



John Robertson: [00:00:00] So, our students outperform, or they certainly have outperformed, the regular college first year students. They also outperformed college sophomores.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:15] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:50] Welcome to today's episode of Learning Unboxed. This has Annalies Corbin. Very excited to come to you today from Alaska. Our conversation over the next couple of episodes is all about positive disruptions in education, in particular, about models and programs that folks can learn a lot from.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:09] And so, today we're actually going to be talking about middle college. And we are in Mat-Su Alaska, a very beautiful location where some pretty innovative things are happening in school. And our guest today is John Robertson. John Robertson is the lead teacher, our founding teacher - he's making a face at me a little bit here. We'll get into a little bit of how he came to this journey with us - Social Studies, and English teacher at the Mat-Su Middle College School. And joining us is one of the students, a junior at the Mat-Su Middle College, Kat Barr. So, thank you both for joining me.

Kat Barr: [00:01:50] Yeah.

John Robertson: [00:01:50] You're welcome.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:51] So, let's jump right in. And I want to start, John, with you. And so, give us just a little bit at the highest level, as a teacher in a middle college, what's the appeal to you?

John Robertson: [00:02:08] Well, that's a good question. I guess, I see two big advantages to this program for students, when I look at it as a teacher. So, one, you have students who are in high school, and they are intellectually really prepared. They're really prepared intellectually to take on some college-level coursework.

John Robertson: [00:02:31] And in a middle college, we're able to provide them the opportunity to take college-level work and regular college classes, where they're integrated fully into the college student body, and they take their courses with college faculty on a college campus. And we have a lot of students who are ready for that in terms of their cognitive development, and they see it as a challenge. And these are students who may be somewhat bored in a regular high school.

John Robertson: [00:02:59] We also have students that can be an overlap, who are socially and emotionally really ready for more of a college environment, and they want to get away from some of the angst of a regular high school. And these students also benefit from our program because they're able to get in to an environment that's maybe more focused on learning and less focused on sports. And that's something that they really appreciate. So, again, there's a big overlap between these two groups, but it's two different benefits.

John Robertson: [00:03:39] There's also the monetary side of things where we have students who tell us that the only way they would ever be able to afford to go to college is if they came through a program, started early, and earned some college credits maybe up to two full years of college through our program where the financing is done through the public funding of public schools. And so, it's zero financial cost to the families.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:05] Right. And we certainly see that across the country in the work that we're doing looking at early, and middle colleges, and on a variety of different types of postsecondary-meant programs. So, that is a common theme. Kat, how about you share with us a little bit about why you opted into this program? Because I'm correct in assuming that you had a choice, in a sense that not every student at Mat-Su High School is in the Mat-Su Middle college, correct.

Kat Barr: [00:04:34] Yes. My home school was Colony. And Colony is a great place. There are a lot of wonderful teachers, there's some amazing students, but it definitely has its issues as every school does. As Mr. Robertson stated, there are different groups of students. I personally would fit into all three. I was not challenged at my previous school. I was struggling a lot with not challenged at all. I would be doing every extra credit project that was available, and then still be bored, and like falling asleep in class, and still have advanced 100% plus in the grade. And it was just not a challenge to me.

Kat Barr: [00:05:15] Socially, I had friends but it wasn't like true friendship. And it's just kind of, "All right, we'll go to school today," and it wasn't something I looked forward to. And here at the college, every day, I kind of get up and like, "Okay, what am I going to learn today? or "Who am I going to see?" or "Who am I going to run across in the hallway, and you're like, 'Hey, whatever. How are you doing?'"

Kat Barr: [00:05:39] And then, financially, my family, I'm very blessed that we can't afford college and whatnot, but it still is very expensive. And I'm going for an art degree. And art classes and art supplies are ridiculously expensive, which is very ironic. But I wanted to have a change in my life, and that's why I decided to come here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:03] So, it provided you with opportunities you wouldn't necessarily have seen had you stayed in your home school?

Kat Barr: [00:06:10] Exactly.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:11] So, I want to talk a little bit about some of the specific program elements that in my work around the country and around the world and seeing a lot of programs. And one of the things that always appealed to me, from the very first time actually that I met John, was a conversation tied to the way you've evolved components of the program over time. And so, when the original Mat-Su Middle College School or the Alaska Middle College School, as it was called at the time in 2012 -- so, John you were one of the founding participants in that endeavor, correct?

