

Faculty Feature
Interview with Dr. Jesse Stipek

00:00:00:07 - 00:00:27:24

Z:

Good afternoon and welcome to the inaugural year of the COE lecture series. My name is Z Nicolazzo and I am the interim associate dean of Faculty Affairs and professor of trans studies and education at the University of Arizona's College of Education. Before we move into the main portion of today's conversation with Doctor Stipek, I want to start by recognizing we are recording this session from the lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation, which are homelands of the Odem and Yaqui peoples.

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Z:

As a college, the College of Education continues to recognize and honor the native people, lands, waterways, and more than human relations with whom we live in what we now know as Tucson, Arizona. I also want to name that the University of Arizona continues to profit from land grabs of native land in Arizona and across the United States. For more information on this, I would encourage folks to read Robert Lee and Tristan Owens 2020 article in High Country Times titled Land Grab University.

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Z:

Additionally, I'd like to recognize a name that the work we do as faculty at the University of Arizona is situated in an institution of higher education that was built through and fueled by the labor of enslaved black peoples. Not only that, but as Christina Sharp's work reminds us, we are still living in the wake of chattel slavery, from which, as Diane Brand reminds us, there is no path back to the door of No return.

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Z:

Black students, faculty and staff continue to face anti-Black racism in higher education, and higher education continues to profit from its ongoing investments in the furtherance of such anti-Black racism. As a result, much of the work we do across the College of Education focuses on addressing and counteracting the effects of these deleterious forms of structural violence and oppression. Finally, I want to take a moment to thank the people at the University of Arizona who helped make this event possible today.

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Z:

A big thanks must go to Mike Griffith and his team, including Erica Lmuth and Jason Aragon, who organize and produce all of the digital content for the college. Thanks also to our Dean,

Regina Deil-Amen for supporting this lecture series. And of course, thanks to all the faculty participating in the series, especially Doctor Jesse Stipek who's being featured today.

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Z:

And speaking of Doctor Stipek will now move into introductions and the main portion of today's lecture series. So as I mentioned, at the top of today's session, will be featuring the work of Doctor Jesse Stipek, who's an assistant professor of practice in the department of Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies. Doctor Stipek received his PhD in Educational Policy studies and practice from the College of Education at the University of Arizona.

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Z:

He earned his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and his master's degree was awarded from the University of Arizona in Educational Leadership from the College of Education. Additionally, as an undergrad, he competed as a member of the University of Wisconsin-Madison swimming team. Doctor Stipek's professional experience includes eight years and as an assistant coach for the University of Arizona swimming and diving team.

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Z:

He has held positions in numerous levels of coaching and teaching, ranging from working with age groupers to NCAA champions and Olympic gold medalists in the College of Education. He has held roles of adjunct instructor, lecturer, and his current role as Assistant Professor of practice. Doctor Stipek's research and interests have focused on the necessity for new policies in relation to sexual assault within college athletics.

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Z:

He continues to be active in keeping up with topics related to title nine youth sports, the NCAA, and equity and equality within athletics. Doctor Stipek, thanks so much for participating in this lecture series and welcome.

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Jesse:

Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

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Z:

Yeah, glad to do it. I know we've had a lot of these conversations off camera, so it's nice to move them on camera.

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Jesse:

Certainly.

00:03:59:28 - 00:04:19:22

Z:

Yeah. So to start us off, can you talk me and our viewers through kind of a broad view of your work? Specifically, I'm wondering what kinds of interventions your work makes in the field of education and if it makes sense for you to extend that scope, the broader communities to which you're committed.

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Jesse:

Certainly. Yeah. Well, thanks so much for having me. And for that question as well. A little bit of background, you know, for myself specifically going from athletics and being involved with the athletic department and then into academia. It was important. It was something, you know, where I was when I was coaching, that was something I was passionate about, but also really enjoyed my courses and enjoyed being in the College of Education and taught a little bit.

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Jesse:

So I started teaching in the College of Art in 2017 while I was still finishing my degrees, and then transitioned full time into the College of Ed in 2021. And so I think a little bit about those interventions for myself, I really struggled personally after being an athlete and then finding something to kind of fill that void or something I was passionate about, and seeing a lot of just how when folks are done competing or have that, it's challenging to go into a different role.

