

9/10/24 EPISODE 1: Muskegon Community College President, Dr. John Selmon, Emily Butkavich and Dr. Andy Wible

Daniel

Hello and welcome to 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 our very first episode of this new podcast. Thank you so much for tuning in and listening. Coming up on the program today, Muskegon Community College's president, Dr. John Selmon, helps us break the ground as he joins us as our very first guest. Tutoring Manager Emily Butkovich in studio today to discuss all things academic support and how students can get the help they need to succeed. And philosophy professor Doctor Andy Weibel in the hot seat, as well as we discuss his passion of philosophy in the upcoming lecture series this fall. That is coming up in just a few moments, but first... Miss Sue, welcome to Jaytalk. How you feeling today?

Sue Samaniego

I'm feeling great. I'm excited to get this going.

Daniel Boothe

Hello, our listeners who are listening, this is our very first episode. So what can they expect here on Jaytalk?

Sue Samaniego

You can expect to learn a lot about what's happening here at MCC, learning about the wonderful people who work here and all of the programs that are happening, things that are available for the community to come and see, just a little bit of everything.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, we're going to be interviewing faculty, staff, students, shining a light here on Muskegon Community College and making this a better place and only fitting that our very first guest on MCC's new podcast, Jay Talk, is the president of Muskegon Community College, Dr. John Selmon. Dr. Selmon has been the president of MCC since July 1st, 2022. Before that, he served as the provost and executive vice president at MCC for over 11 years. And it is not gushing, it is not an overreach, it is not me trying to make my boss happy when I say There is no one more dedicated to Muskegon Community College than Dr. Selmon when it comes to putting student success first and foremost in everything our institution does. No one works harder and no one cares deeper about MCC than our president, Dr. John Selmon. Dr. Selmon, welcome to Jaytalk. Yes.

President Selmon

All right. Well, thank you. Thank you, Daniel. Thank you, Sue. It's really, really exciting here. And it feels so good. We're so pleased to have students in the hallways and the classrooms and parking lots. Our mission here, dedicated to equity and excellence, prepare students, build communities, and improve lives. That's what we're all about here. Our biggest responsibility is to make sure that students succeed here. And we do that by removing barriers and providing additional and enhanced support so that our students are free to focus on learning when they come to this institution. So it's exciting. We're looking for a grateful.

Daniel Boothe

And you say that too. You pound that drum over and over. I hear you pounding that drum to our community partners, but even behind closed doors to the faculty and staff here, you are constantly saying that student success must drive our efforts. It must be the focal point. When people hear the word barriers, you know, maybe some people might not truly understand what we're talking about. Can you talk about some of the barriers that our students face here in Muskegon County, and how is MCC meeting those needs head-on.

President Selmon

Barriers are things that get in the way of students succeeding. Food insecurity issues, transportation, housing, daycare, et cetera. These are many things that happen outside of the classroom. but they actually impact the classroom and in a negative way. So we want to remove those barriers, and we have a laser-like focus on eliminating each and every one of them. The Jayhawk Hub is where students can seek out support, service, and to get the help they need in terms of removing barriers so that they can continue, persist, and graduate from this institution.

Sue Samaniego

We've had some really exciting news this year. Two new programs that have been approved by legislators in Lansing that not only affect MCC, but community colleges statewide. Can you tell our listeners more about that and why it's so exciting?

President Selmon

Well, it's exciting because education, higher education, is more affordable now than ever. The Michigan Community College Guarantee, Reconnect, the Promise, and Pell Grant and other financial sources are so important. Like I said, the exciting thing today is that education, higher education, is affordable and free to those who qualify, and many of these

programs, individuals qualify for it. So it's exciting, and it's a great opportunity to continue your education.

Daniel Boothe

Well, listeners, if you do not know, MCC will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2026, 100 years. This is going to be a year of celebrating, but let me ask you first, what is your level of excitement and what everyone should expect leading up to our centennial here?

President Selmon

I'm really, really excited. I couldn't be more happier about our upcoming centennial. We have been providing a quality education for almost 100 years, and in two years it'll be 100 years, and we are extremely excited about it. I am, we want this whole community to get behind this and get excited at this. 100 years.

Daniel Boothe

Can you tell us a little bit about an evening at MCC and how all crescendo with a huge gala event at the new convention center in downtown Muskegon?

President Selmon

An evening with MCC is about the college celebrating our successes, but an evening with MCC is about telling some of those stories as it relates to our employers, our community-based organizations, our K-12 partners. It's our signature event. We want to be known for an evening with MCC that you come out And you hear some of our stories that we will share with you, our students, our employers will share with you. And so it's just truly, truly exciting. And I look forward to it. And even with MCC is really a time that we would like for people to leave that event feeling good about Muskegon Community College and its impact in this community.

