

9/17/24 EPISODE 2: 'Mousetrap Director' and Theater Faculty Allyson Paris, College Completion Coaches Kiley Jackson and Elania Hardy, and Social Media Coordinator Samantha Korecki.

Daniel Boothe

Hello again and welcome to Jaytalk Muskegon Community College's new official podcast where we break down all things Jayhawks. I am Daniel Booth alongside me co-hosting the operation is Miss Sue Samaniego as we welcome you to episode number two of this new podcast. Thank you so much for tuning in and listening. Coming up on the program today, MCC's Allison Paris joins the podcast to talk about the theater department's upcoming production of Mousetrap this fall, which she is also directing. We talk with MCC women's assistant basketball coach Kylie Jackson and Alina Hardy, and we will tie a bow on it all as we sit down with MCC's newest social media coordinator, Miss Samantha Korecki, as part of our new employee spotlight that is all coming up in just a few moments. But first, Sue, some time to quickly reflect. we are still finding our way here and figuring this thing out. But Sue, I have to say, out of the gates, it feels like we are embarking on something really special here at Jaytalk. What were your thoughts about that first episode?

Sue Samaniego

It was so much fun. I have been thinking about this for so long, and for it to finally be coming true is just amazing.

Daniel Boothe

I know. I feel the same way. I feel so totally blessed, and I'm going to be a broken record when I talk about this, but the reality and the realization of the unbelievable amount of number of awesome, incredibly awesome people that are here at Muskegon Community College, and we get a front row seat and get to talk to them all, and I just feel so blessed and honored to do that.

Sue Samaniego

Me too.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, and talking about being blessed and honored to talk to someone, let's talk about our next guest, Sue the Honors, who we got in studio right now.

Sue Samaniego

Our first guest is Alison Paris. And brace yourself for this resume. Alice is a full-time theater faculty member at MCC, where she teaches acting, theater appreciation, and theater history. Prior to working at MCC, Alison was the artistic and associate director at Grand Rapids Civic Theater for eight seasons. She's directed and music directed over 30 productions across the United States. Is that all? Yeah, is that all really? Including the SpongeBob musical, I and You, News Once, Shakespeare in Love, Matilda, Sister Act, and Mary Poppins. You know, just a few not very well-known kind of things. Before moving home to Michigan in 2013, Allison was the education coordinator at Hawaii Opera Theater, adjunct faculty at Solano Community College, resident director at Solano Youth Theater, head of the theater program at Colorado Springs Conservatory, a freelance director, music director, instructor, and performer all over the country. She served as a facilitator for the American Association of Community Theater, as a fellow in Steelcase's Social Innovation University, and as an NEA Arts Endowment panelist. So really, she's pretty lazy, this one. She holds a Master's in Fine Arts from the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and a Bachelor of Arts from Bradley University. So joining us now is Ms. Allison Paris, everyone.

Daniel Boothe

Hey.

Allison Paris

Well, hi. That makes me sound very hoity-toity and everything, but thanks.

Daniel Boothe

I think it's just me. Lucky to have you here at MCC. That is incredible. Well, Allison, let's start right here at the very beginning. You know, that's quite an impressive resume. That's quite an impressive journey. How did you land here at the gig at MCC?

Allison Paris

Yeah, what a good question. I have to say first though, while hearing Sue read all those things, I got the warm fuzzies for all those wonderful places I've been. It's been a fun and delightful journey. Yeah, so here at MCC, because I was looking to... get back to teaching and get back to directing and have those two things be my focus. I love GRCT. I'm still there all the time. I still interact all the time. But, you know, running a big nonprofit organization was a 60, 70 hour a week job. And I have a sweet little boy. And so, you know, coming here, let me focus on the things I really love, but also make all my kids football games.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, that's fantastic. That's fantastic.

Sue Samaniego

Balance, very important.

Allison Paris

Work-life balance.

Sue Samaniego

So you lived in Hawaii?

Allison Paris

I did.

Daniel Boothe

What in the world brought you back to Michigan?

Allison Paris

This is actually a great story. So when I was in undergrad, I was studying theater history and there was this lecture on Asian theater and Julie Taymor and the Lion King. And I was like, that's what I want. to be Julie Taymor. How do I do that? And Julie Taymor had studied a bunch of traditional Asian theater forums all over Asia. And that's a lot of time and a lot of work and a lot of money. And I found this program at the University of Hawaii where you could study multiple forms over the three years that you're there for your masters. And I was like, I'm going to give that a whirl. And boy, those people accepted me. I don't know why. I didn't know what I was doing at all. And so I went there to study Asian theater. So I learned about kabuki, kyogen, Indonesian ronda, a little Chinese Jingju. So it was great. It was a delight. Then I stayed. I got a job at the opera, which is the natural next thing you do after you get an MFA.