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Jesse:

And so I've really looked at being able to maybe provide those opportunities that I wish were available to me as an athlete, and then transitioning into a different career or a different environment. And I think also, you know, with in general athletics are I don't want to say as much of a cornerstone as education in the United States, but it certainly has been, you know, such an aspect of socialization and, and that change.

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Jesse:

And we've seen, you know, children involved in the obviously positive aspects that can come from that. And so being able to look at those broader communities, you know, and working with just those socialization agents as we continue and as people continue to grow and and get into different levels, and so including those two passions and combining those things of interventions of athletics and academics has been something that is really important to me, but also something that has allowed me to kind of feel those passions as well, and being able to use those skills.

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Jesse:

I think in a different setting.

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Z:

Yeah. I can, I can see the NCAA commercial in my head. Right. Like only 2% of athletes go on to professional careers. So yeah I can appreciate kind of thinking about how you transition and how you move and also thinking about the various different levels of way that people experience sport and, and what that means moving forward for their life.

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Jesse:

Certainly. And I was far from that 2%, just to clarify.

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Z:

Well, you know, I, I think too, that, you know, it's helpful to not only get a sense of the bigger picture of your work, but also I'd love to teach with you or talk with you rather a little bit about, your teaching in the Sport and Recreation leadership program and your particular expertise around sexual assault and collegiate sporting cultures.

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Z:

So can you talk a little bit about how you were drawn to that focal area and really its lasting importance in today's landscape of college sport? Because clearly it's

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Z:

a huge issue and desperately needed to be focused on.

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Jesse:

Certainly. And I also did want to recognize that so many women have done this work and so, you know, for me to recognize my position in that aspect of that topic specifically. And so a little bit about it, you know, just a background with, initially title nine and the Clery Act, which was passed in 1990, just giving some context into that for, for so I mean, specifically, I didn't necessarily have those experiences growing up as much.

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Jesse:

It seemed like things were in a pretty similar spot with, men's and women's swimming specifically. And so as I continue to get, you know, into different levels of sport and then into, a Big Ten conference where, you know, obviously you have the revenue generating sports that are the ones that speaking of NCAA commercials, you have those folks on, right.

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Z:

Right.

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Jesse:

But for me, that then noticing those kind of power dynamics that I was seeing and how that transpired in college athletics specifically, and then also at different levels of the sport and seeing that was it was different. And so, you know, also, I think I was, you know, self admittedly unaware of things that were happening. And so as I continue to get into my education at the University of Arizona, you know, I had great instructors and mentors and, were able to kind of, you know, process on those topics.

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Jesse:

I was interested and, with that, when we have these discussions, you know, obviously want to make sure that students are comfortable and have an awareness that so there could be some trigger warnings. And it's a topic that sensitive to discuss. But I think just the importance of recognizing, you know, some of the statistics and one and for undergrad women experience sexual assault or misconduct on campus.

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Jesse:

And reasons for that and biggest perpetrators for that being, athletes and fraternities. And so just being aware of some of those traditional hyper masculine aspects and sports specifically being one of those that where it's been traditionally, you know, male dominated and that kind of culture. And so, you know, part of it as well for me was just looking at statistics.

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Jesse:

I've always been kind of someone who is a nerd, just looking at data in some respects, for lack of a better word. And so, you know, seeing just the low number of reports that are happening, I think it's been estimated by the Rain Institute that it's between 5 and 26 of folks who actually report it. A lot of those instances sometimes being due to it being, you know, a big athlete on campus and, you know, worried about some of the attention that would be drawn to them.

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Jesse:

And, you know, the PTSD that comes along from that. And so those are some things. And then also looking at some of just the interest in the rise in women's sports that we've seen, but also, you know, one of the drawbacks to title nine was then that a lot of women coaches were pushed out of those roles because, you know, then there was money to be made as well in those positions.

