

Polina: Hello, hello everyone. Welcome back to a new episode of our podcast. And today we're welcoming a special guest, Dr. Jennifer Armstrong from Loyola University Chicago. Dr. Armstrong is a clinical associate professor of communication at Arrupe College at Loyola University Chicago. Dr. Armstrong ~ celebrated her seventh anniversary at Arrupe and she teaches courses in public speaking and communication and new media and provides academic advisement for first year students. In addition, Dr. Armstrong had participated on numerous committees, primarily focusing on student engagement. This year, Dr. Armstrong acted as a program director for bridging the Divide, a partnership with the University of Chicago Institute of Politics. This program provided ARUP students with a platform to share varying perspectives as they engage with other students from urban and rural across the country. Dr. Armstrong has previously acted as advisor for the Black Men for Success and currently for Sister Girl Empowerment. Dr. Armstrong believes in empowering students to do their very best in classroom and life. This belief led to the development of her podcast, Express Your Best. And we are happy to host Dr. Jennifer Armstrong in our podcast.

Jennifer: Good morning, I'm so happy to be here.

Polina: Thank you so much. Of course, we are super excited because ~ we know you as a public figure, as a public person who is the face of Loyola University Chicago. And we are super excited to hear a little bit all the details, all the nitty gritty details, how to lead the students to success and to follow your lead.

Jennifer: Thank you for that kind introduction. Well, I'm still working on a lot of that, but it is definitely coming along.

Polina: Yeah. So wouldn't you mind to tell us a little bit? So how did you start? What brought you to Aruba College and what classes do you teach? Who are your students? Because I would assume that ~ Jesuit education is really blooming in Aruba College.

Jennifer: Absolutely. ~ And so my foundation is actually not in teaching at a Jesuit institution. And when I was thinking about how I got my start, I'm going to take us back just a little bit, if you don't mind. ~ And I started thinking back to my days observing my mother as an educator. So my mother was a teacher with Chicago Public Schools. And I just love to observe her with her students. And she would often take me into the classroom and the students would greet her. She would say, good morning, boys and girls, I respect you. And they would say, good morning, Mrs. Armstrong, we respect you. And I just thought, gosh, this is interesting. I love the way that they spoke to one another to start out their day. But my mother also took me to the homes of many of her students. And so whether we were meeting with families just to have a conversation, maybe delivering food or clothing, I was

privy to all of that. And so I really saw this as what began my model for teaching. ~ I learned that teaching didn't just take place in the classroom, but it was really about developing the entire person, ~ which is exactly what I see with the Ignatian pedagogy. You know, when I became a teacher, I started out at CPS. I taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. And I was just excited. And these were going to be the best and most well-behaved students in the world. And I was going to make sure that they knew everything. ~ So, you know, I went in and they were great. I will say that. I had a lot of fun. But I found myself, you know, in order to do the things that I needed to do in order to help these students to be the best possible. I had to help to influence them in a different way. I had to make some changes. So a lot of the textbooks that they used in this inner city public school were older and they didn't really represent the students in the way that I felt they should see themselves. And so it became my mission to make sure that the students had new textbooks that represented diversity in such a positive light.

I really wanted them to know that as African-American students that they were a part, they played a major role in history. just, I guess I kind of refused to stick to the idea that a curriculum was what came from a textbook and really wanted them to use life experiences. So we watched a lot of films and documentaries. We read, you know, a lot of books that weren't necessarily on the list, but it really got the students to begin asking questions. ~ And I loved it. And I see some of those students today and they remind me of some of the students that we did. And so with that, I went on to become a speech language pathologist. So I was in communication, but communication disorders primarily. And then I kind of started dabbling in traditional communication as well, specifically public speaking. But I found myself, really thinking about how to relate more of what the students were learning in a textbook to what they were doing outside of the classroom as well. So, you know, my style of teaching really was a lot about active engagement. You know, how can we make this work so that it's not just, you know, what you're learning here, but that it's a life experience. And so a lot of that, you know, took me through my years ~ at a state institution here in Chicago. I was there for 11 years. But I always wanted this population. I just always wanted to work at an institution where students were ~ diverse, but also just that they came from so many different environments, but that they had so many experiences to share. I think I wanted to learn something too, right? I wanted to get something out of the experience myself. And so I tried for years to teach at city colleges. I thought that was what I was destined to do. And it didn't happen for me. They kept telling me, no, my PhD was not enough. kind of took it as a sign. And ~ one day a friend who used to work at Loyola told me about Arrupe College. And I started out as an adjunct professor and that's how I ended up here. They had a full-time position in communication and I

