

Cheryl Broom (8s):

Hi, I'm Cheryl Broom, CEO of GradComm and today's podcast is really fun because it's about a project that I thought I would never do again after leaving my own college a couple of years ago. It is the class schedule, one of our fantastic clients, North Orange Continuing Education, also known as NOCE. Mails out their class schedule to more than 350,000 households three times a year. So if you do the math, that's more than a million class schedules that they mail out. And they really wanted some help re-imagining the class schedule. Because of covid, they saw their enrollment decline by 43%.

Cheryl Broom (48s):

So they lost nearly half of their students. And so their president asked them to put together a re-enrollment plan and part of that plan was taking a look at what they were mailing out and making it be more marketing focused, more persuasive, and more of a, a showcase piece. Something that they could really be proud of. And so they hired us to come in and help them kind of tear it apart and rebuild it from the ground up. So today's guests, both from N O C E, Jennifer Perez, and from Grad Comm, our own Jamie, join me to talk about what that project was like and to give some takeaways to other colleges who might imagine going through the same type of process.

Cheryl Broom (1m 30s):

It's a great conversation. A lot of good takeaways. I'm also going to put the class schedule itself into the podcast notes, so take a look at it and there may just be some ideas in there that you wanna steal for your own college. Enjoy. Well, great. Well thanks so much for joining me today. I'm really excited to have you both on the podcast. And I wanna start off by having Jennifer, you introduce yourself and then Jamie, you can tell us about who you are when, when Jennifer's done. So Jennifer, take it away.

Jennifer Perez (2m 3s):

Great. Well thanks so much for having me Cheryl and Jaime. My Name's Jennifer Perez. I'm the director of Campus Communications for North Orange Continuing Education. We are a non-credit entity, but we are a freestanding non-credit school. We are only one of two in the whole state of California. The others San Diego College of Continuing Education. And so we have our own governance structure. We have our own executive branch, for example, we have our own president, et cetera. And so we are a little bit unique. We do, we're within the North Orange County Community College District, which also includes Cypress College and Fullerton College as a credit, we call 'em our credit sisters.

Jennifer Perez (2m 47s):

And so, but we have, we serve about 29,000 students each year ranging from preschoolers to seniors. We have three different campus locations in Anaheim, Cypress, and Fullerton. And then we also, one other thing that makes us unique is we offer classes right in the community, right where people may need us. So we offer classes at over 100 community-based locations in partnership with K-12 schools, churches, community centers, nonprofits, skilled nursing

facilities, rehab centers, et cetera. And so our programs are accredited through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Jennifer Perez (3m 32s):

And then as part of the California Community College System, all of our courses are approved by the state of California. We offer all kinds of different programs on credit programs to enhance basic skills, gain employable skills, prepare for credit, provide self-sufficiency. So for example, we have adult basic skills. So high school diploma, G E D, preparation, English as a second language, US Citizenship Parenting. We have a huge older adults program, which we call our emeritus program. And then we have a very large short-term vocational program, certificates, workforce prep. And then we have a model program for our adults with disabilities.

Jennifer Perez (4m 15s):

So we really do serve our whole community with a variety of programs and services.

Cheryl Broom (4m 20s):

Great. And I just absolutely love working with non-credit programs because I think that at their very heart they're what community colleges are all about. Right. They serve the community. Yes. And like you said, you are offering classes from everybody, from preschoolers to senior citizens and it's pretty amazing the breadth of programs and the amount of students You have 29,000, it's incredible. Yeah, you're like

Jennifer Perez (4m 46s):

Fluctuates here and there. But yeah, that's about, we average about that and yeah, we love to say that we meet our students right where they're at. And so, because a lot of people ask us, why would I go to a non-credit school? Like what? You know, I don't get a degree. But really we're helping students accomplish goals that they may not be able to accomplish otherwise, you know, that will help them to get back into their communities, you know, in a more productive way to feel, you know, valuable for bringing their family up through poverty, out of poverty and into a better standard of living. And so it's just very rewarding to help people in a wide variety of, of programs and services.

Cheryl Broom (5m 30s):

Great. And we had the opportunity to work with you on a really special project, which we're gonna talk about. But before we do that, I wanted to have Jamie introduce herself cuz she played such a big role in this project as well. And it's helping you with some of the marketing initiatives at N O C E. So Jamie, introduce yourself and tell us about your background.