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Jesse:

And so seeing that and, looking at it from just the societal and historical, perspective, but media percentages as well, I think a lot of times we don't recognize that maybe a lack of the attention that women's sports get too, based on that, just how we value it has been drastically, you know, different, just for statistical purposes.

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Jesse:

It's around 80% of sport nowadays that have shown, you know, 0% of women's sports. And then those 20% that's due 1999 is about 9%. In 2009, it was closer to one or went down to 1.6. And then more recently it's been around 14%. So just seeing that and seeing that folks, you know, having access and we see the attention that's being put on it, but also part of it too is just looking at generationally.

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Jesse:

My students are always so surprised when we go over some dates, you know, of of when 1910, when women can wear pants.

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Z:

And then.

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Jesse:

You know, when women could vote in 1920 and then black women in 1965, and women could on a credit card in 1970. And so they get this perspective where then they're like, wait a minute, that could, you know, some of my family members might be an asset is. Yeah. Yeah. So I think those are things that are important to me with sport.

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Jesse:

You know, something that there's no question that positive benefits. But recognizing those spaces and allowing folks to make sure that they feel safe in those spaces.

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Z:

Yeah.

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Z:

Yeah. And it feels so important to address this particularly through sport, because whether you're at an institution with a large sporting culture like the U of A or at a school like my undergrad alma mater, which is a small D-3, like there's still a high prevalence of focus on sport and sporting culture. So it makes sense that just like we're thinking about sexual violence prevention across campus, that we would definitely be focusing on it within within sports, especially given what you're talking about in terms of statistics.

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Jesse:

Yeah, yeah.

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Z:

Yeah. And that conversation about coaching is like, I know it's a little ancillary to this, but it is interesting to think about, you know, regularly when I watch sporting events, I'll, I'll watch women's sports, especially women's college volleyball. I'm particularly fond of University of Wisconsin team. Right. And so I'm always interested in how many women are coaching these teams.

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Z:

Why might women not be coaching men's teams right.

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Jesse:

So,

00:12:44:11 - 00:12:44:24

Jesse:

yeah.

00:12:44:24 - 00:12:45:13

Z:

Yeah.

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Jesse:

Certainly. And they're, you know, percentage wise especially and and so by and power for a conference now I guess. Right. Very, very less it as they wear I mean I vice versa. It's the opposite.

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Z:

Yeah.

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Jesse:

You know we trust people who are most like us.

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Z:

Right.

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Jesse:

So it's interesting to see some of those statistics.

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Z:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, you know, I know the work that you do is not only intellectually rooted for you, but it's also based on your own life experiences. And I know that you had earlier said you

weren't part of the 2%, but I'll, I'll to your horn a little bit that you were not just a collegiate swimmer, you were an elite collegiate swimmer and you competed in the Olympic trials.

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Z:

Right. So, you know, we've talked to you and I about kind of the rapidly shifting landscape of college sports, especially how the nil transfer portal and the broader focus on capitalism has really had a seismic change for college athletes. What does this all mean for student learning and human development in college? I know that's a big question.

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Z:

But I'm curious what what influence that has on student learning from your perspective and, and what would you encourage educators to be attentive to as they engage with student athletes and and beyond the classroom?

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Jesse:

Yeah, certainly. That's a great question. All of these are great questions. So I think, you know, an aspect of that has been huge with and I nil most and recently the the conference realignment. And so you know for example Stanford and Cal now being in the SEC, the Atlantic Coast Conference, I think the Stanford women's volleyball program traveled around 33,000 miles and, and in their season.

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Jesse:

And so putting that into perspective and then also thinking about just some of these grandiose expectations, you know, you mentioned the 2% of folks who go professional. With that being said, everyone would like to believe they could go professional. And so you get just these, I think, delusions of grandeur, which nothing wrong with. But of course, and then we've seen such a privatization, you know, from offerings of school sports and then into the privatization of club sport and what that has done as far as cost and opportunity.

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Jesse:

And, you know, most recently, youth sports have been estimated to be around \$19 billion. Industry as of 2019, which is more than the NFL is at that point. And the cost has risen in the past five years, about 46%. That was from the Aspen Institute. You know, obviously it's dependent on sport, but last year alone, it was around \$40 billion that was spent in the youth sport industry.

