

Going There Episode 1: Minions and Microaggressions

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A Lake Superior College podcast exploring campus mindfulness, equity, and community with Tara McCoy and Steve Dalager.

In this episode, Tara and Steve interview students Dustin Blacketter and Cheyanne Warner about finding community on campus. and whether LSC is indeed "Our Community's College" as the tag-line suggests.

Cheyanne - I'm not gonna go there, I'm not gonna go there.

Dustin - It's just like a club that I'm just...I just don't have access to.

Dan - I went there because there was free spaghetti.

Sunhee - It's like, some people say you're a like spy. She told me, like straight to my face.

Steve - Welcome to the Lake Superior College podcast called

Tara - Going There

Steve - focusing on equity and mindfulness. I'm Steve Dalager. I've been an English instructor at Lake Superior College for 19 years.

Tara - And I'm Tara McCoy. I'm actually in my first semester teaching psychology here.

Steve - First semester...

Tara - Yeah

Steve - Welcome to LSC!

Tara - Thanks Steve, I'm super glad to be here, and I wanna mention before we continue, we should probably tell our listeners where we are exactly since Lake Superior is pretty big.

Steve - We're in Duluth, Minnesota, on top of a hill overlooking the lake.

Tara - We call it a lake, but it looks more like an ocean but it's quite nice.

Steve - The school's pretty good too. Solid programs like nursing, and integrated manufacturing, and new ones, like, get this; eco entrepreneurship.

Tara - How do you spell that?

Steve - Uh. let's just move on. Smart folks come here to work through their first two years of school before they transfer to a university or enter a career. Students learn a lot and save a boat-load of money. We really are our community's college. You know, just the other day...

Tara - Wait, wait! Steve let's take a step back. I'm new here, as are our listeners, so maybe we can talk about what you mean by "Our Community's College."

Steve - Well, huh. Yeah. Good question.

Tara - Thanks! Lake Superior College became a consolidated community and technical college in 1995. And ever since then, we've been working to provide a quality education at an affordable price. We train students to enter the workforce, or transfer successfully to four-year colleges. But that's not enough. We want students to feel like they're a part of something. A part of us. A part of our community. But what does community mean? And what does it mean to Lake Superior College? We needed to find out, and the answers, as you might imagine, aren't so simple. This is Episode One, and we're Going There.

Steve - We start this series by talking to students to find out how they define community. First up, Dustin, and a little bit later in the episode we'll talk to Cheyanne.

Tara - We began with Dustin Blacketter. He's a returning adult student and today, he starts by telling us a little bit about himself.

Dustin - I'm from the Fond du Lac Reservation. This is my fifth and final semester at LSC

Tara - And his favorite ice cream is?

Dustin - Tin roof sundae. I refer to myself as Anishinaabe. It's the term that we refer to ourselves as we are the Anishinaabeg people. Anishinaabeg, with a G is plural and it means original man.

Steve - in the native language.

Tara - Oh! So it's not like a particular tribe or reservation. It's like the language saying the original people, Anishinaabwe.

Dustin - Yes, AnishinaaBEG.

Tara - Anishinaabeg.

Steve - It so happens that Dustin has a visible tattoo on his neck.

Tara - What's on your neck?

Dustin - Oh, this? This is Ogichidaa. Well, there are two translations that I know of, and the modern day translation, or the interpretation is, is a warrior. And the old translation, the way that I was taught, it means big-heart person. The big-heart people, the Ogichidaa, would be the first to sacrifice their lives for the tribes if they were under attack or in any danger and, uh, because they love their people so much, their hearts were so big for their people that they would just, you know, lay down their lives.

Tara - Now Dustin transitions to a discussion about the Duluth community, and as you'll hear, it hasn't all been so great.