John Robertson: [00:06:44] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:45] So, over time though, you've learned an awful lot along the way that, sort of, gets you to the way you actually do and hand in your instruction today. These programs are successful because of the supports, oftentimes, put in place for the students to really straddle these worlds. And so, you guys do a similar program here. What does that look like, and why did you get there?

John Robertson: [00:07:09] Well, it's changed over time. We're probably in the fourth or fifth iteration of it. But when we started back in 2012, we didn't have a formal seminar at all. In fact, we were still teaching quite a few high school-level courses because we were a small program; we are on a different campus, which is a very small campus; and there were certain courses, which were required for high school graduation for which there was no college equivalent being taught.

John Robertson: [00:07:39] So, for our first year, I taught mostly a ton of high school classes, but in my, sort of, time block in my week, we set aside a little bit of time for students to come in to get help on papers and things like that in their college-level classes. But what we saw towards the end of that first year, really, the first semester of our second year, we saw students who were cognitively quite capable of doing well in Introductory Writing class, for example, but they were failing, and where they got a D simply because they were prone to procrastination. Well, basically, that. There's more executive functioning skills.

John Robertson: [00:08:19] So, they have a decent knowledge of English syntax, and paragraphing, and they could even write up maybe a six-page paper or a twelve-page paper, but they basically struggled getting that stuff done on time. And so, we instituted this support seminar. And as time has gone on, basically, the idea is of all of our students have to fair in a college-level English class. They have to be in a support seminar with me where we can go over English, or History, or Philosophy because I can teach all those things.

John Robertson: [00:09:00] And so, the idea is that in the seminar class, I provide them support anywhere from English syntax. I go over rough drafts with students, and it lets me all sit down with the student. Sometimes, I don't do it as often as I would like, but it's two papers minimum per semester. I sit down, and I'll go over. It might take a half hour or so. I think, Kat, I mean-

Kat Barr: [00:09:22] We were doing it for like an hour and a half the other day.

John Robertson: [00:09:25] Yeah, yeah. The other day, we have. It was like an hour and a half. And that was in Economics. It was especially challenging. That's one of the things that we do. And the idea is that although these students have come in able to do the work in some sense, but in another sense, they need some guidance and some support in terms of making sure they get their work done on time. And it also gives me a chance to actually teach them how to write better.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:51] Right. Now, they're still kids after all, right? So, that's one of the things I always remind folks not to lose sight of, right. They're incredibly mature. Kat is sitting here and, no doubt, falls into that category. But the reality of it is you only know what you know, and they'll experience so many things. And so, we have this obligation to sort of help you navigate to be successful in that space.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:11] So, Kat, how does -- two questions because I can tell you the thought bubble that as folks are listening around, they're like, "Oh my gosh." So, that's a pretty unique way that this seminar is structured in terms of the support back to students and those existing collegiate courses. So, just to be really clear, Mr. Robertson is not doing your work for you. You are doing it. He is helping you navigate your way through that. Yes?

Kat Barr: [00:10:41] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:41] Yeah.

Kat Barr: [00:10:42] All of the professors here, the way they teach, it isn't like, "All right. I have to do this, and that, and the other thing." So, they just give you the answer. They're like, "Here's how to find the answer," and they genuinely teach you, and give you ideas. And I've actually shown my parents my papers, and they're like, "Wow. We can see in just one semester alone, you've improved like so much." So, there's a big improvement.

Kat Barr: [00:11:12] And I really like seminar because I used it a study hall. And anytime I needed help, I would then ask for help. Otherwise, I would just work, and it could be for any class that I needed help on. So, I enjoyed the seminar. I passed it last semester, so I don't have to take seminar anymore, but I come to the portables every day, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:31] And so, as you sort of think about the leg up that provided you, do you think the experience would have changed radically for you had you not had that piece of it?

Kat Barr: [00:11:43] Yes. My first semester, if I just went into college classes and didn't have anyone else or any type of high school connection, and it was just like, "This is high school, this is college," and not a middle ground of it, yeah, it would have been horrible. Now, after the first semester, I can understand it. I'm like, "Okay. I'm okay." And if you find myself last semester, I was just clinging on with five college classes, and sports, and everything else, "Oh no, I need that support."

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:11] I think that's pretty typical response. So, John, as you craft that then, and it's a new batch of students coming into that seminar course taking different classes, it sounds like, as it, sort of, goes through. And so, as a teacher, how do you manage the load or the ambiguity to some extent of what comes your way from term to term?