applied and this was it. And Ignatian pedagogy just was such a great fit for me. So yes, that's how I got here.

Polina: That's awesome. So when you came to Loyola, apparently you taught kids, teaching kids and teaching, I don't want to say older students, but maybe more diverse in terms of the age students. So did you feel the difference? if you did, how was the adjustment?

Jennifer: Yeah, so actually after I left CPS, I did go on to teach at another, you know, institution, higher education for 11 years there. And then before I came to Arrupe, so yes, I interestingly, I was teaching graduate students. I taught a little bit, maybe a semester, maybe a year of undergrad, but for the most part, I was teaching graduate students. So it was kind of an adjustment to go back to at Arrupe. I was teaching 17, 18, 19 year old students. I teach first and second year. think, so I'm probably gonna get in trouble for this. I just feel like there's not a whole lot of difference. There's not a whole lot of difference when it comes to age in terms of you know development, the critical thinking skills, right? Those are things that I think are important.

Polina : Yeah, that was the proper way to put it together.

Jennifer : Yeah, and just in terms of experiences, absolutely, right? So everyone has experiences, ~ life experiences, but the ones that, you know, students have here at Arrupe are very different from the ones that I experienced in my last institution. And it's just being able to appreciate, you know, the differences in them. But I read something today and I was thinking about this when I was thinking about our interview and it was ~ I'm going through SEAL. I'm doing that journey right now. And so it looks at the spiritual exercises. And this came up today, that a certain oneness of experience unites all our stories. To listen to a story is to expand and deepen our own experience as we live into, live with, and learn from the shared experience of another. And so I thought that was really beautiful. And it does speak a lot about how I seek to engage students and how I want to relate to them, that we are all essentially made up as a series of stories, right? And that we really want to get to know those stories as a way to expand our own lives. And so not only do I get to do that for myself, but I encourage the students to have that experience as well.

Polina: Yeah, that's a good point because I just last week had a conversation with one of my colleagues who, we share a little bit of ~ same stories that you're talking about, right? But for people, ~ so it's not only the art of listening to the stories, but the art of

Jennifer: Uh-huh.

Polina: Telling these stories because sometimes it feels like what kind of story do I have? It's like regular, ordinary, extra, nothing to tell. But just like you say, every person is a story. And I think that one of the really fascinating things in your field is to like, I'm a student in your field. I'm not, of course, a teacher. And for me, as a student in your field would be an eye-opening experience if Dr. Armstrong will come and teach me how to tell my story, which I don't think very much entertaining, but apparently, just like you say, every person has a story.

Jennifer: That's right, that's right. I love that.

Polina: Yeah. So ~ how do you do it? How do you open the students and make them tell their stories?

Jennifer: Hey, you know what? Surprisingly, I think the students are really in a space where they want to share. They just need a platform and that kind of lends itself to my podcast. But in the classroom setting, ~ I find that when we start off with a self-introduction speech and I give students the flexibility, can, know, the door is wide open. You can decide what you want to speak about. ~ I give them ideas, but I tell them that we are now at a level where we talk about the show and tell speech, right, that we all started with. It was everyone's first speech. How have we grown from that? That now we want to talk about something that others may not know about us, something that we want to share. And I have had students to share some very deep and personal things about themselves that they're sharing for the very first time. So I also, I start with, know, maybe choose something that helps to define you. Who are the individuals that have helped to shape who you are? What is the experience that has maybe influenced the person that you are today? What is it about you that made you think Arrupe College was a good fit for you? You know, how did you end up here? So, you know, and asking those kinds of guiding questions, but also just saying, you know, what do you want us to know about you? I think that's helpful. But in addition to that, something you said, I also am not afraid to share things about myself. You know, my students, they know, you know, my background. Went to a historically black college or university and and I talk about that. And I also tell them, you know, my I had a former professor who tells me much of what you learn in college has little to do with the textbook. And it is about this evolution of life and how we go through it. You learn how you are in difficult times. You learn what makes you tick. You learn if you have to read something 10 times in order to get it. And you learn that maybe you don't really like reading at all, but you