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Jesse:

And so, you know, we see this seismic shift, as you mentioned, just as far as the focus goes on, on athletics and ideas and transfer portal and folks transferring often. And now in different states, they have policies around high school sports as well with ideas that can be made.

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Z:

So wow.

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Jesse:

That's part of you know, that bleeds into the collegiate aspect of it. And so for so I mean, for example, I think we on average is around \$51. Who would have made a non-Olympic year. I want my 50.

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Z:

Right, right. That's a good meal right there.

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Jesse:

But with that you know it's around on average realistically it's between 1000 and 4000 is what's estimated with deals for non-revenue generating sports. And so with that I think just the aspects as educators, you know, recognizing not only maybe how much more travel is going on and that's out of our control, obviously, but also just the pressures that are being put on folks and seeing how much of a shift that's been, you know, with the privatization of sport, those clubs, sports that are practicing more year round all the time.

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Jesse:

So, you know, higher injuries, by the age of 13, the burnout rate is about 70%. And for folks and so, you know, the pressures that have been put on that and then also, you know, now suicide unfortunately, is now the second leading cause of death, specifically in the subway, for athletes. Yeah, which has doubled in the past 20 years.

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Jesse:

So just recognizing some of those pressures I think is very important. And, you know, empathy as far as just recognizing how important it is to be supportive, but also, you know, as part of that is holding folks accountable, as long as we all know as educators. And so I think those are just some of the things that are important to recognize and be aware of as we continue to navigate this shifting landscape.

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Z:

Yeah. And not the not that every educator needs to be a fan or become a fan, but I also think and this is again something I know that you think quite a bit about and talk with your students about, but the pressures around sports betting too, with students who are betting on performances of their fellow students and the weight that that must carry, especially for elite athletes who are playing these games that are broadcast to millions of fans.

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Jesse:

Right.

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Jesse:

Certainly. And and social media in general that, you know, we as fans have so much access to folks. And, you know, we've seen message that people have shared an unfortunate ones. But just the amount of investment folks feel now that there's bettors as well, or have some sort of stake in what's happening.

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Z:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well I was also very much not part of that 2%. In fact, I was part of that 70% of kids who burned out before they were 18 years old, right? I, I played soccer when I was in high school and thought, yeah, no, I don't want to do this. And I don't even want to think about this in college.

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Z:

So yeah, hearing that 70% number definitely rings true for me.

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Jesse:

So I'm sharing.

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Z:

That. Yeah. Yeah. The, you know, the Sport and Recreation leadership program in the College of Ed is experiencing rapid student growth. I know that you're the director of graduate studies for that program. And I think that this is definitely related to, the amazing work that you and your colleagues do in this program. Fantastic educators, a really well developed curriculum.

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Z:

What else do you attribute this growth to? And can you talk a little bit about the unique focus that you and your colleagues take in discussions around sports and recreation?

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Jesse:

Yeah, I again, thank you for that question. You know, first of all, I just wanted to, obviously sing Doctor Osama's praises, who's the director of the program, but just had incredible foresight to recognize, first of all, just the holistic approach to sport and recreation leadership. And I think we're all, you know, pretty up to date and aware and keep track of things that are happening policy wise and just across the broader spectrum of sport, recreation, but with a holistic approach.

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Jesse:

You know, a lot of programs across the country are more focused on maybe sport management or sport marketing. And so, you know, we have a much broader perspective where we're including, courses on adaptive athletics and marketing and finance and equity and justice and modern perspectives. And so that gives a little bit more of a broader, perspective and also options for folks to go into the career field, can cater it a little more.

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Jesse:

Doctor Esserman has also did an incredible job setting it up with recognizing a lot of folks are working full time. And so, you know, we have flexible online seven week, 7.5 week courses and offered there is the online as well. And I think in a lot of ways you know you're talking about experience just the private practitioner experience.