John Robertson: [00:12:33] Well, it's similar. I have to say this, for some of my seminars, I wish I did a much better job. I mean, I've got stuff started, like today at noon, and actually that particular group is kind of kind of a handful. But, yeah, it is -- the difficulty there is the various subjects that everyone is being funneled into. So, on a given day, you might have students who are working, they have a major writing assignment due in an English class in, say, five days. And so, they're finishing up rough drafts.

John Robertson: [00:13:16] And so, on the one hand, I want to help them with the rough drafts. But on the other hand, I might have a group of four students in the Philosophy class who, in terms of their reading, they're trying to understand Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the epistemology that they're working on. And so, I have to prioritize.

John Robertson: [00:13:34] Now, I know somewhat in advance of what is going to happen because I have the students give -- they have to write up a calendar for me of their major assignments. And so, across all of my students, I'm able to see when their major assignments are coming up. So, when I go into the class, I'm already aware, "Okay. I'm going to have these students working on these rough drafts for this class." And so, I'll be able to maybe go over a few of those personally. And then, I'll go and talk to, "I know I need to talk to these four students and just kind of review something out of Plato's Republic."

John Robertson: [00:14:10] And so, basically, having the students give me the information about what is going on in their own courses is really crucial that. And then, I kind of plan around that. So, the real crucial thing is kind of building a communicative relationship where you're able to get information you need from your students.

John Robertson: [00:14:28] And the long-run payoff of this is that you build these relations in your seminar class because all students are in your seminar class. But then, what happens is that when they get out of seminar, and they're in their second semester with us, or they're seniors with us, you have that relationship. And so, these students feel more comfortable coming back to you with papers, say, rough draft, or just they come back and say, "Gosh, I've got this science assignment. And can we just talk about it a bit? And can you help me out?"

John Robertson: [00:15:00] Then, of course, as a high school teacher, I also say, "You should go to your professor and talk during office hours as well. But since you're here, we'll talk."

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:10] Right.

John Robertson: [00:15:11] Right? And so, the idea is to kind of know it's by no means replacing the college professors at all. The idea, in my mind, when we first started seminar was having something that's sort of what like graduate students do for undergrads at a research university. A lot of these middle college programs are not at research universities. You don't have-

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:34] Correct.

John Robertson: [00:15:34] You don't have grad students there. So, this is a way of basically kind of filling that niche role that a good graduate student plays for undergrads in, sort of, a lecture/seminar of course.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:51] And so, Kat, tell us a little bit about your experience sitting in the collegiate piece of this. So, you're a high school student. And just to be really clear to our listeners because this one is a little bit different than some of the other things that we've talked about so far in the program in that, as John said, we're actually adding that to college. So, this program, in totality, is embedded and actually sits at the institution of higher ed. It's not adjacent to. It does have some of its own space. But it's still physically at the college. A lot of these, that's not the case. Right there, just there at high schools, but they behave differently. This one is fully at the college.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:37] So, when you're here, who does Kat feel like? Which piece of this world? Does it depend on where you're sitting at any moment when you're in a college class, you're the college student, when you're over at seminar, you're a high school student, or do you really have had the opportunity to sort of create a space of your own?

Kat Barr: [00:16:53] No matter what, I feel like a college student because of the responsibility you have to take. But even how the college courses are set up, a lot of the classes I am currently enrolled in, there are maybe one to two other middle college students. But otherwise, there are adults coming back or whatever it may be. And I love that. It's really cool because I've always gotten along with adults really well. And it's just a different environment because you don't have to raise your hand like, "Oh, can I go to the bathroom?" or "Can I make this comment?" You can just say it. Like it's a discussion. We'll get off topic, sometimes related, sometimes not, but it's very enjoyable.

Kat Barr: [00:17:36] I like that it's on campus because at high schools, they're really overcrowded; while here, it's like half the seats are empty. So, it's nice. I enjoy it being on the college campus. A lot of students here still like to take classes at their home school, which is fine, and you can do that. They have it set up here that you can take classes at your home school, like if it will be like ROTC, or Yearbook, or some type of percussion, anything like that, they can go back and do take those classes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:11] So, students go back and forth fairly independently then between one piece of the program and their home high school in that case?

Kat Barr: [00:18:19] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:19] Yeah, okay. So, John how do you navigate the relationships between the K12 component of the middle college? And so, for our listeners, if you are just listening to this one and didn't listen to the previous episode, which sort of sets the stage what a middle college is, particularly as it relates to Alaska, go back and listen to that. It's all explained there. But the relationships as it relates to middle college can be intriguing.