Daniel Boothe

Obviously.

Allison Paris

And stayed there another three years or so.

Daniel Boothe

One of the things I really love about Muskegon Community College, full disclosure, in another lifetime, I also was a thespian, if you will. But what's really great about MCC and is not like a lot of other community colleges is that they place a real emphasis on arts

education here. It's not just about getting a certificate or getting you on to the next place. They really want a well-rounded education. And we all know that the arts is truly part of that well-rounded education. And from your perspective, from your 50,000 foot perspective of this all, why the importance of arts? And what does it mean for some of these students who are really, truly looking to find a place to connect, to call home, and to find a sense of belonging?

Allison Paris

Yeah, I'm so glad you brought it up because I do feel that an arts education is for everyone, whether or not you want to go into the arts as a career, that it will enrich everyone's lives. We talk about the creativity, the collaboration, the confidence that comes out of arts education and training, all of those things that are going to be applicable to no matter what you decide to do in life. And most importantly, especially I've noticed this at MCC, it offers a place of belonging for students who maybe feel like they don't quite know who their group is. They don't know who their people are. Well, we accept everybody exactly as you are, and we will find a place for you. And I think that's a great thing for students to experience, and then they take that out into the world. and hopefully find theater out in the world, too.

Sue Samaniego

Absolutely. I've felt that myself. I am definitely someone who's been involved in theater in the past, and it is a place where everyone belongs. I do love that.

Allison Paris

I say all the time, you know, I've been all over the world, all over the country, and every time I move, I discover that wherever you are, there is theater, and wherever you find theater people, you find family. And so that's a real comfort to people who are moving around.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, for sure. Everyone remembers the cast that it was just a little snapshot of a family. And the tragedy of it all is you'll never all be together again. And it'll never be that show again. It'll never be that experience again. But you remember those relationships for the rest of your life.

Allison Paris

Yeah. It's like life. It's ephemeral. It's here and that it's gone. You have to appreciate it while it's happening.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, I love this. is Allison Paris. She's directing a new production of Mousetrap this fall. Sue, what's next?

Sue Samaniego

I wanted to hear a little bit about your debut here last year and directing here at MCU.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, your directorial debut.

Allison Paris

So yeah, I did a production of Lauren Gunderson. I and You, which is a two-person play. So 2 amazing actors from the MCC program, Maxim Chalupa and C.C. Davis, they shouldered 90 minutes of dialogue, just the two of them. It's a beautiful show, again, very much about life and belonging and how important it is to treasure what you have when you have it. And they did a beautiful job. It was a lot of work, but they did a great job.

Sue Samaniego

And what about you? How did you feel about taking that on?

Allison Paris

Yeah, I mean, it's been my career thus far. I've done a lot of giant musicals and big, big plays with a lot of people, huge budgets. And so it was actually an artistic joy to just focus on the story and the actors. It's kind of exactly what I was looking for, a little bit of change. So it was great.

Daniel Boothe

I would imagine that has to be the case because if you're, you know, If you're directing Fiddler on the Roof or you're directing Les Mis or something like that, and there's all these moving parts and everything, quite frankly, a lot of the time you get to like tech week and you haven't simply had the time for the final minutiae of acting moments and to like really... To polish that and to do speed throughs and things like that, so that had been a fun change of pace.

Allison Paris

Yeah, 'cause usually by the time I get to tech week, it's too late for that, right? And it's great.

Daniel Boothe

Tell me a little bit, you've been here just a couple years, right?

Allison Paris

This is my second year, so just one full year.

Daniel Boothe

Tell us about your experience. What is Les like working with Les, and what's the theater department like?

Allison Paris

I mean, everybody's a lot of fun over there. they love getting together and playing theater games. And it's been, everyone's so welcoming, right? It was a big shift for me and everybody was really kind and thoughtful to help me get settled. And now I feel like part of the family when I walk in the door.

Daniel Boothe

Hey, forever a Jayhawk now.

Allison Paris

Yeah, go Jayhawks.

Daniel Boothe

Go Jayhawks.

Sue Samaniego

So Mousetrap is the next production coming up. Tell us what it's about and the history of the show. Yes.

Daniel Boothe

And there's also a big secret.

Allison Paris

Yes, which we can't talk about. That's the whole thing. So Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap, it's a murder mystery, and it has been running for 70 straight years in London.

Daniel Boothe

That's longer than The Fantastics did, right?