know that you have to do it. And sometimes it's difficult. So I think that in learning that this is just a part of one, this is a part of life's evolution. It makes it maybe in some ways a little less daunting, but also acknowledging that communication in and of itself is, we all have to be able to do it. It's a requirement. We need it in order to survive in this world. So some come with a lot of apprehension.

But at the same time, I just try to make it a safe environment so that they know that they are welcome to share whatever it is that they desire. And I'll help them to shape it in a way that maybe is well understood, know, it's clear to the listener.

Polina: That's really touching me because I'm coming from hard sciences where communication, my language is ~ mathematics. And many times, at least I'm talking about myself, right? Because my background ~ is not English language at all. I speak other languages. And what ~ helps me to communicate is math, but it's absolutely not enough. Absolutely not enough. And many times I find myself saying something and saying it's coming from my cultural background. It's not necessarily that I'm trying to be rude or trying to be ~ direct. It's just this is how in my culture we communicate. And many times communication is not just ~ speaking eloquently or speaking ~ beautiful English, but it's actually culturally appropriate communication.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Polina: Do you, ~ does it come up in your classes, something like this?

Jennifer: Yeah, absolutely. Because our students, I mean, I teach students from ~ Columbia, students from, you know, just from all over the world. Students are ~ here and many of them are speaking English as a second language or students who never felt that they really mastered the English language as much as we can say that anyone's ever mastered it, right? So ~ that does come up. I mean, last semester I just, had a student in the first day of class who came to me and said, I don't do very well with English. I don't know how I'm going to do in this course. And, you know, I had to explain to her that I take students where they are. I said, good for you that this is not an English course. This is not a course where you're being evaluated on how well you speak English. So there are times where I've had students to maybe utilize their own language in the midst of a speech when they needed to. So it's more than that. I'm teaching you how to understand some of the nuances that go along with becoming a public speaker ~ and also for you to be comfortable and confident in the way that you're speaking and the way that you're sharing. So it's not so much about that language. That's a different class. ~

Polina: Thank you.

Jennifer: I'm interested in your being able to share your story in a way that's clear to the audience and understand that the audience, the listener is really, they're the most important people. And so if you can gear, you know, what you're saying towards this audience, then you have a chance at being heard and understood. Yeah, so that does come up very often, but everyone starts at the same place. You know, we're not students aren't graded on ~ how well they use the English language. So that's helpful. I think that makes them feel comfortable. ~ One of the things that comes up even more than that, if I can bring this up, students who are managing anxiety. And I remember when I first started here, ~ I knew that the students were nervous. People are nervous about public speaking. a saying that people would rather die than ~ give a speech or deliver their own eulogy before they deliver a speech. And so, it's a very real thing. And I have seen it all. Students, it's gone beyond someone being nervous so that they're sweating or their hands are shaking. mean, there are students that leave the classroom and don't return. They have difficulty with breathing. All of the things that, you know, represent some issues with anxiety. As a result, it has ~ caused me to expand how I address this. And so we do a whole section on how to manage anxiety. And, you know, we talk about breathing techniques, certainly, but the first thing I think we do that what I think is really helpful is that we acknowledge that this is real. You know, I'm not just going to say to you, oh, you can do it. You'll be fine. I don't worry. I've seen this before. Everybody's good. But just to acknowledge that these are real feelings that you're experiencing and that there are many people who experience these feelings as well. You know, we go through, I ask the question, how many of you are also feeling nervous? What are the things that you deal with when you're nervous? And we read studies that talk about this, know, this is the statistical data that goes along. This is the research that goes along with this. Now let's talk about, you know, some of the solutions. ~ And then we incorporate, you know, what do you find in terms of technology? Some people have talked about using that Calm app, or they talk about yoga or things that they've done that really work for them. And, you know, we constantly discuss, you know, how can we

Polina: Yeah.