John Robertson: [00:18:50] It was so. So, in Alaska, I think, I believe every other state in the union, public education is a right. So, every state established, okay, they're going to provide a public educational system to a certain age. So, up to Grade 12, the children in the state have a right to education and public expense. But nobody has a right to a college education.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:22] Right.

John Robertson: [00:19:23] Right? And so, this sets up, sort of, two different distinct worlds where, one, on the public school side, that is K12, we're all interested in maximizing opportunity, keeping students in the school, keeping them engaged, and, of course, working with families because, to certain extent, we act as maybe this is not how things were understood 20 years ago, but, at least, here, where I am now, the school district sees itself really as an extension to assist the families in the education of their own children. So, we're here as partners with families. We're not in an adversarial role with families.

John Robertson: [00:20:08] The university system does not exist in an adversarial role with families. But in the university system, each student is considered a radical individual. And although they do not have a right to a university education, the right to privacy with respect to their parents is very strictly enforced. There's even federal law find this. And so, to a certain extent, that's one thing to sort of navigate where parents who may be very, very interested in how their children are doing, the college, literally, cannot tell them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:43] Right, right.

John Robertson: [00:20:44] Right. Now, as part of our program, you have to sign a waiver, right. You have to sign a waiver to get in our program where you, sort of, have to waive some of -- the individual student waives his or her educational privilege and grant it to us on the high school side. So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:02] But not necessarily to their parent, or to the school, or to the [crosstalk].

John Robertson: [00:21:04] They get to us. And then, the waiver with respect to the parents simply means that the professor can't. If that professor so chooses, may talk to a parent. But in no respect is the faculty member required. And part of what, in fact, our job at the middle college is, is to help the professors do their job by we assume the burden of working with the families, so that the professors can be professors, and they can be teachers to their individual students, and do not have to be overly concerned -- for that matter, concerned at all about what-

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:52] Friction.

John Robertson: [00:21:53] About what a family may think of [crosstalk] respectfully.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:56] Right. And postsecondary, after all, is an adult institution by design, right? And so, it carries a lot of that legacy with it. So, Kat, how have you found that piece of the experience? So, to come in. So, you had to waive some of those access points. But how has that experience been for you? It's different for every student. Every family, they behave very differently. There's not necessarily a universal one. But what's your experience with that been?

Kat Barr: [00:22:24] I haven't any issues or caused any problems. At least, I think I haven't. So, I haven't really experienced anything with that. I have no issue giving someone like, "Oh, if you need to tell my parent this or that, that's fine." I have a really good relationship with my parents but I know not every student does.

Kat Barr: [00:22:46] And I think it is important because it's like we're in a adult environment. So, it's like, "Okay, well, this student is being kind of loud, but their parent doesn't need to know like they're being really loud and disruptive during seminar." It's like, yes, it is obnoxious to a degree, but it isn't going to ruin the entire thing. It's just one day, one class, whatever it may be. So, I personally don't think it's an issue or anything else.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:17] So, John one of the things that you mentioned earlier was to point out that the middle college and, often, middle colleges are embedded in small institutions, smaller regional campuses, community colleges, small independent universities, stuff that tends to be the norm, rather than big research institutions.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:36] And so, with that in mind, there is an implied level of intimacy amongst the relationships, I think, that most people would assume that because you are at a small institution -- how many students roughly at Mat-Su at the college?

John Robertson: [00:23:53] So, at the college, I'm not sure. I mean, we have 177 or so students in our program. And I think we constitute maybe a little over 10% of the total student enrollment at Mat-Su college, but don't quote me on that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:13] No. No, not at all. But the point being is within that small ecosystem, and there are advantages to that. There are disadvantages to that as well always. But the small nature of the community, I guess, is really what I find-

John Robertson: [00:24:24] So, I guess, I would say this. Ideally, there would be a high level of coordination between the high school teachers, such as myself, and the college faculty. That would be the ideal. In practice, what I've seen is that there's a certain amount of -- in an environment this small, there's a certain amount of personality issues. But, also, it's just we are so busy like all the time.

John Robertson: [00:24:55] And I have to say, the school administration - and when I say the school administration, I should say the college administration - has really worked. They've really worked to try to integrate us into, sort of, the professional college right here and, sort of, facilitate discussion. But you've got a lot of faculty who they don't come to faculty meetings because they're really, really busy.

