**Urban Evolution Podcast – Lori Carrell**

Bill Von Bank:

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Bill Von Bank:

Welcome to Urban Evolution, a podcast about harnessing creativity and innovation to transform communities. I'm your host, Bill Von Bank. The vision of the University of Minnesota Rochester is to inspire transformation in higher education. It's a vision that aligns well with the new groundbreaking partnership with two of the world's most recognized brands, Mayo Clinic and Google are partnering with the University of Minnesota, Rochester on a pilot program called NextGen Med, designed to inform the future of higher education, leveraging machines and humans working together in an optimizing relationship to accelerate learning.

Bill Von Bank:

This partnership is a first of its kind for higher education and provides an accelerated degree for students. Today. I'm joined by University of Minnesota, Rochester, Chancellor, Lori Carrell, to learn more about NextGen Med and what it means for higher education. We also talk about the impact COVID-19 has had on the campus community in Rochester, Minnesota, and the uniqueness of the living and learning campus, which has focused on healthcare studies. Chancellor, Lori Carrell, welcome to the Urban Evolution podcast.

Lori Carrell:

Thank you. I'm so glad to be here today.

Bill Von Bank:

Chancellor Carrell, can you share with us your career in higher education in your current role as Chancellor for the University of Minnesota, Rochester?

Lori Carrell:

Well, I'm happy to share about that. I was previously in Wisconsin and a professor of communication and running a teaching and learning center and doing some curricular redesign. And then I heard about this little place off to my West and I had to check it out.

Bill Von Bank:

What made the opportunity in Rochester so appealing?

Lori Carrell:

Well, there was a search firm that kept nagging me in my inbox and they told me that this place was innovative and collaborative. And they said that research would inform practice and I just didn't believe it. And they kept nagging. And finally I said to my colleague, "You know, I wish these folks would leave me alone. This can't possibly be true." And she said, "Well, why don't you drive over there and check it out? I mean, what could happen?" That's what she said. And I drove over, I checked it out. It was real.

Bill Von Bank:

Seeing is believing.

Lori Carrell:

And I was blown away. And though it was so sad to leave my other campus, I was drawn here. It was just compelling, the mission and vision of this place and this community.

Bill Von Bank:

We're going to dig deep into all of that in just a bit. But you are described as an adventure seeker from a remote Eskimo village in Alaska to the Middle East and Ecuador. What have those adventures taught you? Those are exciting areas to visit.

Lori Carrell:

Right, and I would have to start by saying that being the Chancellor of the University of Minnesota, Rochester has been the greatest adventure of all. And yet, those early adventures were part of what shaped my mindset. I remember a first few days in the village in [inaudible] with a student named [inaudible], if I can tell this story.

Bill Von Bank:

Sure, please do.

Lori Carrell:

And he was a teenage Eskimo and I was a new teacher. We were seated in front of an Apple IIe computer, if that dates the story, so be it. We were struggling with the floppy desk and I could feel him just staring at me, just staring, I was very uncomfortable. And my two hour in-service had not mentioned what to do in this circumstance. And so finally I just reacted and "[Name 00:04:45], what are you staring at?" And [Name] leaned in closer, and he said, "What you see when you look out?" I go, "What are you talking about? What do I see when I look out? I see you, the computer, the snow out the window in August, what do you mean what do I see?" And then he leaned closer, still is just almost nose to nose. It's just awful.

Lori Carrell:

And then he said "It all blue." Because he had never been that close to a person with blue eyes before. And I was like, "No, no, no, not at all. No. When you look out and I look out, we see exactly the same world." But I was so wrong, right? And, and it took some time for me to realize that we saw completely different views when we looked out. But of course it wasn't the color of my eyes or his eyes, but rather our culture, our language, our histories, our perspective of education, everything. And so that question has carried with me through the years. What do you see when you look out? Is the question to be asking, especially of our learners, what is it that you see? What has informed your view? And so listening deeply, proceeding humbly, and being ready to learn is what adventure has taught me.

Bill Von Bank:

Fascinating. Tell us more about the University of Minnesota Rochester, or known as UMR, a campus that opened in 2006. What makes it unique?