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Jesse:

A lot of us have, you know a background in athletics or parks and recreation and having some of those careers prior to going into academia, and that's been very helpful. But with with that, you

know, I like to just personally give a lot of access to guest speakers and have I have, you know, Paralympic medalists and Olympic gold medalists and coaches.

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Jesse:

And so I think it's fun for also students to recognize and get practical experience. You know, some of that experiential design and learning that they can recognize that they can also be outside and do some nontraditional and yeah, focus on on the topics and things that we're looking at in the program.

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Z:

Yeah. Which is I mean, I think a little bit down to certainly some professional networking, but also that experience that you and your colleagues bring, like having people that are involved in developing policy for the NCAA to come into your classroom. Certainly. Those are. Yeah. Based on the depth and level of experience that you all have. So, yeah, you know, I think that, you know, as people who have been in sport are fans of sport, like the two of us are.

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Z:

I think we kind of recognize this, maybe this kind of tug and pull race. Sport and recreation is both this targeted area of political turmoil. And I'm thinking especially about things like the ongoing vilification of trans women in sports, as well as anti-Muslim sentiment that really drives political policies and directives worldwide, as well as an important place for people to explore themselves and be connected to communities through play and just being outdoors.

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Z:

So you do such a good job of interrogating these complexities in your classroom teaching. You know, you you mentioned Doctor Oscar Mayer. I often hear him talk about these classrooms being about much more than who won the game last night. Right. So can you discuss a couple ways that you work with students to do this? And how do you bring students into these contested issues with deliberate care and attention to the different stances that people may have?

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Jesse:

Yeah, absolutely. Great question. So, you know, first I the teaching type topics is very beneficial for myself. So thank you for how, you know, is of course. And so I do use a lot from Doctor Kiama and Doctor Esther Myers, messages that they send. And also just content that they've used the funds of knowledge and video from StoryCorps.

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Jesse:

But for me as well, those, you know, spaces, I think a lot of times, as you mentioned, we just focus on wins and losses and we won the game. And so I think I really try to set up those courses as far as focusing on physical literacy and the importance of having access, you know, to moving our bodies and being able to, recognize some of the barriers or systemic barriers that folks face in those spaces.

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Jesse:

And so with that, I really try to set it up for students to recognize and go over, you know, from a sociological perspective and intersectionality and looking at different backgrounds and perspectives and that it's okay to have those. And so for me as well, I also really like to go over current events each class and I start the classes that way.

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Jesse:

And right now, you know, in sport there's so many.

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Z:

I'm just talking always but especially now.

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Jesse:

Yeah, absolutely. So and that's something I

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Jesse:

think that gets the students comfortable recognizing that those are topics that maybe aren't highlighted, you know, during halftime. And they can really engage in those. And those are just as much a part of sport. And recreation as who won, who did win that game. I think a lot of times too, typically, you know, just when you have those conversations and the courses I teach are very discussion based and so I think it allows them to recognize.

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Jesse:

So more often than not, they have a lot in common and approaching it from that perspective. But then also, you know, speaking of metaphors or the irony of sport is that it's it's such a melting pot

of different perspectives and backgrounds, but you're all trying to work towards something to accomplish. And so.

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Z:

Yeah.

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Jesse:

They're, you know, no one cares who shot the last shot and made the shot. We're excited. We want to celebrate who they are and the identities and recognizing that folks that are going to play their best and be their best when they're celebrated and feel comfortable in those spots. And so those are some big things. And then also, you know, just trust I really try to make sure that I'm being vulnerable with the students and vice versa.

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Jesse:

If if I just let that expectation, I feel like they're more comfortable. And then lastly, humor. That's a big thing. Yeah. As I think that helps disarm them pretty quickly. Just recognizing that it's okay to have these conversations and be, joyful while they're in. So recognizing and obviously I, you know, with a caveat that's not the case all the time.

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Z:

Yeah, yeah yeah. Time place manner. Right. But it's pulling on different styles and, and approaches. And I love that idea of bringing in kind of current events because yeah, there's certainly you can look at the bottom line of a win and a loss. But then you can think about what's behind that, what's context, what's happening kind of around the game.