Jaime McNinch (5m 50s):

Yeah, delighted to be with you ladies today. I am the client services director on the GRA Grad Comm team. And so what that means is I am a person sometimes in the trenches with our client partners to bring projects to life for N O C E specifically, we have worked on a number of projects. We're a really good partner with N O C E and have helped them in a, a lot of ways to

bring projects to the forefront. So this, what we're gonna talk about today is just one of those projects and I can't wait to share it with everyone.

Cheryl Broom (6m 24s):

So I wanna take our listeners back in time, at least like 15, 20 years back in time when I started working at a California community college. And I did not understand what non-credit education was. And it was not a priority for my department at all. I don't think I did anything to promote non-credit. I think I sent a photographer to the adult high school graduation. I think that's like the extent. And now fast forward, you know, a decade and California changed some of its funding models and started giving colleges apportionment dollars to have non-credit students.

Cheryl Broom (7m 8s):

And then all of a sudden non-credit, at least in the marketing world, became more of a priority. It's like, wow, you know, these classes are free but our institution is actually going to get paid to have students take them. Right? And so marketing became more important. And Jennifer, I know your institution's a little different cuz all you do is market non-credit. Right. But before we jump into the project, I, I wanted to see if you had seen a shift in the importance of marketing non-credit at all over the last decade or so, what your experience with that's been.

Jennifer Perez (7m 42s):

With non-credit, even though we do pass our curriculum through our, our faculty and up through the state of California, we can really react quicker and respond to community needs in a quicker manner. And so I feel like we can meet this community right where they are. And so the importance of non-credit has grown. In addition, the funding model yes, has changed a bit. And so whereas non-credit apportionment classes were funded at a lower level, some of those classes still are, but many of them now are funded at a higher level. We call those career development and college preparation courses.

Jennifer Perez (8m 26s):

And so there's an incentive now to offer those types of classes. And so some of those, for example, are like our career technical education classes, which they're all important. All non-credit classes are important. But those are really important to our workforce community and our students that really need to get in and get out, you know, from anywhere from a six month period, you know, to, you know, one or two years of completing a certificate where they can then go out and start to, to earn a living livable wage right away.

Cheryl Broom (9m 2s):

And your institution is right in the heart of Orange County. So there's a really population, a really dense population area. Like you said, you've got 29,000 students, a hundred locations and you do digital marketing. You do, you know, some more, I guess modern type of marketing, but really your biggest marketing is your class schedule.

Jennifer Perez (9m 28s):

Yes. So our research, through our application process, we've been able to, well since the beginning of time we've, we've noticed that anecdotally that our class schedule was important. However, our recent research over the last several years has made that example for us. And so what we find in the data is that our number one reason for coming to N O C E is actually a referral by a family or friend. And so that's our highest marketing tool there. But our second marketing tool, most effective tool is our class schedule and our printed class schedule.

Jennifer Perez (10m 12s):

And so we've always printed a class schedule. We used to have four terms, now we have three semesters, actually two semesters and a summer term cuz we have 18 week semesters. We mail out 375,000 schedules each, each time we send it out. So each semester, so that's three times a year.

Cheryl Broom (10m 36s):

So that's like a million, it's like a million

Jennifer Perez (10m 40s):

Million schedules. True. So that's to all of the North Orange County community college district residents. And then in addition, we also print an additional 15,000 boxed copies or copies that we box and that is those copies then go to our three centers. We mail 'em out to all of our community partners and to all the locations where we host classes. And then we also utilize those copies for when we do community outreach, when we do like tabling events and things of that nature. We found to, like during the pandemic, we learned, obviously we had to pivot right in March. And that was right when we were building our spring schedule. And so we obviously didn't send a schedule at that time.

Jennifer Perez (11m 23s):

And so what we found is that of course our enrollment dipped, I mean of course our enrollment dipped for a variety of reasons, right? It was the pandemic. But people were, were like, where is that schedule they wanted, they wanna hold it, they wanna put it in their purse, they wanna look through it and leaf through it. You know, we find that with community colleges, credit colleges, you know, you know for sure like okay, I wanna major in business, I know where to go and where to find that information. A lot of times Google search, right? But if you wanna do do learn about English or maybe some parenting classes, maybe you didn't even know we offered parenting classes, that that would be something that you would, you know, if you get it in the mail and you see it and you, you know, you it's attractive and you see their smiling faces and people being successful and you know, hearing of the stories of our students, you know, achieving their goals, then you might be more willing to, you know, register.