Lori Carrell:

Number one is that at UMR, we are able to have educational research inform practice. And so we choose to do what works. We had the opportunity to start from scratch, which is enviable by other higher education institutions. We did start serving students in 2009. And we started with a set of practices that the research and education said, these will work and then set up a system whereby our faculty, no matter what their discipline, do their primary research in education in student learning and development, biologists, philosophers, everyone. And we use those results in real time to inform practice, to adapt, to innovate. Our result of using these practices, which I love to talk about, so I hope you'll be asking, but a result is equity and educational attainment. What some have called closing the opportunity gap. And that's where it has led, which is beautiful by design and by outcome. Lots more details, but it is a novel innovation community.

Bill Von Bank:

You've previously described that UMR students are clustered in teams to live and study. A model that reflects Mayo Clinics team approach to delivering medicine. What are the benefits found in grouping students?

Lori Carrell:

Well, the first outcome that is so vital is sense of belonging. And it is sense of belonging and the practice at intercultural relationships and the interdependencies and conflicts that emerged there and the learning that emerged there that produced measurable outcomes of higher GPA, less time to degree, and greater placement. Like the major outcomes that are desired in higher ed. What's also important to note is the quality of the learning journey itself when wine is in a committed community, rooting for each other, advocating for each other, studying together, eating together, doing life together in a campus environment. So these living learning communities are central to how we're organized.

Bill Von Bank:

2020 was a record year for enrollment at UMR. What do you attribute that to?

Lori Carrell:

We had momentum in progress with our enrollment growth. What we're really working to do is to be strategic about that growth so that we sustain the current campus culture and the current educational outcomes so that we have facilities and faculty just in time as the enrollment continues to grow. As we're looking forward, I think that the pandemic may impact interest in health careers, and we are focused on health. So that may be a factor going forward. But the last year from '19 to '20 was momentum in progress.

Bill Von Bank:

Your campus has expanded into new space in One Discovery Square, which is part of a new healthcare innovation campus in downtown Rochester, Minnesota. What's unique about this space is that students are learning next to physicians, researchers, and engineers who represent global health companies in a collaborative environment. That must be a major benefit for students.

Lori Carrell:

Absolutely. In fact, we're just now doing an alumni survey in which we're documenting those benefits. And at the top of the list so far, though the work isn't done, is the expansion of awareness of options. So we do primarily educate students who are just coming out of high school and they are moving from childhood vision for making a difference in health, which has a very limited list of careers and into an adult version of, "How do I bring to bear my unique experiences to make a difference in a career in health?"

Lori Carrell:

And as they engage in the environment of One Discovery Square and see the options and diagnostics and, their perspectives simply expand. And it is an inspiration to them, it's also very practical in opportunity for internships and work study and job observation like, "Well, what do you do?" Right? That the answer to that question is part of the instruction that students receive here. And one might think that's organic, but we've been highly intentional about where we place our classrooms and are so grateful to have the opportunity of all of Discovery Square, but particularly One Discovery Square. Also on the list there is, we love the environment. The light is part of wellbeing. And our students comment on this often, which I just find fascinating.

Bill Von Bank:

You have 10,000 square feet in this new building, Mayo Clinic, and University of Minnesota, Rochester were two early announced tenants of this building and then added to that is Boston Scientific, and Phillips, WuXi Diagnostics, major health companies. Talk us through your space and how unique it is.

Lori Carrell:

I'm happy to do that. So I do want to reference the ancient history of our startup in 2009, in that the original first Chancellor, Stephen Lehmkuhle was also very intentional about putting students in proximity to healthcare professionals and to patients and visitors in the sky ways. And so that spirit continues with us as we make decisions about space and when Discovery Square put us in the position to be able to expand what students would experience, in addition to the spaces in downtown.

Bill Von Bank:

Rochester is the global headquarters for Mayo Clinic. Google will now have office space in Rochester. You recently announced a groundbreaking innovative partnership with Mayo Clinic and Google known as NextGen Med designed to re-envision healthcare education. Explain that partnership.

Lori Carrell:

Might I just start by saying how thrilled we are to have this opportunity. The partnership with Mayo Clinic has been longstanding and our students have been the trailblazers there and internships and other opportunities demonstrating the viability of an undergraduate in that space. And so those doors have opened wider and wider still, and they inform what will be NextGen Med. The partnership with Google helps us bring to bear the lessons learned and continuing to be learned in this pandemic. And that we're so grateful to be able to connect through video chatting.

Lori Carrell:

And yet, we know that higher tech exists and is not being leveraged in classrooms at any level, right?

Bill Von Bank:

Anywhere.