Daniel Boothe

Awesome.

Sue Samaniego

That is awesome. And speaking of stories, you're going to be a host here. That's right. Yeah, on Jaytalk once a month with a segment we're tentatively calling Spotlight on Alumni with President Salman.

Daniel Boothe

It's a working title, Sue. It's a working title.

Sue Samaniego

It works for now. So why is it important to shine a light on the impact our previous students have had in the community and beyond? And what is your hope with those interviews?

President Selmon

We want the community to know that it works. What we do works, and what we do matters, and what we do is important. And so we are the community's college, and we want this community to succeed. So I want to engage our alum, see what they're doing right now, and what they have done in the past, and just really to share their journey. And that's one part of it. And the second part is we want current students to be connected with alum, and so that they can get a real feel for what it looks like along the way in terms of a career path. And so that'll be exciting. So we want to engage our alumni in a couple different ways. So I look forward to talking to them. I bet they have some wonderful, wonderful stories.

Sue Samaniego

Finally, as we look to the future in the next 100 years, when you go to sleep at night, assuming you sleep, What is your dream for MCC, and where would you like to see us go in the years ahead?

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, when you think big, what is it?

President Selmon

That Muskegon Community College is the institution of choice in this community, in this region, as it relates to education, training, and occupational opportunities. And we always, always want to remain relevant and responsive to the community needs. Again, we are the community's college, and we want to reflect that in everything we do.

Sue Samaniego

I love that.

Daniel Boothe

I love it too. President Selmon, on behalf of everyone here at JAYTALK, we want to thank you for being our first guest. We want to thank you for your leadership. We want to thank you for your heart, for your passion, for everything that you're doing. Like I said, you lead by example. And we're just so proud to have you as our president. Thanks so much for coming on the show.

President Selmon

And I really appreciate being here. Obviously, it's larger than me because it takes a community to do this work. So I don't do it alone. I helped lead it, but I don't do it alone. And I'm so thankful for the team that we have at Muskegon Community College.

Sue Samaniego

We do have a great one.

Daniel Boothe

Yep. Go Jayhawks.

Sue Samaniego

Go Jayhawks.

President Selmon

Go Jayhawks.

Daniel Boothe

Rolling right along here. Sue, one of the things that me and Dr. Selmon were talking about is this notion of eliminating barriers, right, that keep our students from achieving their goals. Academic success is such a huge part of what makes MCC special. You know, this notion that we never, ever want to leave a student behind. We want to equip students in every way to help them succeed. And so I think that this is just a perfect segue into our next guest. Who do we have on the docket?

Sue Samaniego

So here from the Department of Academic Support is Tutoring Services Manager, Ms. Emily Bookovich. Emily, welcome.

Emily Butkavich

Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here.

Daniel Boothe

All right, Emily. Now listen, before we get into everything, part of what we want to do on this podcast is to help our community get to know each other a little more, a little deeper. So Emily, a little bit about yourself. Where'd you grow up? Where'd you go to school? How did you make your way to MCC? What do you do for fun when you're not at MCC? Come on, details. I want the details.

Emily Butkavich

Yeah. So I grew up in Connecticut. I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but we moved to Connecticut when I was three years old. And so I ended up coming back here in 2018. And my background is in elementary education. But after a couple of years in the classroom and just kind of figuring out my way, I decided it was not for me. And so I decided to explore higher ed. And that's what brought me to MCC. I started in the Welcome Center as a student services specialist. And then when the opportunity for the tutoring services manager opened up, I applied and was hired.

Daniel Boothe

That's fantastic.

Emily Butkavich

And it has just been such a joy and a blessing since. I have just loved, I've loved being there.

Sue Samaniego

Awesome. So what inspired you to go into tutoring services in the 1st place? Is it something you were always passionate about or something that you became passionate about?

Emily Butkavich

Yeah, for sure. So I have a heart for people and a heart for education. I love that. Yep. And I just, it's Tutoring and just the need for support in education is so vulnerable. And I have experienced that in my own life. And so I just really wanted to be somebody that could be an encouragement and help students find their way through academic support and getting the help that they need to be successful.

Daniel Boothe

You know, I'm curious as we have this conversation about tutoring, I would imagine that a lot of students are at first reluctant to ask for help out of fear or this fear, this feeling of not measuring up. And so what has been your experience to that? Can you speak to that? And what message do you have to students about the courage it takes sometimes to say, hey, I need help? Because listen, we're all flawed and we all need help, right?