Jennifer Perez (12m 20s):

And, and and so we find that that's what brings a lot of our students in.

Cheryl Broom (12m 25s):

And I think that's interesting cuz I think there is a psychology behind credit versus non-credit class schedule mailings. And I get asked this a lot, should we still be mailing our credit class schedule? And for credit side, you're right, it's college. I mean people generally who are gonna go to college know that college starts twice a year with a summer semester and there's certain majors you take and you have to go see a counselor and like people kind of have that figured out. So getting this like huge hundred page schedule that has every section of English 100 is kind of a waste. But with non-credit, anybody can take these classes and they're free and they don't necessarily know that they even exist.

Cheryl Broom (13m 6s):

In fact, I had a focus group with MiraCosta College ESL students last year and one of the students said during the focus group, she was from Latin America and she said, in my country, only rich people go to college. Nobody go, no, you have to be rich to go to college and there's no such thing as free, there's no free college. Like she didn't even know free English classes were a possibility. Like it wasn't anything, she was even in her mind in any way. So she needed something to say like, hey, this is here for you, it's free. Like, right. Yeah. So very different I think. And I think it's such an interesting and important tool.

Jennifer Perez (13m 48s):

Yeah, we do get that question a lot. Like really they're free. Why are they free? And so we do, we kind of have gone back and forth because we know free is attractive. Free can also be negative though, cuz free can also mean low quality. And so we're really strategic about how we utilize the word free and which populations really gravitate and like appreciate the word free versus which ones don't. And so a lot of times we do use, we interchange that with tuition free, which may not seem like a little thing, but in marketing it is a big deal. And then we also go the extra mile and we explain that no, there is a cost. So we are, these courses are being funded through your state tax dollars and so there is an investment here and you are, you're actually paying for this investment so you might as well utilize it, right?

Jennifer Perez (14m 37s):

So we try to share that information every time we go out and we get questions about why is it free?

Cheryl Broom (14m 44s):

Oh my gosh, Shiff, that's so funny because I was just, I did a presentation in November at the Community College League of California with Miraco step out, our non-credit work and they are heavily utilizing free, especially for esl. And this, we had this board member, I don't remember what he is a trustee from another district and he was in the front and he raised his hand and he goes, nothing in life is free. There's no such thing as a free lunch. And I was like, well it's free. Yeah, it's free for the students. He's like, it's not free for me. I pay my taxes. And

Jennifer Perez (15m 22s):

Exactly that is true. And then we have to say, and you have, we have to, you know, we have to break even. So we have to say, your payment is attending class so we have to meet those

minimum like attendance. And so we do have a a little bit of, of an uphill battle and trying to explain that because sometimes free also is like, eh, I can miss a class. And so we really try to empower students as to why they need to attend and you know, the benefits of achieving your goals and the more you come, the faster you're gonna complete your goals, et

Cheryl Broom (15m 54s):

Cetera. Yeah, that's true. Cuz when you do have like skin in the game, like when you have to pay something, it does make you want to stick it out a little bit more to get your, to get your monies worth, right? Right.

Jennifer Perez (16m 6s):

So you wanna show them the benefits and what they're gonna get, you know, the outcomes of their time. And

Cheryl Broom (16m 12s):

That actually is a great segue into this project because I'm gonna ask Jamie to chime in here. You came to us and, and you had been developing, you know, this class schedule's really important. It is a great resource. It lists, it lists your courses, but it didn't have any marketing in it. It didn't show the value, it didn't have testimonials. So it was, it was just a resource booklet and not necessarily a marketing piece. So you had come to us to see if we could help elevate it. And so I wanted to, to, I had asked Jamie to come and help manage a project. So I wanted to have Jamie chime in here and, and fill us in on what you thought when you first saw the class schedule, what you thought about this project.

Cheryl Broom (16m 57s):

I know that she's your client, so she's gonna be, she's gonna be very diplomatic.