Dustin - For me being here, it's been a, it's been a really good experience because, I don't know, being out in the community, I get a lot of dirty looks. I think a lot of people look at me like I don't belong in certain places. Like I go to the coffee shop and people kinda look at me different, you know? Like, they'll be having their conversation and smiling, and then they see me and like the look on their face just changes to something that's, that's, I don't know what it is, but that always hurts me, you know. We learned in one of my classes about micro aggressions. That's something that I've been thinking about a lot now that I have a term to put to it. Going around Duluth, I'm more of an outcast there. I get a lot

of, like, weird looks from people, you know, when I go into stores, or... It takes a while to break that ice or that first initial, first impression that you make with people, uh, based on appearances. You know, it's so powerful when you see somebody, and you're like, okay well, this is what they look like, this is what they're like. But I guess a good thing about that is that it's really taught me how to override that in myself. You know, those first impressions when you see somebody, they're not like what they look like. The way they look doesn't really mean anything. But I go into the coffee shops and people just, are not happy to see me, you know, like I don't get the same kindness, the smiles that other people get. It's not easy, I guess, you know? It's just like a club that I'm just, I just don't have access to.

Tara - Dustin has found community at Lake Superior College, if you can believe it, studying statistics.

Dustin - Well like I said earlier, being at LSC has really kind of opened some doors for me back home in the community because a lot of the people from Duluth go to this college. And then they see me here, they see me out in the community and it, and I think it makes a difference in the way they perceive me as a person. Being at LSC has kinda given me access to kindness in a way because people see me at school so they know that maybe regardless of how I look - you know, I have a tattoo on my neck, I have scars, you know - regardless of how I look, you know, I'm doing something with my life and they show me kindness. I see a lot of people from LSC in the community and when they see me now, it's not this look on their face of, I don't know, like. I don't know what that negative look is initially, but, but it's a smile instead. And for me that's really something that has really made me feel included, and it means a lot to me. I really, I really love this school. Me, I'm kind of an outcast, I don't have a lot of, a lot of friends either, at school. My, my focus is homework. Then you come here and you focus on your homework and make sure that you do decent in your classes, and outside of here, you know I work and I have a kid that I chase around some of the time, and I don't really have a lot of time for friends, but the people I tend to vibe most with are like the nerdy people, or the other outcasts. They are interested in sociology and the way society works, and social justice and I really vibe with those people. And people who are interested in the mind as well, and reading books. I read a lot of nerdy books.

Dan - What's, what's your nerdiest book that you ever read?

Dustin - I read the *The Wheel of Time* series.

Dan - Oh, that's my favorite series.

Dustin - And it was uh, 14 books. Each book is like a thousand pages, and when it ended I, I was sad. I was truly sad.

Tara - Incidentally, before recording this conversation we witnessed Dustin reuniting with another student who he clearly shared community with.

Dustin - The, the woman that you saw me, you know, embrace, we took statistics together.

Dan - That's a bonding experience

Dustin - And, and it was so. It was so stressful, and so difficult of a class, like I didn't understand it, and we spent so many hours together, like, working together. Man, I think, 38 quizzes. And you know, assignments, and Excel, and a book that we were supposed to read that was online, and I was, I was literally so stressed out at the end of the last semester that I started to have like these dizzy spells. And Sonja was, was there through the whole time, like she was in the same boat as me and we worked together and we both passed the class with an A. Sonja is one of my, I would consider her a good friend. So I don't really have, you know, I'm not part of any groups or clubs, but uh, a time where I felt really part of a community, and I still feel part of this community is in the math lab. They all know me up there and every time they see me, they get really, you know, like they're excited to see me. They're just a great group of people up there and they really make me feel included up there.

Steve - The math community in the Learning Centers, specifically, right?

Dustin - Yeah

Steve - Is there a math community outside of the Math Lab in the Learning Center?

Dustin - No, it's just those guys up there. You know there's a few tutors up there who were with me throughout my whole journey in math. Every semester I had a math class, I think it was three in a row I was in there after every math class. I did my homework and to learn, so they got to know me pretty well. I brought them gift from, from France?

Dan - Cool! Was it cheese?