Emily Butkavich

100%. I think what a shame it is to let fear or pride or whatever.

Daniel Boothe

Family pressure.

Emily Butkavich

To get in the way of doing something that you are capable of doing if you are just willing to take that step. And I think whether a student is just fresh out of high school and they are experiencing higher education for the first time We've got returning students who they've been out of school for so long and they don't know how to be a student anymore. I think it's just so important that students know that there are resources available to them and that we want them to utilize those supports, that we want to be a part of their success because we We can't try to do everything alone in life. We need people to get us through. We have students who they don't feel supported by their parents or significant others. People make comments like, what are you thinking? You're too old to start over. You're not smart enough. You're not going to make it. And those are lies. Those are lies from society and just, it's not, It's not worth giving into that. there's so much hope. Yeah, just overcoming is what we want to encourage students to do.

Sue Samaniego

Wow, you just gave me chills.

Daniel Boothe

I know, right? The right person for the job.

Sue Samaniego

Absolutely. Now, obviously, those students who do come through your doors, end up succeeding. So we would love to hear some of those success stories and maybe inspire people who are considering coming to you and want to know what they can accomplish.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, or is there one specifically that sticks out in your mind like that person, you know, that encompasses it all?

Emily Butkavich

There are a bunch. Good.

Daniel Boothe

That's good to hear.

Emily Butkavich

I mean, it really, it's just, we, a lot of my tutors are actually students themselves who have gone through tutoring. And they got the help that they needed to thrive and to really do well in their courses. And then they've continued on. I actually pulled a report just to kind of see where our feedback is, landing. And over the past, since last fall semester, roughly 4,000 students 93% reported that tutoring has made a positive impact on their education. And a lot of the comments are, it has helped with my self-confidence and it's been a blessing. It's made a difference in my understanding. It's helped me to just get through my assignments, my work, and they just keep coming back because it's making a difference for them.

Daniel Boothe

That's fantastic. And one of the greatest assets our students have, obviously, is your neck of the woods, the College Success Center. Tell our students and listeners about that. Where is it located? That beautiful space, as you call it. And what can students expect there?

Emily Butkavich

Yeah, yep. So we've actually just recently renamed our department to Academic Support. So previously known as College Success Center, we are located in room 3081 on the third floor. In our department, we house tutoring services, the writing center, math support, and then our college success seminar, which is an introductory course for students who are either new to higher education or are returning and just looking to get acclimated and kind of figure out how to be an independent learner. But all of our services and support is free. to our students. So that is just a huge reason why to take advantage.

Daniel Boothe

And I would imagine that too, that when students are down there too, that word support, they see other students who are there with them and that there's camaraderie there. There's kinsmanship to see that.

Emily Butkavich

Yeah, there is so much networking that goes on in our area. Students come and they build relationships. They build relationships with their classmates, with the tutors. It's just a really neat place where we are all We're all equal, we're all looking to work together, and just to, we have the same goal, to be successful. I love that.

Sue Samaniego

They're able to find their people.

Emily Butkavich

Yes.

Sue Samaniego

We've all got to find our people.

Daniel Boothe

Yes. All right, Emily Beckovich, you are the tutoring services manager. Way to make MCC proud. Thank you for what you are doing, the impact you're making on students' lives. Keep up the good work.

Sue Samaniego

Yeah, thanks, Emily. Oh, thank you.

Daniel Boothe

You know, Sue, it feels like the art of listening in today's political climate is somewhat dead. Wouldn't you agree? It seems like we live in a world of the art of reacting and not listening to each other. We could all use some more civil discourse these days, which brings us to our very next guest, Sue, the honors.

Sue Samaniego

Our next guest holds a BA in philosophy from Hanover College, a master's in philosophy from Ohio University, a PhD in what? Philosophy from Wayne State University. Here at MCC, he teaches or has taught biomedical ethics, business ethics, introduction to philosophy, environmental ethics, logic, LGBTQ studies. He also oversees the MCC student group, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, and facilitates Muskegon Community College's lecture series. He's an author and loves golf. It's MCC's Dr. Andy Weibel.

Daniel Boothe

Welcome. Andy, welcome. Welcome to the podcast. Yeah, thank you so much. We so appreciate it. Dr. Wible part of what we want to do here on the podcast is to help our community get to know each other a little more, a little deeper. So before we get into philosophy, can you tell us where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? How did you make your way to MCC? Take us back to the beginning.