Jennifer: Apply some of these strategies. So that, as you know, over the years since I've been here, that has been a big issue for many of our students. But I am happy to say that many of them definitely after their first speech come away saying, hey, that wasn't so bad. I came to, you know, I applied the techniques, but I also came to you and I rehearsed the speech with you. So I felt better prepared to deliver. And then they find that it wasn't as bad as they thought it was.

Polina: I have more questions, but I think I would stop and I will ask Jessica. Maybe she wants to ask something so I do not occupy the whole time with my questions.

Jessica: I was just thinking that both of the topics you teach generate anxiety, right? Paulina, you're teaching chemistry and Jennifer, you're talking about the anxiety that comes with public speaking. ~ And so it's interesting. Obviously the disciplines are very different, but the association students have with them is similar. ~ When you talk about ~ validating the students' feelings of anxiety, it sounds like you're doing a lot of for a personalis and caring for the students. What other ways do you demonstrate care for your students?

Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. That's a huge part of of a rupee. You know, when I think about, you know, ways that I care for the student, it goes back to, I guess, recognizing that a rupee is a community. And because we treat it as a community, it's one in which students are made to feel comfortable and coming to us when there's a need and that we can refer students to one another. So we have social workers here that will come to your class if that's what you want. Or we can refer the students to social workers. But also, we take a lot of time with our students. We are meeting with them individually. As you mentioned in the introduction, we are also advising. And so we're meeting with these students in groups. We're talking to them on the phone as in many ways as possible trying to find ways to engage the student. But I also, you know, tried to maintain, establish and then maintain these relationships with students even after they leave Arrupe. ~ I just love keeping up with the students and seeing all the things that they're doing and continuing to encourage them to go further. Sometimes if students mentioned to me that they are interested in a particular field, it's nothing for me to say, yeah, I know someone who does that. Let me give them a call and I can connect you with that person. ~ They may not know anyone who's ever done that before. I interviewed a student who is interested in coming to Arrupe and she told me she wants to be a museum curator. And I said, now interesting, how did you decide that that's what you wanted to do? And then I asked her, do you know anyone that's a museum curator? And she said, no, I don't and my wheels are turning and I'm thinking I know someone who works with the Smithsonian, DC, and I need to, and she's not even a student here yet. I had to kind of pull back a little bit and I was saying, maybe you should wait until she's a student here. So I think it's just the way that I choose to engage with students every day really does address this whole you know, that we're trying to meet the needs of individuals. And even in my podcast, you know, that that is a platform where students can talk about, you know, some of the highs and lows of their college journey and then not only do that, but offer some words of wisdom for their peers. So I don't want you, you know, them to just think, it's my opportunity to just pour out. And then I get to take, you

know, all of this for myself. But you also have to give something back. And I know that that has to be modeled because even in the midst of the days that we have that are difficult in our teaching and our serving, we have got to give to the students that we work with. And so it can be difficult, but we got to share that and have the students learn that this is something that you need to do as well.

Polina: I'm wondering with all this work that you are doing, I would assume that your class sizes should be limited to certain number of students, so to be able to serve the students on such level that we're talking about. How many students in your classroom do you usually have?

Jennifer: Yeah, so our classroom setup is a little bit different. The first year, so everyone has to take public speaking, of course. And there is another communication instructor. She also teaches public speaking and she teaches a ~ intro to communication class. And we have a business communication class as well. So I'm teaching that for the first time this semester. But that class started out with about 18 students. And usually I don't have any more than 18 to 20 students. But we also have some classes that are smaller. So my class this summer will be communication and new media. And I may have 10 to 12 students in that class, which works well because those students do podcasting projects. And so it really helps that they're smaller. They can work in small groups. They get to go and record in the podcast studio and I can kind of work with them a little bit more hands on.