Dustin - No, they were like these bracelets that...they have these little markets at this little port city in the South of France, and there was a lady who was making these bracelets so I brought them back a bracelet.

Tara - But his statistics course and Math Lab aren't the only places Dustin has found community.

Dustin - There was one class that I was in - it was a sociology class. Her name is Professor Severson - she had this really cool exercise related to gender dynamics and what we were supposed to do is we were supposed to form group between three and five people and then go to a big box store and we were supposed to take pictures of, you know, the gender norms. Like gender toys for babies, and how and when does it start? Different clothes, like what were they marketing to these different boys and girls. And we had to meet up outside of class, and it was worth a huge chunk of our grade. If you didn't go, you would've at least lost a letter grade. That was a really interesting. I thought that was good experience to go out and work with a team, and I didn't really form any connections, but there were definitely people in the class who I made connections with, and if we had been a part of a group, you know, it would've even made our connections stronger. And so, Field Exercises, I think make...you have to show up, you know, take a selfie with everyone in the picture, so if someone isn't there you don't get credit.

Tara - Dustin has had positive experiences at LSC outside of his academics. Take Halloween, for example.

Steve - So tell us about that experience attending that event.

Dustin - It was really interesting. First of all, you know I love Halloween. I just feel like it's such a magical time of year. I always have, since I was a kid. And then, the girl

who was hosting karaoke is in my yoga course, and she had mentioned the Thursday before the Halloween party, or maybe it was Tuesday. She mentioned Tuesday in class that she was doing a karaoke party, so I went and I wanted to see some people sing and she had actually sung a song by Evanescence. Which was really good, and she did a great job. "Wake Me Up," I think it's called.

Dan - Yeah, that's fun!

Dustin - I've always like that song. And then they were serving popcorn, like, I smelled the popcorn. I was looking for it, and then I finally found it. Okay, it was over in the last place I looked, which was actually in the atrium. There was a costume contest. Yeah, that was really fun. You know then just having people around and they had some like craft events. They were making little spider suckers for the kids, and carameled apples, and stuff like that, so. It's interesting and fun to have music.

Steve - So you went there by yourself?

Dustin - I did.

Steve - And when you were there you interacted with some people, but did you feel community?

Dustin - Yeah, I did. I did feel community. There was a lady who works in the Student Life office. I can't remember if it's Heather, but she's always so nice. Like, any time you see her, she's like "Hey!" Like always goes out of her way to say hello to me. I really appreciate that, so, I saw her down there. I saw my friend Leslie and we talked for a little bit, and headed to class after that, so. I did feel part of a community though. It was nice.

Tara - So Dustin, what are your future plans?

Dustin - When I go to my next college, I don't know if it's gonna be as good of an experience, but for now, I think it's great. I like LSC a lot.

Steve - We're leaving Dustin's experiences with community now, and on to Cheyanne. We'll have her explain who she is.

Cheyenne - I'm Cheyanne Jovana Warner, and I am a heterosexual female at LSC. Oh yeah, my life is quite an adventure. Yup.

Tara - Cheyanne's adventure brought her from Chicago to Duluth, and she'll discuss her experiences finding community.

Cheyenne - When I came to Duluth, I was in a culture shock. I would say that, to be honest. I had come from a high school with predominantly black kids, so then when I transferred here I was coming to a school with predominantly white kids. And that's a huge difference. Do I feel alone? Yeah, but I wouldn't say that has anything to do with Duluth's or LSC's community necessarily. I have felt alone for awhile, and, that comes from the actual things that I have gone through in my life. Which is homelessness, and just certain types of poverty. So, yeah, it was just my economic situation, I wasn't in a good one. Me and my mom, we were actually living with my grandmother and my auntie. She had gotten evicted on the South Side of Chicago, so then we moved in with my grandma, mother, and my auntie. We had to make a decision as to where we were gonna go. We went to our nearest emergency place, which is basically a hospital, and found out if we can find any shelter. I was there for about nine months, and then, in that nine months we were supposed to be getting a little bit of help from my uncle. My mother and him decided that they thought the best thing for us to do is to just leave the city and go ahead and be closer to him. We stayed with him for a little while, and then that was about a year total, and then we had gotten our own place.