Dr. Andy Wible

All right. Well, I'll start by saying I've been here over 24 years. But I grew up in Indiana, kind of northern Indiana, near Fort Wayne. I went to, as mentioned, Hanover College, which is in southern Indiana, a very beautiful place if you ever get to visit. It was built in the middle of

nowhere with the idea that you'd study more if you were in the middle of nowhere. I'm not sure that worked out, but that was the idea. It's right on the Ohio River. And then I was the number one philosophy student at Hanover because I was the only philosophy major. That's the way to do it. Well, yeah, so I did well. So then I went to Ohio University for a couple of years, did a master's degree, another beautiful place. Then I went to Wayne State University and did my PhD, which, and then right after there, I came to MCC and I've been teaching here ever since.

Daniel Boothe

So you're a West Michigander now through and through.

Dr. Andy Wible

I think so. Yeah, feels like it.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, you've earned your stripes.

Dr. Andy Wible

Yeah, And yeah, I've enjoyed it here. I thought I wasn't going to stay, but I am.

Sue Samaniego

Well, we're glad you stayed. So, philosophy, you seem to like it quite a bit. What inspires you about philosophy?

Dr. Andy Wible

Well, you know, I went to college not to be a philosophy major, but like a lot of places, it was required that I take a philosophy class. And it ended up being the best thing that ever happened to me, I think. I loved the class, and I went to be a business major, but I was kind of bored. My parents had a small business, I thought I'd be in business. And I still teach business ethics, by the way. So got some connection there. But I enjoy the philosophy classes. I kind of like political science, but I felt like you kind of had to compromise your values. And philosophy means the love of wisdom. And so I thought, hey, what is love of wisdom? It's really the pursuit of truth. In philosophy, you go after the truth and take the argument wherever it takes you. And that's what logic is, the study of arguments. And that's the basis of philosophy. And I just like that whole approach of saying, hey, let's see where Let's look at these big questions and see where the evidence takes us.

Daniel Boothe

You know, you pretty much just answered my question in what you just said, but I'm still going to ask because I'm curious why you think, why is philosophy important for all students to take, in your opinion, for them to stretch their knowledge of truth and the pursuit of truth? Why is it important for students, everyday students here at MCC to study philosophy and to explore that?

Dr. Andy Wible

Yeah, we have, for the associate's degree here, we have What's called an ethics logic requirement, and one of the things philosophy does in the pursuit of truth, it gives you those techniques or tools to reason critically, and those critical reasoning skills then can be applied to important issues in. in philosophy and beyond. And so I think it's really that ability to think ethically, to think critically, and to think abstractly, which is something that is often not taught in other classes. That's the big specialty of philosophy, is to look at these big issues. And sometimes they're issues that, like I teach biomedical ethics, and we talk about some issues like abortion you've probably heard of, but there's some issues that will affect us all on life and death. And Sometimes we're thrown into it. Suddenly we have a sick parent and we don't know what to do. But if you've already thought about that in class, you can be much better when you're in that situation and the heat is on. If you've already thought about those issues and you have the tools to think about new issues that come out, when you're in those situations, hopefully you'll be making better decisions.

Sue Samaniego

Seems like it really applies to anything that comes up in our lives.

Dr. Andy Wible

I mean, I'd like to give the story of when I started taking some classes in environmental ethics. I thought it was environmental, but by the end, I was like, I think I need to be a vegetarian. That was a big change. My parents were like, you want to do what? You don't want to eat me.

Daniel Boothe

Indiana boy.

Dr. Andy Wible

Yeah, right. I mean, my family would buy a cow every year and have it for the family to eat. So it can result in big changes into your life. But again, the goal is to be a good person, to live the right life, and to follow what you're most justified and believing. And sometimes that takes you down a path that you didn't expect. And so, I think as a society then, we

want to progress morally. We want to be better than we were. I know 50 years from now, we'll look back and think, oh my gosh, what were we thinking? But hopefully that's because we progress. And I think a philosophy class and ethics classes help as a society to get us near what is true, what is right, how we should live a good life.

Daniel Boothe

Fantastic. I want to switch the gears in the interest of time. I want to talk to you a little bit about your club, the Gender and Sexuality Alliance. Can you tell us a little bit about that and just the need to have safe spaces like that at MCC for our LGBTQ plus students?