Jaime McNinch (17m 5s):

Well, I I think that, you know, I came from, you know, a college community college background too, and I've been making schedules for years and decades just like everybody else had. And I thought that this was a, a dead thing that we didn't do these anymore. And so when, when Cheryl brought me on board and said, you know, we have a client, they're gonna print a class schedule, I think you'd be great for this. I thought, yes, I would be great for this and I really didn't think we were ever gonna do this again. But I love what you say about meeting your students right where they are and putting a tangible piece right into their households, right into their homes, right into their hands is pretty powerful.

Jaime McNinch (17m 48s):

And when we look at, at the type of student that N O C E is, is developing programs for this tool is perfect tactic to support that. And then if you think about, you know, a million impressions a year times two people in the household, the return on the investment and what you're seeing, enrollments obviously there, but when we took the project on, we recognized that there was gonna need to be some change. You recognized that there was gonna need to be some

change. And so our first, our first go at it was just to, to do two things. One, do just a really honest review of the current schedule.

Jaime McNinch (18m 28s):

Like look at every page, review the content, you know, and make observations about what we're seeing in there from a, from an outsider's perspective. Not somebody who has any sort of skin in the, in the N O C E game who's gonna, you know, have feelings sort if we start to take things out. So we did just early deep dive into, you know, what's the schedule look like right now. We also, I thought it was really great, your project included a, a committee of people from across the campus. So it wasn't just marketing looking at it, it was division directors and your president was participating in those early conversations. So we're listening to everybody within your organization to understand what was gonna be important coming out of this, this schedule re-imagining project.

Jaime McNinch (19m 18s):

And we had some really cool findings and obviously we knew that, that it was full of copy and it was gonna have to have some copy re-written and we knew it was a little tired and, and crowded and not full color. Those were all things that, you know, we could cosmetically affect change in. And that's how we, you know, started and then we got to work and, and bringing forward a different look and feel for the schedule.

Cheryl Broom (19m 47s):

I remember going through it the first time and I'm like, why is there all this clip art in here?

Jennifer Perez (19m 56s):

Yes. We still utilize clip art.

Jaime McNinch (19m 59s):

Yeah. And we did a lot of discovery around, you know, you have an, you have an internal system that your schedule had to export from. So we had to account for limitations within that platform that you had to work in. And we were so grateful to have experts at the table who were able to tell us the ins and outs of, you know, you won't be able to change that and you know, you won't be able to do that. And we asked a lot of questions like, can we change this? Can we delete this? Can we move this over? And it was really great to have all hands on deck to help us real to recognize what we could affect and what we couldn't in the schedule.

Jennifer Perez (20m 36s):

Yeah. And one thing we was a blessing and a curse was like Cheryl mentioned, we put everything into that schedule, right? We called it kind of our bible almost to the point where it was like a catalog even though we did have a catalog. But the thing was, is our students, our staff too, and our students would, would literally use it and go step by step by step to try to figure out the processes and all of the details related to their enrollment and the registration. And so it was really hard. We knew that it was super tech heavy, it was really overwhelming to read, right?

Jennifer Perez (21m 16s):

To the point where it's like, whoa, I have to turn the page cuz there's so much text on that page. But at the same time, every line in there was purposeful because we knew that our students are low English, you know, learners, they are, some of them have, many of them have learning disabilities, a lot of them are maybe seniors and, and they have low technology skills, so we can't always send them to the website. So there was a variety of reasons why we did what we did. However, that's why we really needed an expert to come in and say, okay, I appreciate that, but we can do it this way so that it's, it's still effective but it's more a marketing tool, right?

Jennifer Perez (22m 4s):

Let's get back to the, the piece of, of being a marketing

Jaime McNinch (22m 8s):

Tool. And we did some really cool things in the schedule to bridge that gap between what you could find online and what you could find in the book. And we, we used QR codes, which the pandemic provided us a good, a good tool.

Jennifer Perez (22m 23s):

QR codes are not dead now.