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Z:

Right. Those sorts of things. So yeah. So something that I often talk to educators about is imagining what educational practice could look, sound and feel like, by this, I mean, what are the radical possibilities of what education could be beyond the confining, limiting, and often damaging ways? Education or let's say a sport and recreation

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Z:

is currently shaped

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Z:

through policy and practice.

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Z:

So to this end, I'm wondering how would you talk about what your hopes, dreams and imagined futures are for education based on the work that you're doing?

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Jesse:

Yeah, certainly. Thank you. One of the biggest things for me is human connection and storytelling. I, you know, often have guest lectures, as you mentioned. And that to me is really important because it allows them to get different perspectives as well. But for me, just having that connection and recognizing and making sure I know if you're on a first name basis, I think that goes a long way with students.

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Jesse:

And then also, you know, giving them practical experience rather than just maybe theory or readings and making sure I'm having a good mix of that. It's I'll give an example. We do one assignment in one of my courses where it's, it asks them for a list of things that shouldn't be competitive and has been made very been very competitive.

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Jesse:

And they a lot of times, you know, obviously people mention things like brand awards or so. Education comes up a lot where they just, you know, feeling so much pressure of having to compare, you know, standardized test scores or resumes and just extracurricular activities. And I think one of the important things about education specifically is, is that just as in sport, you know, when people are celebrated or feel like they are supported and have a voice and, and what they're saying is important and that you care about them.

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Jesse:

Yeah, that they feel comfortable. And then that's when you're going to see the most growth. And so those are some big things. And also you know of course with the diminishing opportunities up and coming quality outputs continues to be something where I think it's a focus on just recognizing that it's okay to celebrate them as people and vice versa, and giving them their space to feel supported and being in those spaces.

00:27:39:08 - 00:27:40:13

Jesse:

Yeah.

00:27:40:15 - 00:28:08:24

Z:

Humanizing approach, student centered approach. Being able to contextualize things for folks, it's such, I think, an exciting opportunity to recognize all that is around the final result of a game or going out and having a field day at a park. And it's it's cool to think about. Yeah. How did how do you all engage students in that process together?

00:28:08:27 - 00:28:25:14

Z:

In, in large classes too, like, you all have some big classes. So it's not it's not just as simple as knowing, let's say 5 or 10 people's names. Right? You need to know lots of people's names and and really address folks from a wide variety of perspectives as they move into a program.

00:28:25:16 - 00:28:47:18

Jesse:

Certainly. Yeah, yeah. And I think, you know, one thing in particular with the observations we've done that have been outside of class, they have asked me numerous times if they can go back to practice or I can get them. Wow, that's not really an open invitation to do, but certainly having just some different, you know, connections and intersections of just that traditional maybe model.

00:28:47:20 - 00:28:48:07

Z:

Yeah.

00:28:48:10 - 00:29:13:28

Z:

At some point, I'll have to tell you and you can share with your students about the time when I found my way into the McHale center, when Lute Olson was coaching and was politely asked to leave. So definitely not open invitations to practices, but glad that the students got that experience. Before I incriminate myself too much more, I'll just say thank you so much for your time today, Doctor Stipek.

00:29:14:01 - 00:29:36:28

Z:

It's been really fantastic getting to know you and your work better, and I'm really excited to see where it goes, especially with this kind of, exponential growth that the program has been experiencing. And thanks to for all who watched this video. I hope you've gained as much insight as I have. As well as fun little tidbits about the both of us along the way.

00:29:37:00 - 00:30:05:09

Z:

If you're interested in learning more, I would encourage you to look into some of Doctor Stipek's work, especially the impressive work that he's doing with his colleagues in the sport and recreation leadership Program. You can find his work highlighted on the University of Arizona College of Education website, including his entry in our College Faculty feature series, where he shares about his inspirations, accomplishments and the advice that he would give to his younger self.

00:30:05:11 - 00:30:09:21

Z:

Again, thanks to you, Doctor Stipek, really a pleasure being able to spend some time together.

00:30:09:28 - 00:30:11:02

Jesse:

Thanks so much for having me.

00:30:11:04 - 00:30:11:14

Z:

Yeah.