Lori Carrell:

Anywhere, right. So we can imagine easily if you know a young person, some teenager who is gaming and they're in a virtual world and the people they're playing the game with are all around the planet. And then it's time to go to class, their phone clicks and tells them. So they step out of that virtual world with their global partners and they step into a rather archaic remote environment in which people, well I'll own this one, you know, forget to unmute themselves, or.

Bill Von Bank:

We've all been there.

Lori Carrell:

Yes. And all of us are doing our best, absolutely. But we're aware that higher tech tools could enhance instruction. And we want to use those higher tech tools while also, so this is a both and, using are highly relational, very human processes of community that I've described. And some others where, who we are as human beings is part of education and higher tech enhances education. So, the program overall will be a pilot of a platform that makes wonderful use of higher tech instruction and data analytics to inform practice, something we're already doing. And that organizes all of the in and out of class experiences for students in one place for easy access, creates a digital learning portfolio as students progress toward competencies that have been identified by our industry partners as important for future employees, all of that beauty in one platform and an accelerated degree for undergraduates that makes use of community, relationship, and higher tech.

Bill Von Bank:

Give us the backstory on how this partnership formed.

Lori Carrell:

It was a glimmer last summer after we moved online virtually overnight, and that happened across education and across the country. And many of us knew we weren't doing what could be done. We were doing our best, but there were better ways to do what we had to do. And we just didn't have the tools. And so we began to record what was challenging and what might help, and then had a lot of generative conversation to spark ideas. So knowing Dr. Clark Otley and others here at Mayo who are working on the Mayo Clinic platform and accelerating toward their Bold Forward vision, and having conversations about how we could do better with the technology and the human centered design pieces in a conversation with my boss, President Joan Gabel, we cooked up an idea and at the very front of the idea was equity.

Lori Carrell:

We have this beautiful outcome and we had the disruption and crisis around George Floyd's murder. And we had the angst of, are we doing our very best in education? And that percolated up in a conversation to this idea, how can we do our very best for students when this pandemic is over? Of course, we didn't expect the length of the pandemic at that time.

Bill Von Bank:

Length of it, right.

Lori Carrell:

But we were able to, to get a pitch opportunity with Google and then the pre-design process began and it's just been an energizing experience ever since. It's wonderful to think about doing ever better for our students.

Bill Von Bank:

You noted as a pilot, so what's the length of the program?

Lori Carrell:

So the program will be designed this summer. It will launch the following summer. It is seven terms instead of eight, but because we're having students go year round, use the summers, this will take just over two years, two and a half years in, in that vicinity. And then students can be out and earning or out and on their way to advanced study. So the pilot launches in summer 2022 with 50 students in a cohort, and we are going to learn so much. Our faculty are expert at this kind of research and this kind of design, even though it's brand new, they know how to document and how to adapt. So what we want to do is pilot the platform and then tweak it until it is magnificent and then use it in other programs and more broadly and across the university, and as always in our vision statement, we seek to inspire transformation in higher education. So we think that we will learn lessons that we can share with the broader higher education community across the country.

Bill Von Bank:

I just want to reaffirm, this is a first for higher ed, correct?

Lori Carrell:

Absolutely. So there are online degrees, right? And there are academic technologists to help faculty use higher tech in instruction one course at a time. But there is nothing like this yet that uses human centered design and relationship along with machine learning and higher tech instructional tools in a health environment. So a piece of the pilot that I haven't talked about yet, there's just so many pieces.

Bill Von Bank:

Keep going.

Lori Carrell:

A piece of the pilot is that the courses will be organized around healthcare challenges. So another part of our vision is that we are empowering students to become designers of solutions to the grand health challenges of the 21st Century. And we wrote that vision before there was a pandemic. So, now we have all universally experienced one of those grand health challenge, and we know we need solution designers. And so as we block schedule courses, let's say one seven week period would have biology, and writing, and philosophy at the early stage of this accelerated degree.

Lori Carrell:

And perhaps the healthcare challenge would be disparities in vaccination rates across various demographics. And how could that be done differently? And what happened in all that? So there would be a healthcare challenge that integrates the coursework. And what that does first is, provide high relevancy to young people who are passionate about careers in health. And second, it teaches them how to design across disciplines, not to expect there to be solutions on this shelf as they go forward to use data and great thinking and compassion, to be able to come up with new ideas while they're learning basic content. So we're accomplishing multiple kinds of learning outcomes and they'll document their progress toward the requisite competencies in their digital learning portfolio.