Jaime McNinch (22m 26s):

Remerge, remerge something that we all understand now and where somebody would need more information, we put the QR code in there and we directed 'em exactly to the page on the website where they needed that. And I know that that was a lift on your team to bring those pages along at the same time that the class schedule was coming along. But it certainly helped us to convince

Jennifer Perez (22m 50s):

Yeah. And I think that was, it was an opportunity for us to say, okay, we're gonna cut some of it, not all of it, but also we're trying to train our staff and train our students. Okay, it's still there but it's just in a different place. So let's, let's get the basics here in our schedule, but then let's go to our website, which we really have been. And the pandemic really helped us to solidify our website as our central information hub. And so, and then from there, so all the information is there and then from there we can do our class schedule, we can do our, our social media, our, you know, digital media ads, et cetera, posters, flyers and whatever.

Jennifer Perez (23m 30s):

But at least the website is where everyone can come and have it be the most updated and centralized point of information.

Cheryl Broom (23m 39s):

And you were really lucky you had done a website project and your website turn out beautiful. Yes. And it's very functional and it's easy to use. So this was,



Jennifer Perez (23m 48s):

Yes, we launched a website right when the pandemic happened. That was great. Right in the middle of the pandemic, but that's ok. It was good. We, we pushed through and we got that done.

Cheryl Broom (23m 57s):

Yeah, you got it done. And so that was a, a great way to blend to make that publication a little bit more digital, a little bit more user-friendly. So I'm, I'll put into the show notes a link to your class schedule so those people who wanna see, see it can pull it up. But what were some of the most popular changes or what have you heard the best feedback on of what has been changed?

Jaime McNinch (24m 24s):

Right, right away.

Jennifer Perez (24m 27s):

I'm sorry, Jamie,

Jaime McNinch (24m 27s):

Can I jump in and tell a story one right away? Tell us. Yes. So, so we, we gather all of our recommendations and we, we present to N O C E this beautiful concept of full color, big spreads for each sec, each department division to have its own dedicated color and big page introduction. And we didn't know if they would be able to even go this route, if there would even be budget available. And when the team saw this vibrant, modern magazine style schedule, I remember the group saying it has to be in color. Like we have to produce this in color.

Jaime McNinch (25m 8s):

And so it was such a great coup to hear resounding like, yes, let's make that investment in full color. Let's, let's not do this in one color and black and white again. And so that's probably one of the biggest wins for this project is you have just, it's a beautiful full color magazine style piece.

Jennifer Perez (25m 30s):

Yeah, that I would agree. It was, that was huge. And because our programs are so unique and so different, you know, E S L versus emeritus versus parenting, sometimes things would get lost in there because we offered so many things for so many different populations. And so now we have them brilliantly color coded, right? So all of ESL is green and all of emeritus is blue and all of parenting is pink or whatever. So, so that was really exciting because it's real easy to see, oh you have a, a whole variety of different types of options here.

Jennifer Perez (26m 10s):

We just printed our spring schedule, so we had the iteration number two. Yay. And so this time we added basically like a header at the top of that color. So the word eng English as a second language at the top. So now it's even easier like to just kind of fan through it and you can see the title right there, but,

Jaime McNinch (26m 32s):

And you're saving time. I know I asked Jennifer like, you just did a second one, did our template that we provided you save you time this time. And she said, oh my gosh, it was so much easier to put the

Jennifer Perez (26m 43s):

Schedule schedule together this time. Yeah, we had a few hiccups that first go around with our printer and, and just kind of making sure that we're all speaking the same language. But once we got all those details down yeah it went so smooth and that was part of it. And I think, yeah, Jamie mentioned we were utilizing Word and a really sort of homegrown system to pull, to extract the information from Banner. And so that was a lot of the, no, we can't do that because we have to use this system. And so our, it our district, it really, and then our, our our class schedule coordinator, they really worked hard and she was awesome.

Jennifer Perez (27m 24s):

Our team member Sheila, she was like, yes, I will learned in, she's learned, she had learned InDesign in the past but she was ready to, you know, upgrade her skills even more and refresh herself and you know, dive in. And so now we're doing it in InDesign and it's, you know, the template that you provided was, was great. And so this second go around it was, it was, it just, it was very streamlined and it, it went a lot quicker. So that was really exciting.

Cheryl Broom (27m 53s):

Well I think those, the two examples speak a lot to sometimes having external help because you hear inside like, we can't do full color, we don't have, we don't have money for full color, we have to do this in Word because you can't pull the schedule any other way and then you get an outsider come in and say like this is what you could have, right? Like shiny object,

Jennifer Perez (28m 17s):

Here's the, yeah, here's the punter.