Allison Paris

Way longer than The Fantastics, right? And what I just told the cast, we had our first rehearsal last night, and it is part of the reason it's able to run for so long is at the beginning of the show, they say to everybody, basically in a very British way, they come out and say, no spoilers. It's a murder mystery, right? And so we don't want the audience to go out and tell people who the murderer is. That's part of the fun, is you watch the show and you're trying to figure out who it is and everybody's a suspect and you get to intermission and you get to talk about who do you think it is, you know, and then of course you eventually find out. And that opens November 7th, runs to the 10th, just one weekend. So you definitely have to get out there. Put it on your calendar. Yes, you can buy tickets now, actually.

Daniel Boothe

Anything about the cast? Are you excited? about the cast that you've assembled, obviously.

Allison Paris

Oh, yeah. We had a great turnout for auditions, able to cast some wonderful people, and we were able to cast some understudies, which is both a good learning opportunity for the students. But it's also great because in this world we live in now, people get sick. And we used to say the show must go on no matter what. Even if you are sick, you have to come do the show. We don't feel that way anymore. So now we have understudies that can make sure that the show goes on, but everybody stays healthy. And again, it's a good opportunity for them.

Daniel Boothe

How big is the cast?

Allison Paris

It's 8 characters, and then we've got 5 understudies.

Daniel Boothe

Wow, fantastic.

Sue Samaniego

So if I were to want to go purchase my tickets today, how would I go about that?

Allison Paris

Yes, so you can go to the Overbrook Facebook page or the Overbrook Instagram and get to the link from there. I'm sure it'll also be on the MCC website when we get a little bit closer for sure.

Daniel Boothe

Allison, this has gone by remarkably fast. 12 minutes just went like that. And so we're already at the end of our time with you, which is crazy because that was so much fun. So please come back and be on this show again. How about you come back in November with your cast? Bring a couple cast members and we can promote the show then. How about that?

Allison Paris

I mean, you know how actors love to talk about their show, so that's perfect. That's going to be great. Can't wait.

Daniel Boothe

Allison Paris, so honored you're here. Thanks, Chinda. Keep up the good work.

Allison Paris

Well, thank you both for having me. It was fun.

Sue Samaniego

Kylie Jackson Hardy, college completion coach here at Muskegon Community College through the Michigan Colleges Network, part of AmeriCorps. She's a graduate of Central Michigan University where she earned her degree in psychology with the concentration in mental health. Kylie Jackson is a mental health advocate, an avid book reader, and a certified Swiftie. When she's not helping students on campus, she's spending time with friends and family, trying out new restaurants and watching movies.

Daniel Boothe

Meanwhile, Kylie Jackson also joining us in studio. She is also a college completion coach through the Michigan College Access Network. She is a Muskegon native. Kylie also attended MCC and has recently received her bachelor's from Grand Valley State University. Congratulations. Outside of work, she is one of the Lady Jayhawks assistant basketball coaches. She is passionate about the arts, social justice, and helping others in her community. Alana, Kylie, welcome.

Kylie Jackson

Hello for having us.

Daniel Boothe

Thank you. All right, before we get into college completion coaches, what that all means, let's start a little bit about yourself. Kylie, you first. How did you make it here to MCC?

Kylie Jackson

So, I grew up born and raised, like Daniel said, in Muskegon. I've been in the same exact house as... I was brought home in, which is really cool. Been there for 22 years now, almost 23, and went to Mona Shores High School, graduated there in 2020, did two years here at MCC, transferred to Grand Valley, and I got my degree in political science and human rights. In my community, I am a really strong activist. for social change and justice in my community. And I love basketball. So then that's why I accepted the position to be a volunteer assistant coach for the Lady Jayhawks. And I'm very excited to be here today.

Elaina Hardy

I am also born and raised in Muskegon. I graduated from Mona Shores as well. I did the early college program here at MCC. And so after graduating in 2020, I did an extra 13th year here and then two years at Central. And my psychology background is kind of what led me to this position. I've always just been passionate about helping other people.

Daniel Boothe

So Sue, a little birdie told me that these two are actually best friends outside of MCC walls. Was this always the plan, part of the master plan to work together and had to do the same thing?

Elaina Hardy

So that's actually a very funny story. Kylie actually got the job 1st and was told me like, hey, you should apply. And so I did. And then there was like a couple other people who were also applying for the job and they were interviewing. And I eventually got it, but they were like, Hey, once they found out we were friends, they were like, why didn't you tell us? And she was like, what do you mean? Like, why didn't you tell us we were, you guys were friends? Like, we were looking for someone who would, you know, vibe well with Kylie and would work well together. That could have really helped her. And she was like, oh. I didn't know. But everything worked out anyway.

