

Cobb drives SIUE academic community



Segue • SIUE

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Ever since arriving on campus at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in 2003, Denise Cobb, PhD, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, has continuously helped pave the way for student and faculty success.

On this week's episode of Segue, which airs at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 12, on WSIE 88.7 The Sound, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, and Cobb have an insightful conversation about her responsibilities and how she helps the University community thrive.

Cobb serves as the chief academic officer for the University and is responsible for promoting the academic and scholarly environment at SIUE. She works in collaboration with the academic deans, faculty and staff, as well as the SIU System president, SIU Board of Trustees, and the Illinois Board of Higher Education. She is responsible for strategic academic program and budget planning, policy development and review, and program assessment, as well as faculty and student development.

"As provost, you work with virtually all of our University's academic units," Pembroke says. "That is a lot to help coordinate."

"It can be challenging at times," Cobb replies. "We have a wide-ranging set of programs, but it is a tremendous opportunity to help our deans, faculty and staff to create programs that will be successful and serve our region."

"I take the big problems as they come our way and make sure to try and clear the path for the people to do the good work they imagine for our students, faculty and staff."

An Arkansas native, Cobb earned her bachelor's from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1993 and a master's from the University of Central Arkansas in 1995. In 2003, after she achieved a doctorate from Tulane University, Cobb joined the SIUE Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice Studies as an assistant professor. Prior to her promotion to professor and appointment to interim provost in 2015, she was assistant provost for academic innovation and effectiveness, then associate provost for academic affairs since 2012.

"As an administrator, it is important to have lived the lives of the people you serve. You have been a faculty member, associate chair, and worked in assessment and program development," Pembroke says. "Those things give you a great perspective as you think about what our deans are trying to accomplish and when you work with academic individuals at SIUE."

"It's been incredibly helpful and my journey here has prepared me in ways I have never imagined," Cobb says. "It has been beneficial to imagine what my fellow faculty members need and what can help them do the type of work that is meaningful for them in and outside the classroom."

"Our faculty and students want a provost who helps and understands the challenges they have, whether their issues are budgetary, with personnel, or trying to acquire the equipment to fulfill their research needs."

Looking toward the future, Cobb believes that interdisciplinary program growth, increasing the University's retention rates, and developing more research opportunities for undergraduate students are SIUE's keys to success.

"I want to make sure we have the programs that our students and our communities need and thinking about curricular innovation is extremely important to me, both in the short and long term," Cobb says. "By providing opportunities for our students to thrive and achieve their higher education goals, they will be able to move toward their degree in the way they're supposed to, which will help us raise our four and six-year graduation rates.

"We also want to make sure each student has an opportunity to work independently or collaboratively with faculty on research or creative activity early in their curriculum rather than at the end of their undergraduate career with their senior assignments," she says. "It's the work our faculty love doing with our students, and it will help students work toward graduation in a seamless way."

Not only has Cobb secured SIUE's reaffirmation of institutional accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission, but she also seeks various program accreditations throughout the University's academic disciplines.

"At the institutional level, accreditation is a necessary condition. It's an institutional stamp of legitimacy, accountability to the federal government, and allows us to strive for continuous quality improvement.

"We also pursue accreditation for our various academic programs to say that we are meeting the disciplines' standards and that our students will be ready for professional practice. Accreditation for our programs in the Schools of Business and Engineering, for example, helps shore up our academic reputation and communicates a story to our potential students that they will get the same experience they would have received at another accredited institution."

"Looking forward to the future, how do you think education will change?" Pembroke inquires.

"The focus on online education will be even greater to meet the needs of each kind of learner," Cobb answers. "Although brick-and-mortar universities are here to stay, online or technology-based programs will allow us to meet the needs of adult learners or other students who may not be able to go to campus for the traditional experience.

"With the growth of technology, SIUE will continue to be able to provide pedagogical programs that help student learning, whether it's in an online program or in the classroom."

Listen to Cobb and Pembroke's conversation in its entirety at 9 a.m. this Sunday, Nov. 12, on WSIE 88.7 The Sound.

By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing and Communications