and a wide range of webinars.

On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Elizabeth Thomson, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Director of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Intercultural Programs at the University of Minnesota Morris. Welcome to the program.

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: Thanks for having me.

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

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: My one thing is disability justice. So disability justice, one of the principles of disability justice, which is intersectionality and how that connects to my life.

Stuart Brown: Can you give a description for listeners that might not understand what that means?

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: Intersectionality also comes from legal, black scholar, feminist, Kimberly Crenshaw and it's really acknowledging and recognizing the power differences and the connections when someone has intersecting identities. And so originally it connected with race, ethnicity, and gender. And now it's been expanded towards additional identities such as, but not limited to, disability, immigrant status, sexual orientation.

Stuart Brown: Is there a story behind this being your one thing?

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: I did my undergraduate at a private liberal arts college north of Chicago and the experiences that I had then after, which then was in Chicago predominantly in the Rogers park area, which is very diverse in a variety of different ways. And so although I had already had my identity development, I'd say pretty solidly around being a Vietnamese adoptee and also a feminists, being in Chicago really got me introduced to more of the diverse Asian American-Pacific Islander communities as well as the broader L G B T Q I A + communities. And so I was also then working at the gender and sexuality center at the University of Illinois at Chicago and I was really steeped in the diverse L G B T Q I A + communities. And then I got introduced more to the Asian American-Pacific Islander communities also on the national front. So in short, there was a time that then many of my communities collided and I got to know folks who were both queer and Asian American-Pacific Islander. They were both Asian American-Pacific Islander and disabled. And so while I felt really good and comfortable and affirmed when I was in a predominant space like the queer community or I was in a predominant space in the Asian American-Pacific Islander community or the disabled community, the times that I know that I really flourished and thrived as a person.

And then also then my work in student affairs was when I was connected and surrounded by the community of queer Asian American-Pacific Islander and also disabled. And so I found that through working with the national queer Asian American-Pacific Islander alliance and then also a number of disabled communities as well in Chicago.

Stuart Brown: What would you recommend to individuals listening to the podcast that are thinking, you know, I share a lot of what Liz is talking about, but either in my area of the country, sort of geography, I don't know how to connect, I don't know how to do what she did. So what could you recommend for those people?

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: Yeah, that's a great question. Because now as I'm in rural central Western Minnesota, working at the University of Minnesota Morris campus, that's hard and that's actually a reality for myself. So I would recommend that one, write it on a post it note, make a poster or do something, but just remind yourself that you are not alone. You have community, even if physically or on your campus or in your small town, you think that you might be the only one. For me, being in central western Minnesota, and while I do, I have really great colleagues, I do have some also great allies. I also have found a few people that also share at least one, if not sometimes two, of my identities, but it's still really lonely and it's really isolating in 2022. You know, I'm privileged to have really great access to the internet and I probably increased my social media viewing and connecting definitely in the past two years. But for sure in the past, I'd say five years after I left Chicago.

Stuart Brown: I would imagine individuals could tap into the various professional associations. They might not always be the answer, but at least people can start out with the major associations, let's say the generalist ones, ACPA, NASPA, but there are a lot of, you know, there's AHEAD for the disability community and they have knowledge groups and that you can really get yourself involved, but people have to do is make the effort. No one's gonna knock on their door and say well here's a group to go into here. Here's a group but they have to sort of reach out and like you said with the internet it's very easy to search out groups.

Dr. Elizabeth Thomson: Yeah absolutely, Stu. I'm pretty involved in, I'd say mostly NASPA and then also ACPA, as well as AHEAD and then the other group too that I've really been pleasantly surprised at just connecting because I'm not directly in campus activities anymore, although that was where I kind of got my start in student affairs, is the ACUI. And so I would say yeah with those different knowledge and practice communities, the different SIGS or employment resource groups that might be on your campus that I honestly, sometimes I have to decide and choose. Am I going to the disabled employee union or am I going to the Asian American-Pacific Islander group. So you know, capacity and just kind of emotional effort and like you said motivation, like I can't go to them all. And so I would also, you know, so the groups that I'm able to go to, we have our mission and purpose and we, you know we do center our issues and concerns as well as we need to make time to also reach out to the other groups. And so that's also one of the principles of disability justice is collective access and collective liberation. And so absolutely, you know, within AHEAD our racial justice group and then our disability studies group and our queer group and we are also so much stronger together when we can come together and do that reception or come together and go out for that coffee break together because I have to say, I mean some of the younger professionals they're looking for already that intersectionality and they don't want to choose between having to go to one group and not the other. They want to see that solidarity and ally ship between the professional organizations and and professional groups,

Stuart Brown: Liz, thank you for sharing your one thing. I think this is so important, especially as we talk about community with COVID isolating us for so many years—we can say that plural—that people are looking to connect and there are communities out there. Sometimes it just takes a little effort to see what is out there.

You have been listening 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 shape your professional career? I want to thank today's guest, Dr. Elizabeth Thomson, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Director of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Intercultural Programs at the University of Minnesota Morris. 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'll join us next time for another episode.

E N D T R A N S C R I P T