Kylie Jackson

But I always say that, especially after that story, that our site supervisor, not our site soup, our partnership manager said to us, I was like, this is just the universe proving to us that we are meant to be best friends.

Sue Samaniego

I think that is fantastic. And you can tell, you guys, just have a great time together. I see you together all the time. And it's got to make your life a lot more fun. So tell us a little bit about what a college completion coach does.

Kylie Jackson

So a coach serves the first-generation, low-income student of color here in our community. And our position is a grant-funded position through the Office of 60 by 30 at the Michigan College Access Network, and it's through the Department of Education. And so their goal with the Office of 60 by 30 is to increase the college attainment level of those first-generation low-income students of color to 60% by 2030.

Elaina Hardy

And so what we do on a daily basis here is just help students with whatever they need, whether that is... scheduling classes, financial aid, time management, anything like that is going to remove those barriers that prevent students from getting their degree or certificate.

Daniel Boothe

You know, one of the cool things about Kylie, your story is that not only were you here at MCC, but you had a college completion coach yourself. I'm really curious if you can speak to what that experience was like for you as a student of color, how that impacted you. how you pass that same knowledge on to the students you help here at Muskegon Community College.

Kylie Jackson

So I'm first-generation, low-income student of color myself. So when I was able to have a college completion coach and be a part of his cohort and know that I had somebody on campus who was supporting me, who looked like me, was very important. And I always tell him, 'cause we're still connected, and he actually was at our professional development. Just knowing that you have that support system is something that not every single student has once they walk out of our doors. So it's a nice addition to MCC's campus to have not only one of us, but two of us. that can support the students who are first-generation, low-income students of color.

Daniel Boothe

Is there studies to suggest, is there data to suggest that seeing someone who looks like them truly does contribute to their success?

Elaina Hardy

For sure. It is really hard to imagine yourself in those type of positions when you don't have someone to look up to when you don't have that role model. A lot of success comes from being able to really believe in yourself and picture that. And it's really hard to do that when you don't have any examples. So yes, like having people in these type of positions and in other positions like professors or doctors or anything.

Daniel Boothe

Or the president of the college.

Elaina Hardy

Yes, that too. Like just having that example just really I think it's so powerful of a message to not only our students, but even the community, like you said, our president, to show students and others that, like, if you want to have this role, you can.

Sue Samaniego

This must be a really rewarding job for you to be able to give back in a way that was given to you as well. Tell us a little bit about, you know, what your days are like.

Kylie Jackson

We come in every day and it's different. It is.

Daniel Boothe

Keeps you on your toes. Yes.

Kylie Jackson

It's literally expect the unexpected. Every day is a new day and some students come in with the typical issues, you know, troubles with financial aid or I'm not really enjoying this class. But then we're also there for the students who just maybe need somebody to listen. You know, there's students who may not have a strong group of friends, a strong family support system outside of school. and they just want somebody who can listen to them. A lot of our co-workers and our higher-ups at the Michigan College Access Network say that we're kind of like social workers. We do a lot of connecting with community resources. We connect them to Emily Merton and the Jayhawk Hub, which hosts our student pantry. It gives out

gas cards, bus passes, and a multitude of things that you would never know unless you walked into the Jayhawk Hub. But like I said, every day is different, but it's It's good to know that we can wake up every day and know that even if we help one person, we're still making an impact.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, Ms. Hardy, Ms. Jackson, you crushed it. Thank you so much for everything that you are doing at MCC, for the lives that you are impacting, for making this a better place. Just so proud of you. Keep up the good work and go Jayhawks.

Sue Samaniego

Go Jayhawks.

Daniel Boothe

You are listening to JayTalk, talking all things JayHawks. I'm Daniel Booth. With me as always, Sue Samaniego. This next segment we are calling New Employee Spotlight. Getting to know the many new faces who have joined the team here at MCC this fall semester. And Sue, I'm really excited, really excited, maybe because she works in the office next door to mine. She's always laughing, she's always smiling. I already feel like she's my little sister and just like me and you, just has a real kind of zest for life. Tell our listeners who's our next guest.

Sue Samaniego

Daniel, our next guest is a recent graduate of Calvin University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in strategic communication. and also served as the school's student event manager. Her professional experience includes a number of marketing and mass media internships. She's A graduate of Grand Haven High School, teaches kids how to play tennis in the summertime, and is Muskegon Community College's new social media coordinator. It's Samantha Korecki . Yeah, welcome.

Samantha Korecki

Hey, everybody.