Polina: Um, that's the, that's, that's a great class size, especially for public speaking, right? Because, uh, when you probably need to give a, uh, a stage for, uh, everyone to speak and you need to listen.

Jennifer: Yeah, and I think, you know, when I talk about a group being a community, I also try to establish that within the classes, right, that we are a community. And so, you know, we're a community, we're a safe space, we can engage with one another. We don't have to be afraid of speaking up or asking questions, which is a whole nother. You know, that's something else that we try to get students to relinquish. You know, this idea that they don't have to, that it's not okay to ask. If you don't know, please say so. If you have something to add to the discussion, please say so.

Polina: Yes, absolutely. You know, I guess that in every discipline we sometimes face a certain challenge. So, could you discuss a specific challenge that you faced in implementing a new teaching approach and how you navigated it? What lesson did you learn from overcoming this challenge?

Jennifer: Yeah, I think when we took a reading class recently, this was a professional development experience. And so it was a course that was helping us to understand different strategies ~ and ways that we could implement them to help our students with reading and all that goes along with it. you know, we talked about some of the basics that, you know, when we are on our own learning journey, when we're encountering new information, how do we face that information? Do we look up new words? Are we writing down those things that are familiar to us? What's our own strategy that we've used beyond context clues? How do we understand the material? And we also listened to students. There were some videos where we listened to students and they talked about their fear of asking questions that they felt that they didn't that they would not be heard. They didn't know what to do when professors said read these chapters. And so they didn't feel the need to read them because there was no real instruction surrounding that. We also talked about setting norms in our classrooms. And so here's the challenge for me. I come from a very structured background, ~ from my HBCU, Hampton. You know, the professor knew if you missed class, you were going to hear about it, you didn't come to school late, you did your work. This was just, you know, wasn't a lot of flexibility in that. And I appreciated the structure. ~ And the norms were already set. And so that's my, you know, that's also been my approach to teaching. Right, so I come in, I've got these things that you're supposed to do. ~ Here they are, these are the guidelines. This is how you, this is the level of respect that's required. There should be no phones. should, all of these different things. Until I was, in this class, they talked about establishing norms. Well, what was happening for me specifically was that, on speech days, students were coming in late to class. I know it doesn't seem like much, but I told the students when we're talking about this as a community, right, that we want to be respectful of one another. Students acknowledging that students are going through lot. They are experiencing different levels of anxiety ~ when it comes to speech day.

So they have worked hard or maybe they haven't worked so hard, but whatever it is, people are feeling that certain angst. And so to have someone entering the classroom late, disrupting the classroom, the structure that was created by me, but also that the students had come to expect, it became a big deal. And so I told the students, said, I just had to stop because I told them, I said, I know that cartoon where smoke is coming out of your head. I know that smoke was coming out of my head. I know it. So let me just stop because I don't, I really believe that you can impart those feelings onto, you know, the people that you're in front of and that angst, that nervousness, that tension is not the way that I want things to feel in this community, in this classroom environment on the day that you are supposed to be delivering a speech. I want you to feel at peace. I want you to feel comfortable. I want you to feel confident. So I have to exude that. And I wasn't feeling it. That was it. So I pulled