John Robertson: [00:25:20] So, I would say, it's thought as -- the situation is very collegial, but there's not as good communication flow, as I would like to say, just as an instructor. Now, that said, both our principal and our high school counselor meet weekly with the academic counseling staff of the college. And, now, I'm not in those meetings because I'm a high school teacher. I'm doing my teaching thing.

John Robertson: [00:25:49] But I know that in those meetings, they talk about individual students and how individual students are doing so. So, that's not a conversation between university faculty and high school faculty, but it is a discussion between the academic counselors on both sides, and they're getting information from the university faculty in front of me. And that's a way of sort of providing support and training information about students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:18] Right. And, ultimately, contributing back towards long-term student success.

John Robertson: [00:26:23] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:24] And the students in this program, it's been around since 2012 in one form or another, but the students in this program are very successful. The Mat-Su Middle College data's quite impressive on national level. Your data is really, really impressive as it relates to your student success, as it relates to how they're actually performing when they're sitting in those classes. So, what's your explanation?

John Robertson: [00:26:54] Well, I guess-

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:55] I mean, I have my theories, but what-

John Robertson: [00:26:56] So, I'd say a couple of things. I mean, if you look at our college data, right, so our students outperform or, at least, certainly outperformed the regular college first year students. They also outperform college sophomores. They're on par with college juniors. There is a huge gap between college seniors and our first and second-year students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:24] As one would think.

John Robertson: [00:27:25] As one would hope. As one would hope.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:25] As one would assume, right? Yeah.

John Robertson: [00:27:25] Obviously. Having looked at these data, when a college senior, they have four years of college, they actually know what they're doing going into that first semester of senior year and second semester.

John Robertson: [00:27:36] Well, I think, one thing is that, to a certain extent, we do attract to our program, perhaps, a more intellectually-focused sort of student than it is the regular application pool for the community college.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:55] Right.

John Robertson: [00:27:56] Right. So, there's that. Another thing in terms of some of the data, I'll just pick one out. So, our ACT scores in terms of the essay, the ACT essay test -- and I don't want to make too big a deal of this. I mean, I'm very skeptical I've got these data points that is using these as metrics, but we've got to use what we have.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:20] Exactly.

John Robertson: [00:28:20] And our median essay ACTs or our median ACT essay score is in the 87 percentile nationally, looking at the national norm. And why is it that they're able to do that? Well,

number one, we do not teach to the test. I mean, when our juniors go in there and take that test second semester, they've already been in the college level writing course, and they've probably been writing several college papers in other courses - History, Science, what have you. And so, they've been engaged with college-level English instruction. And so, they're able to do fairly well on what's, essentially, an extemporaneous writing exam. And it's interesting that they are able to do better on an extemporaneous writing exam than people who are being taught to take an extemporaneous writing exam.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:13] Exactly. Well, I think that that goes to setting an intent and all of those different pieces. So, Kat, as you sort of think about what's next for you, where does this experience sort of sit in the ecosystem that gets you, not just to art school, but successful in the way that you think about and plan investment path to get there? What role do you think the experience that you've had here in terms of setting you up for that?

Kat Barr: [00:29:45] I'm, now, ahead. When I'm 18, I think I'll give up three courses or maybe 12 credit hours off of -- not 12 credit, but I'll be very close to having my associate's degree at 18. So, by the time I get my bachelor's, I'll probably be 22, just turned 22, versus other bachelors who would be getting out at 24. So, I'll be two years ahead of the game, and I'll be younger, and I'll have that experience, like, "I was this responsible in high school. So, I imagine how responsible I am now." So, applying for a job, there is that, and I'll be able to say, "I have job experience that. I have college experience. And not only did I have the integrity and the desire to start college early, I finished it early." And if I wanted to, I could go for a masters and graduate the same time as someone who didn't do this program who just came out with a bachelor's, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:49] So, it just moves you down but more efficiently towards that aspiration. So, as we have folks listening and thinking about taking on whether it's building middle college programs or other types of programs, but there are lots of folks sitting out wondering, "It sounds like it's a lot of work," and it is lot of work, no question about that at all, but, Kat, from a student perspective, if somebody is just getting started, the idea on paper, and then getting ready to design this thing, what's the top two things that you want somebody to know, from a design standpoint?

Kat Barr: [00:31:22] Like a physical location or just like more?