Cheryl Broom (28m 19s):

Yeah. And like I haven't met any, I've worked with a hundred colleges and I've never met one that does their schedule in Word. Like

Jennifer Perez (28m 27s):

I know it's been a long time coming, it's

Cheryl Broom (28m 29s):

Been so

Jennifer Perez (28m 30s):

Everything too is yeah, definitely with your assistance. We really needed someone to come in and help us streamline all the text because we're just, we're right in the middle of it and we, you

know, when you're in the in it, it's hard to kind of get out of there and, and so it was great for Jamie to come in and say, do you really need to say these three paragraphs? Can you can say it in two sentences, you know? And some of it again, it was like, oh, I don't know if we could do that, but guess what we did? And it, and it, I think some, some things we had to have happy medium, you know, compromising. But for the most part that was really helpful to have an outsider's perspective to help us, you know, streamline a lot of those processes and

Cheryl Broom (29m 14s):

Text. Yeah, you had, I don't remember how many pages at the end of policies and procedures and then the text was like 10 point like we're like, well do you really need all this? So I think,

Jennifer Perez (29m 28s):

Right. And again it was like, yes, but let's house it on the website. Right. So, so a lot of direct links and QR codes and all that kind of things too. Yeah. And that's important and we need it, but maybe not in this tangible book every single time. So,

Cheryl Broom (29m 45s):

So as we wrap up, I know there's a lot of colleges out there who are looking to do the same thing. They're taking old publications that have been tired and just trying to give them new life, making them less reference based and more marketing forward. Do you have any advice for colleges who are embarking on projects like this?

Jennifer Perez (30m 7s):

I think like what Jamie said, it was really helpful to have all the parties on the table. So we, we did have instruction there and what they look at in terms of the scheduling. We did have our scheduled coordinators, our our marketing team and then our a and r team and then of course our president, right? Executive leadership. So we had a lot of buy-in. I think everybody was really motivated, but I also think one thing we, we gave access to Jamie and the team was our authentic photos. And so we really don't like, you know, you mentioned clip art. Yes, we were, we were guilty of using that, but we really tried to not use stock images wherever we could.

Jennifer Perez (30m 50s):

So we had luckily Bill Temple Library of really nice classroom photos that really showed our diversity of our students and the, their joy. Honestly, when you look at a lot of our students, I mean there are some where they're, you know, seriously studying and things like that. Of course you have to have those, but a lot of our students, they just love being here and then you can just see that coming through in their photos. And so that was really important for us. And then when Jamie and the team presented and they had these full page students smiling photos, I mean that just really made a huge impact. So I think in any type of publication when you're trying to, you know, show the benefits of your school, and I think that's really important is showing, you know, the reaction of students I learned long ago don't show building, show students, right?

Jennifer Perez (31m 38s):

And so I really tried to to, to keep that, you know, moving forward. I think too less is more, right? Because I'm, I'm guilty. I, I love where I love writing, I love to explain it. And so, but I find, okay, let's take a re-look at that and, and really it does, when you can simplify and text and make it real concise, it really just makes the message clear and people wanna read it. And so I think that that was, that's really important as well. What about you Jamie?

Jaime McNinch (32m 12s):

I think you covered almost everything. I just know from being a marketing director in the past that I would've never embarked on a project like this if I didn't have a partner to, to help me facilitate it. I mean, you could have never figured out how to do this in the, with all the other priorities you have. So I was glad to be able to bring that, that expertise in and help you and be an outside sounding voice and a little bit of a different approach or approach to be able to look at it with a lens that everybody inside your organization might not have been looking at. And so it's very, that our partnership is really great and I, I love all the different things that we work on together because, cause we're partners and we're parlaying ideas off each other all the time.

Jennifer Perez (33m 4s):

I was gonna say, yeah, luckily we get along really well and sometimes I have to be like, okay Jamie, I'm gonna make you the bad guy. Right?

Jaime McNinch (33m 14s):

Nowi

Jennifer Perez (33m 15s):

She'll say, well, I'll see that. So anyway, but in the end I think it, we had some great compromises and some wins for sure. So it was very exciting.