Tara - Cheyanne's adventure brought her from Chicago to Duluth, and she'll discuss her experiences finding community.

Cheyenne - I hear that Duluth has a lot of small musical festivals. They even have, like movie-time for kids at the library. I've heard of a lot of things that Duluth does to create a sense of community. But, I would say in my experience, they do fall short only because of - I wouldn't say Duluth as a whole necessarily has a great sense of community just - I think the sort of activities or community organizations are made for a particular taste of people. I wouldn't say that it's made for everyone as a whole. Does that make sense?

Tara - Yeah, yeah. Though when you say a particular taste of people. What are the characteristics of that taste of people that you're referring to?

Cheyenne - If I could identify, I would say for instance, like the library movie-time, I would say a mother and her kids, but I'm not necessarily a mother with kids, so I wouldn't be going there that many times or very often. I went with my family, my mom, my uncle, my grandmother, my aunt, and my little cousin Gia. We went to the movie thing in the library and we were watching Minions. It was definitely an experience that changed my view about Duluth. I knew that they were pointing their community gathering toward a specific group of people which are kids, and I thought that was really special.

Tara - Cheyanne has also found personal community at a local resource center for young adults.

Cheyenne - I'm really connected to a youth shelter downtown named Life House. I've actually been going there a couple of times this year. More times than I have the five total years that I've been living in Duluth. They're actually a really great community. They help youth that are from a large range of ages, which I find really impressive. I believe the ages are 14 to 24, which is actually pretty wide when it comes to what you would consider to be youth. Life House helps students like me, and they make sure that we can, you know, we have people who will get us jobs. We have people who will actually get us food if we need it. We also have, like, a really great activity base. They've got things that they do every day for the youth. So they can come in, day or night, and I think there is also a shelter too, but I think it's a limited shelter, though, like for you to stay to sleep. I love being there. So, I really do identify with Life House.

Tara - Okay. You said for people like me, what do you mean by that?

Cheyenne - Yeah, Life House is a place where, if you're down and out with, like money wise, or food wise, too. I've actually should've been seeing them sooner. I just really didn't realize they were helping kids my age. I was thinking I was too old to be going there. That's what I thought. I thought it was like 14, 18, or

something like that. Right out of high school, I'm like, I'm not gonna go there. I'm not gonna go there because I'm too old, but then I realized, no, they're actually helping adults who are to the age of 24 and I'm 21. So that made a lot of sense.

Tara - Yeah, that's awesome.

Cheyenne - I would say one way they connect with my school life is, the advisor that I was talking to from Life House, she would actually ask me how my schedule was doing at school. So, when it came to asking her about getting a second job, she made sure she took into account everything that I was doing. My schedule with work and my schedule with school. She would actually tell me things that she had learned from being in school, and advised that I don't get a second job. So, I would say that is a good connection - her finding out about my schedule, and, you know, using her professional opinion to help me stay in school and to help with my studies. Making sure that I'm not overworking myself.

Tara - Cheyanne has also found community at LSC.

Cheyenne - When I came to LSC, I felt a little less alone. I felt a little less alone. I felt like, so many people are open to your diversity, or willing to communicate with you about your diversity that I wasn't looked over or invisible, you know. It was a little bit of a change going to LSC as a college and coming from Denfeld as a high school.

Tara - Like Dustin in the math lab, Cheyanne has found community at LSC's Learning Center.

Cheyenne - When it comes to the Learning Center, it's gonna be your best place to be, especially when you're trying to do your studies. You don't necessarily, like I said, have to get taught or get tutored every time you're in there. You could just be in there to focus. If you're a student like me, who is staying at home with parents, and you're not necessarily comfortable in your room all isolated, by yourself, you can go to the Learning Center and that's a good place for you to vibe with other people, which is something that I really appreciate while I'm in there. So if I'm comparing the way Life House is to me, and how LSC helps, I've got advisors on both scales at Life House, and here at LSC. When I need the help, I can find the help here.