Lori Carrell:

So all of these elements are to be designed this summer by our faculty and staff, in collaboration with Google and with Mayo Clinic. And it is a joy ride, absolutely. And one essential element is student voice. So that question from [Name] is one that we continue to ask of students. And we will have a student focus group who is testing and responding to ideas all the way through pre-design, design, piloting and beyond. We want to create something magnificent that informs the future of higher education.

Bill Von Bank:

Are you getting feedback from your colleagues around the country about this program? How did you get it set up? Can we listen in? Can we participate? I mean, this is huge.

Lori Carrell:

I have to tell you the dings on my phone from LinkedIn in the last few weeks since this has been announced are nonstop, and there is broad interest. It's interesting in higher education and all of education, there is both exhaustion from the current work, which is emotionally and physically draining, challenging ,what we want to be doing, what we can do. And there is excitement. So, exhaustion and excitement together, and the idea of machines and humans working together in an optimizing kind of relationship is what we want to pursue here in education.

Lori Carrell:

How can we accelerate learning our own and our students with such optimization? And nobody knows what it looks like yet, but we get to be a part of creating a pilot of one way that it could look and then sharing that. I have intersected with from across the country in something called Higher Education's Big Re-Think and equity, sustainability, tech equity, deeper learning, more compassionate learning, more awareness of home environments that have come through the way we're doing education right now. All of these ideas are very hopeful. And so there is this excitement across the country, and I have to be real and say, there is also exhaustion. So we think that doing something intellectually interesting that has student's best interest in mind will bring the rejuvenation we need as we emerge from this pandemic.

Bill Von Bank:

And having the students help design it.

Lori Carrell:

Yeah.

Bill Von Bank:

I mean, you've, you've covered all your bases.

Lori Carrell:

Yeah, great.

Bill Von Bank:

That's great.

Lori Carrell:

Their perspectives are the most important.

Bill Von Bank:

In a recent interview, you noted that UMR has a strong placement track record with two thirds of graduates going on to advanced studies while others enter healthcare fields immediately after graduation, to what do you attribute that success?

Lori Carrell:

First and foremost, very hardworking students. Our curriculum is rigorous and they bring it. I am so proud of our students. So before I brag about the campus and our practice and our research, I want to acknowledge the students who are quite driven. There are some key practices that we have documented as contributing to that success. First is that every student has a success coach, a life coach who helps them with academic planning, career exploration, doing life, all of it, and who travels with them as a life coach from before they enroll until after they graduate.

Lori Carrell:

One of the interesting alumni survey results is, "Can I please keep my coach?" Like what, for life, you know? But this success coach has been a pivotal piece of supporting student success as has been our Just Ask Center, which is a place where faculty are available to students and relationships with faculty develop and deepen as has been our living learning communities that we talked about previously. Our instruction is also all active and flipped. We don't do lecture at UMR, and the pandemic has given us the opportunity to think even more seriously about what that will look like in the future. So those are some of the key practices that are fueling high student success after graduation.

Bill Von Bank:

You have shared that your student body is comprised of a fairly significant number of students who are first in their families to attend college. Do you have a story of one of those students whose resiliency and dedication has inspired you?

Lori Carrell:

There are many stories.

Bill Von Bank:

I was just going to say, there's many, probably.

Lori Carrell:

One that comes to mind, I'll call her Jennifer. Right? So Jennifer was a rural Minnesotan student who came to UMR to Rochester when she was 17 to start her journey. She was in a living learning community with a very diverse group of young people. She was the only student from a farm family, the only white student and her experience is, she would describe it, you know, came from a place of goodwill and naiveté and desire to connect and some apprehension.

Lori Carrell:

And she found ultimately, commonalities that built bridges. Even when there were conflicts in those early weeks or misunderstandings. And the commonality of being first-generation of growing up with sameness was experienced by many students in that living learning community. Her journey to leadership as an outspoken voice for equity and well-being without disparity is one that inspires me deeply. She is now a graduate and a mental health practitioner with a sensitivity, a cultural humility, and an intercultural competence that I admire and learn from by observation. She has meant a lot to me.

Bill Von Bank:

Thank you for sharing that. A year ago, your university had to pivot from in-class instruction to virtual learning. COVID-19 turned out to be the great disruptor, but also the great accelerator of changes and new innovations. Moving forward, what changes at UMR will remain in place because of the pandemic?