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:25] It could be. I'm really more interested, I think, from a programmatic aspect. So, there's another community in Alaska getting ready to start their middle college. As a student who's gone through the program, what do they need to know as they're at the design phase? I always like to end each one of the programs with, "Here's the thing you need to know," right, because that's really, really useful. Folks are sitting back wondering, "What am I pulling out of this that's useful to me?" So, what do these folks need to know from a student perspective, Kat?

Kat Barr: [00:31:53] I would say, this program, how it's set up is really efficient. What I've noticed though is, sometimes, teachers, and coaches, and whatnot at the home schools forget, "Hey, they're just normal high school students." They're taking college classes, and they may have a job, they may have various things outside of just the sport or this activity. And it's like, yes, we're college students, and we're taking these classes, and we're doing well, or we may not be doing well, but we're still high school students. We're still kids. And it's a lot of pressure. And sometimes, we need to understand that. We need to have a way that gives some space, if that makes sense.

Kat Barr: [00:32:42] Another way I would say that if you want to make a program like this is have the professors also understand that. Almost all of my professors, because of my height, and how I look, and how I present myself, I have had to tell all of them that I am at Mat-Su Middle College. Like I'm a

high school student, I'm 16. In my Microeconomics class, they talk about certain things that happened in the early 2000s, I'm like, "I was 5 then." So, there is a little bit of disconnect a lot of the time.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:16] But does that matter, do you think, Lat? So, I ask this question for real for a reason. We often will advocate actually that programs don't -- in bigger institutions, back to John's comment about the research institution and, sort of, the way these programs sit. So, oftentimes, big institutions, we actually will advise that there is no notification being made for a variety of reasons. So, have you found that that is a key component to your successful navigating and planning of those courses?

Kat Barr: [00:33:51] I can understand why you may not want to tell a professor, and treatment may be different. I know when I've gone back to my home school, I'm treated very differently if I'm like, "I go to the Mat-Su College." Either I will get not the most positive responses, or I'll be treated that I'm the super-smart, advanced student that may not necessarily be true. It's just about having integrity and being able to work. You don't have to be-

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:18] Well, people learn differently, right?

Kat Barr: [00:34:20] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:20] Some folks are going to be straight-A students all the time. They're really great at rote memorization. Other students are, "I need to be hands-on, and I'm not fitting in this environment." And you change one environment and submit still, right.

Kat Barr: [00:34:31] Yeah, exactly.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:31] So, lots and lots of pieces. So, the same question to you, John, what do I need to know if I'm going down this road?

John Robertson: [00:34:38] Well, I would just say this. I think, an important part of our program is that we are on a college campus, and that our students are integrated with regular college students. The thing that really surprised me the most, I think, now about our program is that our students are 16-year-old, are 17-year-olds, being in classes full of a whole mix of people. So, not just people who are, say, in their late teens and early 20s, like regular traditional college students, but, also, they have returnings.

John Robertson: [00:35:15] Like Kat said, you have the people who are in their 50s and 60s in these courses. And what's remarkable is that our students really developed socially and emotionally in that environment, I think, better than when they're just with their own peers. There's something about having those older people in the room that sets a higher level -- maybe I shouldn't say higher but more adult level of behavioral expectations.

John Robertson: [00:35:45] And, also, of course, our concern is also maintaining academic rigor. And the fear is that, "Okay, if you do get college curriculum, and you import into a high school environment, you're only teaching high school kids, does the curriculum, sort of, slip down? Does the rigor of evaluation and grading, sort of, slip down?" And what we've discovered is that having our students integrated in the regular college classes that those other students in there who are paying tuition, and who are adults, especially the older adults, they are really at check on keeping rigor from declining because they want a really hard course. So, many of our younger students,

although they might be willing to go along with a slide down, older people are less willing to accept that. And so, I haven't seen any decrease in rigor in the courses that I've started typically on.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:55] And we certainly see that as well. I mean, your point is a really great one. And I can say that through my travels and the various programs I've had the chance to really look at them and think with, we see the same thing that that fully integrated into that collegiate environment does, in fact, hold the bigger component across those. And it's good for everybody. All participants benefit from that. So, yeah, absolutely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:22] Well, I want to thank you both very much for taking some time out of your day. For our listeners, we'll have resources. Some of the things that you heard both Kat and John talked about today will be posted, so you'll be able to download or take a look at a variety of different things. But thank you so much, both of you, for joining me.

Kat Barr: [00:37:41] Thank you.

John Robertson: [00:37:41] Okay, well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:41] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media at Annalies Corbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.