Tara - What classes do you normally go to the Learning Center for?

Cheyenne - I go for any writing class that I have, so English. Right now I'm doing Interpersonal Communication. You don't necessarily have to get taught or tutored you know, 24/7 when you're in there. You can just be in there to focus. The Learning Center is also good because you have peer tutors, and peer tutors. I believe that's a very significant thing when it comes to LSC, because peer tutors are actually doing courses with you, so therefore they are your most recent resource, and that can become really important when it comes to you actually going through the whole college experience. You wanna have somebody there that you can talk to who's doing it with you. It's a little bit different than someone who's already graduated.

Tara - Do you have any experiences or moments in your time here where you felt like you were part of the LSC community?

Cheyenne - I guess I can say, this summer when we went on a hike outside, across campus, in the woods. It was actually pretty fun. I felt like I was a part of something really private, which was nice because I do get a really good private feel from LSC, which I'm saying in a positive light. Being out there in the woods with Steve and the other students was actually very fun. I think it would've been my first experience where I felt like I was a part of something that I can work together with a couple people with.

Tara - Cheyanne, so, why do you think college students need the type of support and community that you've been talking about?

Cheyenne - I think there's a stigma that goes on around, especially college campuses or the community or society as a whole that, after you're out of high school you are basically an adult. Which is not true. Not really, at all. That time between 18 years old and 24 is actually pretty important for your entire life. You got a lot to figure out. It's kinda like being dropped into the world all by yourself for the first time.

Tara - Great. So, Cheyanne, what can LSC offer to students who have been, as you say, dropped into the world?

Cheyenne - The community here is really good when it comes to opportunities. I've seen a whole lot of opportunities that I can continue to reach out to, like, there's a Christian ministry, there's also guitar lessons, you can also join the choir if you want to. All of the fliers and the attention that LSC tries to point out to you gives you so many opportunities for your future. And I think that's a really good thing, because even if I'm not doing it right now I still have the opportunity to do it in my future, and I think that's really good.

Tara - So Steve. we just finished listening to Dustin and Cheyanne's stories or their experiences of community at LSC and the Duluth community. You've lived here longer than I have, how do you relate to some of the stories they've talked about?

Steve - Well, when I think about the fact that they have found some community, it strikes me that it's happened in sort of random ways. Like, they've fortunately both found some community - they both describe themselves as loners - and they have found some community, but it isn't really intentional on LSC's part.

Tara - Yeah, they've sort of found it either randomly within a classroom through peer connections or at the Learning Center.

Steve - Obviously the Learning Center is an intentional place where students can go to find community, but how many students actually go there? We just happened to find two that do.

Tara - That's true. Well, I one of the things that I liked was that Cheyanne and Dustin come from very different backgrounds and are at different ages and stages of their lives and yet they both found a similar sense of community that kinda speaks to the variety that the Learning Center seems to offer.

Steve - They are also people who seek community, so for students who seek community, they'll find community. I wonder a little bit about those students who don't seek community, whether they're finding any community. But anyway, that may be something that

we will discover in Episode Two. So in Episode Two, we're gonna be talking with Dan and Sun-hee.

Tara - Sunhee.

Steve - Sunhee! Sunhee, yes. I'm practicing.

Tara - And then we're going to wrap it all together, right? With everybody.

Steve - We sure are, and uh, we're going to figure all this out, aren't we?

Tara - We are

Steve - We're gonna have some concrete answers to this community question. See you later.

Tara - Bye, Steve.

Steve - You've been listening to *Going There*, a Lake Superior College podcast. Special thanks to puppet master, Kelly Hallsten-Erickson; prison breaker, Theresa Leopold; sound breaker, Brandon Leno; and finally to a Band Called Truman for rockin' the theme song. Mic drop.