back. And what I decided to do was ask students to come up with what they thought were some of the concerns surrounding students coming into the classroom late. Because I needed to know, am I the only one? That thinks this is a problem. And so they rolled down some of the same things I was feeling. They said that people have worked hard, it's a disruption. They don't want someone coming in during the middle of their speech. And so once we did that, I said, well, what do you think? Individually, they had to come up with some solutions. What do you think are some solutions for that? And then they had to work within their groups. And I wanted them to come up with maybe two or three resolutions. You know, what do we think should be done about this? And interestingly, they range from, you know, you should leave them outside and they should belong to class and they should. So I had to weed out some of those. But they came up with a couple of great, resolutions. this is a student who is late should communicate with Dr. A first. Yes, communication. They should let her know that they are riding, that they're going to be late. Maybe they're on public transportation. They recognize that things happen, right? So this is life. So they would say communicate with Dr. A first, then. If that happens and you are beyond this amount of time late, then you are going to have five points deducted from your speech. If you are beyond that time, this amount of points will be deducted. So after they gave me all of their suggestions, I did. put them in a Google form. I had them go through them all. And it was a last chance for them to add anything additional that they wanted to. And then that's how we came up with the norms surrounding, you know, late arrivals. And that was a big deal for me. I don't typically relinquish, you know, that kind of control in the classroom, but I was so grateful for that. I really did love it. And I know that I have to do it for each class because, you know, this was one community. Now I've got to do it in the next. So I really appreciated that.

Polina: Yeah, that's awesome. I agree, communication is the key here. And what is interesting, I think that, so in some majors, taking communication is ~ not one of the requirements, but I think it's not only it's important for the students, but it's important for us. And while you were speaking, while you were telling your stories, I was thinking about how amazing it would have been

Polina: To take a class in communication, at least for me, I would have been happy to take a professional development class in communication.

Jennifer: I'm sure there's something you can still do it. Yes. Absolutely.

Polina: Yeah, maybe this will be a great beginning, a great start for new ideas.

Jessica: I have too many buttons and screens and all that kind of stuff. ~ And so what was it like? I know you said it was a big deal for you to relinquish that control. was a big deal

about that? I know you said you're used to a lot of structure. What else was behind that that made this such a big deal for you?

Yeah, just, you know, because I'm really, also always about, you know, how to better myself as an instructor, certainly. ~ But it was also just, ~ I felt like I was releasing a burden, if I can say that, that I knew that it didn't have to be, you know, something that I was always doing because now students were beginning to hold themselves accountable, which is ultimately what I want. But my saying over and over again, you've got to be accountable was not working. But to put themselves in a position where they could then say, ~ well, I made this, I created this rule. ~ So I need to hold myself accountable to it. But it also made them more accountable to one another. ~ And so, yes, I get, now I get these emails from students saying, the train is late or I'm running behind, is it okay? Sorry, I wish I was coming earlier. And then we also came up with grace periods. And I love, you get me anything that says grace, so I gotta give grace. So a grace period of 10 minutes and just those, because they're probably really minor things, but it really did help me to, it helped me to see that I could put some things back on the onus back on them. I didn't have to do everything. And I imagine it's like parenting. I don't know. I'm not a parent, but I imagine it's very similar. You can say, you know what? You can do this for yourself. And you're going to be OK. And my goal is to not only help you to be successful in the classroom, but in life. And if that's the case, You know, how am I doing the best that I can to teach you those skills? ~ And that's a life skill.

Polina: I wanted to actually flip the coin a little bit because we talked about challenges, right? But again, from ~ many things that ~ I know about your impact to the students, I know that there many success stories in your teaching. But can you maybe share a memorable success story or a moment where you felt a real impact on students' academic and personal growth? I bet there are many, but maybe what comes into your mind first?

Jennifer: Thanks. So only because this student is, ~ so there are two young ladies who asked me to be a mentor for them. Both of them were here at Arrupe. And I am just so impressed by them. They have always just, know, shown up in a way that was positive. They are encouraging to other students. They are, you know, that and then they are brilliant and beautiful and just, you know, wonderful to each other. And I really appreciate that. So one of the young ladies is actually she graduated from Arrupe last year and she is now a junior at Loyola. And she took my public speaking class. She was my the first student on my podcast. And she's been on the podcast twice and she's also interviewed me. I have just had an opportunity to witness her growth from the very beginning. And most recently I saw her, she worked with a group to put together a panel on, ~ I think it was gun violence at Loyola, not gun violence at Loyola, the program was produced on the lawyer on campus,