Daniel Boothe

Hey, welcome, Samantha. So real quick, before we get started, Sue, I got to tell you, this job, this social media coordinator position, I don't know if she knows, we had probably 50 people apply for this job. It was a heavily, heavily coveted job. So we are truly lucky to get

her because it just shows, it's just a testament to her experience and her work ethic. And so congratulations on the new gig. Thank you.

Samantha Korecki

I am excited to be here.

Daniel Boothe

First question out of the gate, Samantha, what attracted you to the job here at Muskegon Community College in the 1st place? You know, other than the paycheck, of course. What drew you to MCC?

Samantha Korecki

I'm from Grand Haven, Michigan, so I grew up familiar with MCC. It's not too far away. And I really loved working in social media and marketing at Calvin University while I was a student there. I did all kinds of social media posts for their dining services, and I just really grew to love doing social media for colleges. So I just knew it would be a fit.

Sue Samaniego

It definitely has turned out to be so. how have you liked it so far? Are you settling in?

Samantha Korecki

I'm settling in great. It's really been thanks to the friendliness of everyone else at MCC that I've come across. Everyone's so ready to introduce me to everyone and be helpful. And I'm really just excited about the opportunity to go to all the events this fall and take pictures and meet the students and just continue to become more integrated into the campus.

Daniel Boothe

Well, that's fantastic. You know, Sue, I mean, this is Mrs. Sunshine herself. She's just so gregarious and outgoing. So obviously you're going to fit in really well here. I'm sure you love having your own office.

Samantha Korecki

I do. I did not expect to have my own office when I graduated college, but I am real excited about it.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, not a lot of people your age have their own office at this point in their career. That's pretty awesome. Okay, Samantha, tell us a little bit about what do you do and how does that lend to your talents?

Samantha Korecki

Right, yeah. So I run the social media accounts, which is primarily Facebook, Instagram. We're working on getting started up with some TikTok. And I also work with some other people to do our LinkedIn. But other than just running the social media account, I'm the photographer for campus. I take all our photos, both for social media and for something called JMail, which is our student e-mail newsletter that goes out every week.

Sue Samaniego

Awesome. So yeah, obviously your job is more than just posting campus events on Facebook. Speak to how you hope to engage with students over the course of this academic year.

Samantha Korecki

Yeah, I think my biggest opportunity to engage with students will just be when I'm out and about on campus to get pictures just for general social media, post as well as for our specific events. I'm excited to be at our athletic events, at our theater events. I'm excited to go into our science classrooms and see what's going on. I'm just, I want to be everywhere. So I think I'll be able to meet a lot of students just by going out where they are and meeting them, asking them if I can take their picture and definitely taking a lot of pictures. So you guys are going to get to know me real fast.

Daniel Boothe

We're talking with MCC's new social media coordinator, Samantha Korecki . So Samantha, As a recent graduate yourself, you just walked away from the college experience. Let me ask you, how important to you as a student was it to feel connected to Calvin College, to have that sense of belonging, to feel a part of that community? And do you think that there is room for that here at MCC?

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely. Feeling like a part of the Calvin community was a huge deal for me, especially my freshman and sophomore year, just because I was leaving home for the first time. Grand Rapids isn't that far away from Grand Haven, but I felt like I was really striking out on my own. And so being able to call a new community and a new group of people home was super imperative to me, just like being able to be successful socially, academically, just in

everything that I was trying to do. And so I think that that's a really important aspect of any college or university experience. And I really have observed that we have that here at MCC. The students have so many staff and faculty members that are just wanting to help them succeed. And the community here is just so vibrant and friendly. I think that anyone who is at MCC knows that they belong here and that they're a Jayhawk.

Sue Samaniego

That is awesome.

Daniel Boothe

That's awesome. That choked me up.

Sue Samaniego

Yes. Well, we just are all so very passionate about what we do here. Are there ways of using social media that we're not currently doing here at MCC that you think we could implement that would help us engage with students on a deeper or more impactful way?

Samantha Korecki

There's something that I would love to get started at some point this year or next year, and that's social media student takeovers, where I can get a student to post on our social media story or make a reel about what their day looks like at MCC or maybe an event that they're going to just to show from the student's perspective rather than just mine as the social media coordinator. I think it's a great opportunity for students to reach other students, and that'll really boost our engagement, I think.

Daniel Boothe

That is a fantastic idea. in the life of an MCC student.

Sue Samaniego

Absolutely. It's always fun to see different perspectives of what's happening here.

Daniel Boothe

And that's what we really want from that, your position, Samantha, like you said, Sue, is to gain a deeper understanding because we're always trying to get more inclusive, more sense of belonging, you know what I mean, and really reach students exactly where they're at. I think that's awesome.

Sue Samaniego

Samantha Korecki, welcome to the team.

Samantha Korecki

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.