Cheryl Broom (33m 27s):

Well I think I, I hope that you enter it into some contests maybe see if it can get a recognition cuz it is beautiful. And, and I, as a closing note, just wanna echo the photography. Like stock photography does not look like non-credit students. Like they're too handsome. Like some of the people you're just like, people don't look like that. So your photography is beautiful. And it did, it makes it, it brings a lot of pride and I think that's one thing that we might overlook in marketing is, you know, obviously you're trying to recruit students, you're trying to show the community your programs, but you're also really showcasing who you are and that makes people who work with you and for you really proud.

Cheryl Broom (34m 16s):

And I think this was a project you can be really proud of

Jennifer Perez (34m 20s):

For sure. And I think I really have to give it up too to, to our president Valentina Patel. She is very, she's always gung-ho. She's like, let's do it. Let's, she, she's tries to really establish at our

institution like, we're not gonna do it just because that's the way we've always done it. So she really encourages us as a school to be innovative. In fact, she really is like, please be innovative, bring new ideas. And so she and I talked about this and this was one of the ideas we had, this enrollment recovery plan. One thing we didn't talk about is that as of August of 2022, as we're starting to emerge from the pandemic, we were down 43% in our enrollment over the prior year.

Jennifer Perez (35m 12s):

So when we were deep in the pandemic. And so that's startling and, you know, life altering essentially. And so we really had to come up with a plan and she came up with, you know, this enrollment recovery strategy that all, you know, the whole institution kind of came on board with, but it really had the prongs of, of all the, the students' journey. So from on outreach to onboarding to instruction, student success and basic needs and sort of all the different tactics related to those items. And outreach was a huge part of that. And so we were reimagining what does that look like for us?

Jennifer Perez (35m 53s):

And so we did invest in some digital media, but really the, this re class schedule reorganization reimagined was a big piece of the puzzle. And because we know that, you know, we have to, we had to also reengage our community, you know, that, that we're starting to emerge on the pandemic. We had to show them, Hey, we're here again. We want, we wanna engage with you. You know, some of our partners didn't quite make it out of the pandemic in terms of their businesses, our organizations closed. And so we also really needed to reengage our old partners, but also establish new partners. And so this class schedule is like not only a tool, obviously for our students and, but it was for also a showcase to our community partners and to say, Hey, how can we partner with you?

Jennifer Perez (36m 43s):

How can we bring more benefit to our community? And so that's what we're doing now. We're re-engaging our partners and we're really excited about that. And so we went from down 43% to about a month later we were only down 4%. Wow. 4.3%. And now I think we're about even, so it's very exciting. So I know it was more than just the class schedule, but that definitely was, was one of the pieces. And so we're really proud of that accomplishment. That

Cheryl Broom (37m 13s):

Is a tremendous success story.

Jennifer Perez (37m 16s):

Yes, for sure. And then we, you know, we tell everyone it's a living document. And so that's kinda how if, if people say, well we maybe we should look at this or do that, great, let's look at it and let's see if we can make it better the next time. And so we really just want it to be really effective and we're actually gonna be doing focus groups with our students to, to, to gather more data from them.

Cheryl Broom (37m 37s):

Well that's great. Well, I I love talking to you about this. I love the project. I'm gonna put a link to N O C E and your class schedule page and the podcast show notes. And if anybody wants to reach out, Jennifer, she's awesome. So, oh, she's incredible.

Jennifer Perez (37m 54s):

Thank you so much for your time and for highlighting our project. Yeah, it's very exciting.

Cheryl Broom (37m 58s):

That's good. And I look forward to what's next. So thank you both so much for joining me today.

Jennifer Perez (38m 3s):

Yeah, it's great to meet you ladies today. Thanks Jamie. All right, take care.

Cheryl Broom (38m 10s):

That wraps up this month's episode of Higher Education Coffee and Conversation. I hope you enjoyed the discussion and learned something new. And if you like the podcast, I would love it if you would leave us a review and make sure to take a screenshot and email me or hit me up on LinkedIn and I'll send you one of our fantastic GradComm shot glasses and a little something, something to go with it. On behalf of all of us at grad com, thank you for listening and thank you for working hard to make higher education a reality for students across the nation. Until next time