right? To make sure I'm clear. ~ So just to witness her, the part that she actually presented was focusing on women and their experience with gun violence and just the facts that were astounding and the way that she presented it was just so engaging. She had invited all of these ~ community partners to come and participate. And I just had a chance to watch how she was able to take a lot of the things that I know that she learned at Arrupe and just put them together. And I just told her, I mean, I was so proud to witness that. I told her how well she spoke, of course. I told her, you were clear, concise, coherent. Loved your volume was perfect. You were just fluent in your speech. And she just said, really? I was trying to think of all the things that I was supposed to remember to do, you know, when I'm speaking. I said, you did them all. ~ And so that is, that's just the one that comes to mind. But there are so many students that I can say, ~ even those students I've had a student who didn't really, he didn't do well here. And he ended up when he came to my office and he said, I just really need to pass. And I said, I know, but you this isn't, you didn't, you know, this is the way it works out. And I wish you had, but I, what I share with him is that, but you're going to be okay. And he just couldn't you know, he couldn't wrap his mind around that. He's someone else that I interviewed for the podcast and he talks about that. But he is, he's okay. He went on to do something else because timing is everything, right? So we don't all get it, you know, at the same place at the same time. So, but one of the things that I appreciate is that I can share with you that I love and care about you and beyond all of that, ~ whether you do well in the classroom or not that doesn't, know, those two things are not mutually exclusive. I can love and care for you and want the best for you. Even if you're not a straight A student, that's okay. Everyone's not a straight A student.

Polina: That's, yeah, this is very inspiring. No, this is very inspiring. I agree with you and many times, so I just to share a little bit about my feelings about what you just said. ~ I write a lot of letters of recommendation. I get many requests for letters of recommendation because I teach pre-health, pre-med students. And I feel even

Jennifer: I was more than you asked for, Polina. Sorry.

Polina: More call to write letters of recommendations for not an A students. Because A students, are already successful in terms of the scores. And apparently it's not, so those who are not A students, not necessarily they are less talented or less smart. just they had other obstacles in their road to, and I don't want to say success because A student is not necessarily, to be an A student is not necessarily to be successful because actually many who are successful are not A students. And I feel a call to support more students who are actually not scoring an A in my class, but rather worked hard, demonstrated interest in the subject. And again, not necessarily all the time, the interest should be there because we know that the life is the life and not every day is a successful day. Sometimes we have a

bad hair day. But I agree with you. So ~ the respect and the love and the support and being an A students, they are not necessarily, they don't necessarily need to go along and just watching the student growth, watching the coming, even if a student has been always a C student, but ~ it doesn't mean that a person does not deserve the support. It actually means an opposite. It means that we need to support more the students who struggle.

Jennifer: Yeah, I was not a straight A student and I had so much tremendous support, you know, and that's one of the things that I appreciated about my college and also just, you know, my family. That was not the expectation that I came home with straight A's. The expectation was that I did my very best and that's what we want. And people are always, when they listen to my podcast and they say, how do you pick these students? Well, I don't really pick them.

Polina: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah.

Jennifer: You know, the students end up, they come to me in a way, you know, whether someone recommends them or I meet someone and they have a young person or I talk to them here. And I never asked them, what is your GPA? It doesn't come to that. But they say some of the most amazing things. I mean, when they talk about the words of wisdom that they offer are not just for students, you know, these are words of wisdom that certainly are life-changing for me. So I love to listen to them and find out what's in the minds of these young people. And that has nothing to do with how well you're doing in class.

Polina: Dr Armstrong, have more questions, I can speak more and more, but I think we just need to meet ~ outside of the podcast and discuss our passion for teaching. ~ We're very short on time and I just want to be ~ respectful of your time and Jessica's time. I think at this point we can really wrap up.

Jennifer: We need to have lunch, come on now.

Polina: And I would like to thank Dr. Armstrong for sharing her amazing vision to teaching me new things. And thank you, Jessica, for co-hosting this beautiful episode. And thank you everyone for connecting and listening to us today again.