Lori Carrell:

Yeah, that was a year ago yesterday. Wow. One of our initial questions is going to continue into the future as a core question for instructional design. And that is if we have less time together in a classroom, how should we optimally use that precious time? So getting really intentional and strategic about what we do when we have the privilege of being in person. The distancing, you know, made for less classroom capacity, and so that question became mandatory. Is it labs? Is it community engagement? Is it simulation? What will we do when we to be together? Again, that question will inform us going forward into NextGen Med design and all of our programming and teaching and learning. What will we do when we are together, and what could be done optimally, when we're not together? That will change curricular and pedagogical design going forward I think across higher education.

Bill Von Bank:

U of M President Joan Gabel has announced that all campuses, including Rochester plan to resume fully on campus operations this Fall. University leaders said Fall coursework and activities should resemble what they were before the pandemic, ensuring that students have the greatest opportunity possible to experience the best of the University of Minnesota. That must be a good feeling.

Lori Carrell:

Oh yes. Might I just pause to say "Yippee!" We miss each other at the University of Minnesota, Rochester. We are a community. And we're known for our collaboration and innovation, which is true of this whole city. We fit right in. And we do miss one another. What I look forward to most is the conversations. I value them for what they generate in new ideas and connection. And it is through conversation that collective genius is formed. And while we can talk to one another via Zoom or Google Chat, it does not have the same quality in every instance as the in-person interaction.

Lori Carrell:

And I think we'll need to ask again that question as we come together, "What do you see when you look out?" There is apprehension, there has been loss, there is a need for transition. It's not going to just be an abrupt return to what was, we have been changed. And we are moving forward as different people in a different community. So I really look forward to the conversations in person, as we do some sense-making around what we've experienced and how it can inform the way we design our life, the way we design our campus, and the way we design our future.

Bill Von Bank:

You've previously addressed the impact and repercussions the pandemic has had on high school students. Isolation, remote learning, and resulting mental health issues, just to name a few. How have your faculty members prepared to help students emerge from those experiences to succeed on campus in 2021?

Lori Carrell:

Our faculty are extraordinary. I think generally across higher education and within our faculty, what they are doing now to prepare may not have been conscious, but is happening. And that is, a heightened level of empathy because the faculty are experiencing very similar challenges that the students are experiencing. What are the distractions in the home environment? How do I organize my life when it is virtual? And how tired am I from these kinds of activities? There is a heightened sense of empathy, and I think that will, though UMR faculty are compassionate and relational to begin with, I think this heightened sense of empathy will affect their approach going forward. You know, just some basics like, Oh, an assignment is going to be late. Well that shouldn't be, meet your deadlines. We all need to do that. But a recognition of what may have led to that is coming out of a deeper sense of empathy with home challenges, life challenges. So that they have traveled this challenge to mental health together, I think will be good going into the future.

Bill Von Bank:

As we come out of this pandemic and look to some normalcy as a campus community. And as you look ahead, what inspires you?

Lori Carrell:

So many things, I am always inspired by student journeys. It's such a privilege to be in the presence of young people who are developing into adulthood. I am inspired by the genuine values they bring around compassion for all and equity and sustainability and their expectations for what the world should be and will become. I am inspired by recent graduates during the pandemic who didn't get to have a commencement ceremony in person last year, who are now getting into med school and advanced degrees and doing all of that remotely. Their struggle, their resilience inspires me. A really specific moment of inspiration, I think worked as a metaphor for me, this was the topping off of Two Discovery Square, which was exciting for lots of us, all that work from Destination Medical Center and all the excitement to come of who will be the tenants and so forth.

Lori Carrell:

But on the day the sun was shining. It was a little bit nippy, but we were in person, though outside and masked. And as I watched those who had constructed the edifice so far and saw their camaraderie and their joy as that beam was raised with that tree on it. And we all were imagining what would happen in that building and the discoveries and advances. I was really thinking about the interaction of that construction team and how it serves as a metaphor for building community, building our campus community in particular, and the conversation and coordination and strategy that it took to get there. That inspired me very much. So, I was privileged to be there.

Bill Von Bank:

Chancellor Carol, this has been a fascinating conversation. Best of luck to you, your students, your faculty, and your new program with Mayo Clinic and Google. Thank you for being our guest on Urban Evolution.

Lori Carrell:

Thank you for having me.

Bill Von Bank:

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