Dr. Andy Wible

Yeah, I also teach LGBTQ studies, which is offered this semester, and advise a faculty advisor for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance. Used to be called the Gay-Straight Alliance, but that wasn't as inclusive as it should be. So we try to be an inclusive group with a whole host of queer communities. And we have a big group this year, I'm happy to say. And it is supposed to be a welcoming space for students of all different backgrounds, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. And it's a group that is sometimes political. We've protested things on campus. One of the things we did was, for example, we got menstrual products in the men's restrooms. And so we try to do things to improve the campus, but really the group meets once a week and it's a space for people to talk about issues they're going through to support each other. One time we had someone come in to talk about homelessness. And we discovered that three of our members were technically homeless and that there were services out there available for them. And so it's some of those practical issues, but also a place where people can feel like they can be themselves and be supported about who they are.

Sue Samaniego

So switching back to listening, can you tell us about MCC's lecture series as a whole? What is the hope? What is the goal?

Dr. Andy Wible

Mostly we bring in outside speakers from outside of the community, outside of MCC. Occasionally we bring in and have panel discussions of local talent and MCC faculty and students and staff. But really what it is to bring people together to learn something that they haven't learn before and to learn from experts. And I know I'll hear after that, boy, that was the first lecture I've ever been to. Now, of course, they've been to classes and they've heard lectures and classes, but it's something a little different when it's a public lecture and people from the community are invited and come in and it's a time to get together and

learn together. You know, it's something about sitting there together And then there's always a time for question and answer after the lecture. And it's time to, I think, students to test to see, hey, maybe I can engage in this conversation. And often students have the best question and bring up things that many of us have never thought about, but they add to the discussion and move it forward. And yeah, you do have to sit there for an hour and listen. And people say, I didn't think I could, but it ends up they can. And I think that is a technique.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, well, last year's was just spectacular. The whole lineup. I remember the War in Gaza lecture was truly fascinating. listeners and students, if you're interested, those are still relevant conversations that should still be having today. And students can go online on our website and watch those old lectures. on our YouTube channel, but we want you there in person.

Dr. Andy Wible

They are recorded, but we like you there in person.

Daniel Boothe

Correct. So tell us real quickly, what is the lineup for the fall semester? What's coming up the next two to give us?

Dr. Andy Wible

All right. So in the fall here on September 25th, as I mentioned, that's a Wednesday night coming up at 6 P.m. in room 1300 is Dr. Kevin Tempe. He is the chair and professor of philosophy at Calvin University. And he has written many books, but he has a disabled child and years ago decided to get into disability studies from a philosophical point of view, which is not a big field, but it really needs to be addressed. And what he's giving is a talk called Disability Justice and Civil Rights and comparing and contrasting disability rights work to the civil rights movement? What are some of the similarities and differences? And he thinks, we know, we tend to think we know a lot about the civil rights movement, but very little is known about the disability rights movement. And so he wants to look at it, what has worked, what hasn't, and what should it look like going forward?

Daniel Boothe

Dr. Andy Weibel knocked it out of the park. Thanks so much for the time, man. Thanks for the conversation. I could talk to you for an hour.

Dr. Andy Wible

Well, I can stay, but it looks like I need to go.

Daniel Boothe

All right, everyone, that's Dr. Andy Wible who teaches philosophy here. Mr. MCC himself, you can see him all over campus. He's just everywhere, and we're so thankful to have him here on staff. Thanks, Andy. Talk to you soon.

Dr. Andy Wible

Thank you very much.

Sue Samaniego

Thanks.

Daniel Boothe

Sue, first Jaytalk in the books. What'd you think?

Sue Samaniego

I had a blast, and I learned a bunch about people I work with that I didn't know.

Daniel Boothe

I know, more of this, please. And that's what we wanna do here with this podcast is to have in-depth conversations and really shine a light. There are so many awesome people here at MCC that have so much to share. And I feel like so many times we just barely scratched the surface. And this is gonna give us a great opportunity to do really deep dives and really shine a spotlight, like I said, on the faculty and staff and students and alumni that are really making a difference.

Sue Samaniego

Right, and just all of the things that are going on up here, this is one more way of getting the word out about all of the things that you, the community, get to be a part of here, and we would love to see you. So hopefully this is one that you enjoy listening to, and you'll learn more about us, and you feel comfortable coming up onto campus.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, for sure. How about that passion from Emily, by the way, when she was talking about, you could just feel it in your gut. Absolutely. How much she cares. I know, just how much she cares. Well, everyone, thanks for listening. This is Jay Talk talking all things Jayhawks. I'm Danielle Booth.

Sue Samaniego

I'm Steve Samaniego.

Daniel Boothe

We will do it all again next Monday. Until then, everyone have a safe and wonderful week here at Muskegon Community College, and go Jayhawks.

Sue Samaniego

Go Jayhawks!