

Higher Ed Rewired
Season 1, Episode 1
Global Service Learning and First-Gen
Host: Oliver Wong
Guest: Dr. Julian Jeffries

Open:

[Ambient Sound - Potluck]

OW: It's a Monday night -- and about 40 people mill around a classroom at California State University, Fullerton. After laying down food they've brought for a potluck, they take a seat and after a few minutes chatting with their neighbors, turn their attention to Dr. Julián Jefferies who walks to the front of the classroom to speak.

[Speech in Background].... (IN SPANISH) Yo soy el Profesor responsable de llevar a sus hijos a Puerto Rico a venir así que

ROUGH TRANSLATION: I am the professor responsible for taking your children to Puerto Rico so that...

Jefferies addresses students in Spanish because for many of them, it's their first language. In a few weeks, he'll be taking a class of Cal State Fullerton students to Puerto Rico for a two-week study abroad. Jefferies and the students have been preparing for this trip all semester but this potluck is to let the whole family in on the discussion.

[Ambient Sound - Classroom]

“Muchos de ustedes tienen muchas preguntas pero primero los invito a que vayamos al fondo sirvan de algo para comer y pongo un poco la música y seguimos hablando. Bienvenidos ” clapping)

ROUGH TRANSLATION: Many of you have a lot of questions, but first I invite you to go to the end of the table to serve, to eat and I'll put on the music and we'll keep talking. Welcome.

OW: Julián Jefferies knows the parents have many questions but food comes first. He uses the potluck as a way of building rapport with the parents. After all, many of the students in his study-abroad program are the first in their families to go to college and as such, they can struggle to find their place culturally and socially, which can impact their academic success. Potlucks like this are a way of involving families in navigating the college experience, which in turn, helps students to do the same.

Jefferies: our students are close knit with their family. And you could call these cultural traits or you could call it economic survival. But we have to think about. I think with first-generation students, we have to think about educating the whole family unit.

[FADE IN MUSIC]

OW: In this episode, a high impact approach to helping first-generation Latinx students thrive in class, on campus, and beyond. I'm Dr. Oliver Wang and this is Higher Ed Rewired.

[POST - MUSIC THEME]

[SHOW OPEN PROMO - :20 - [Language Here](#)]

PROMO: Higher Ed Rewired is a production of the California State University — the largest, most diverse four-year public university system in the country, and an engine of social and economic mobility. Higher Ed Rewired examines exciting innovations taking place across higher education that have the potential to improve student success and to positively change the environment in which we teach, learn and discover.

[MUSIC UNDER - AND FADE OUT UNDER INTRO]

[SEGMENT A]

OW: Welcome to this episode of Higher Ed Rewired. I'm Oliver Wang - professor of sociology at California State University, Long Beach.

Today we're going to talk about what one professor is doing to better serve his students by taking them out of the conventional classroom.

First... Demographics on college campuses have been shifting and universities are searching for ways to adapt. Here in the California State University system, more than 40% ¹of students identify as Chicano or Latino American and that number is expected to rise in the coming years.

As noted earlier, many of these students are the first in their families to attend college in the U.S. and while their parents may understand that college is an important path for future social mobility, they lack first-hand experience of how to follow that path. For all that higher ed teaches people, learning how to successfully navigate four years of university, is a skill that traditionally hasn't been taught in a classroom. Instead, it's knowledge that gets passed down from older family members or friends. For many first-generation college students, especially the children of immigrants, that knowledge - what sociologists call "cultural capital" - is in shorter supply, making the college experience more challenging. Dr. Julián Jeffries is Associate Professor of Reading and Literacy at California State University, Fullerton and he knows this dilemma first hand.

Julian Jeffries: *I immigrated to the states when I was 22. I'm from Argentina. I'm the first one in my family to go to college. And so I see myself reflected in the experiences of the students. You know, my father's a farmer and he. It took him a many years to understand what I was doing. You know, he never thought that I was producing something. You know, and my brother keeps telling me that I just talk. chuckle*

Julian Jeffries: *So when I talk to my students and my students parents. Having them understand what is college, why? Why college? Uh, why do I have to do all this reading? I find that I can understand the experiences better because of this lens.*

Oliver Wang: *How do you think having this background shapes how you think about how you teach and how to get across to students?*

¹ https://www.calstate.edu/as/stat_reports/2018-2019/feth01.htm

Julian Jeffries: It's definitely shapes how I what I teach, how I teach it and what kind of experiences I want to give and offer my students. And one of the, you know, one example of that has to do with integrating parents into the class. When I started thinking about study abroad experiences for first generation Latino Latina students, one of the very important things that I had to do was to have this conversation with the students about how are they going to present us to their parents and their communities. We have to make decisions with our family. And as I was planning a study abroad, I knew that that conversation with the parents was extremely important. And so one of the things that that we did was create this parent potluck where parents come in and talk to us. The professors that are organizing with and ask us questions like, why do you have to study this important leak or why can't you study it here? What is this for? You know, what are you going to learn? They're all very valid questions.

[Ambient Sound – Potluck]

OW: And indeed the parents at the potluck have all sorts of questions-- some are specific - like exactly what kind of activities will they be doing in Puerto Rico, why so long?

OW: Bianca, whose daughter is going on the trip, wants to know if the water at the Puerto Rico beaches is safe for swimming. One of the dads in the room, Carlos Escobero says his concern is also about safety -- he's always keeps a close eye on his children, especially his son who seems to spend all his time on campus, often not getting home until the wee hours.

Mr. Escobero: He shows up at 2-3 in the morning, but I always know when he gets there cause I can't go to sleep until I know he's there and I know he's home and I know he's safe.

OW: Then there are those students who have travel jitters, but it's not something they can turn to their parents for help. Aristy Inguanzo is a senior and excited to go but says she'll look have to look to others for answers about travel.

Ms. Inguanzo: *Because I've never traveled anywhere, so I have no clue, like I've never gone on an airplane before, I don't know what the rules are, so I need to ask someone, so can we have a packing party? Someone help me (laugh).*

OW: Julián Jefferies says answering these questions is more than just calming fears. It's reminding parents and students that they have a rich culture and history that is valuable in the world.

Julian Jeffries: *The thing about our students are students that mostly second-generation students or their parents emigrated. So they're growing up in the United States but in the Mexican house and in the Mexican neighborhood. The dilemma was of the second generation is you were born in the United States. But you are not really from the United States. Your parents are from Mexico or from Central America. But you're not from there either. The famous... Not from here. From there. Yeah, right.*

Julian Jeffries: *I thought that doing a study abroad in Puerto Rico or in Mexico was key to their development because they need to know where their parents came from. They need to know the culture, the music, the history. Go to university there. They need to know that firsthand because they're growing up in a country that doesn't talk well about their culture. And the media represents Mexico in a very negative way. I make sure that we have created an affordable short term program that our students can go to discover or rediscover their roots, their language.*

Oliver Wang: *It's not just that you're educating students, it's that you're also educating their parents about what college can do and is about. And I think that's a really fascinating intervention in a way that I think a lot of the parents are first generation college students, especially immigrant parents, are usually, I think, left out of those conversations.*

Julian Jeffries: *If we assume that we're educating our students, we are assuming an individualistic kind of cultural trait which might work for, you know, white middle class students in the United States. But our students are close knit with their family, with their*

extended family. And you could call these cultural traits or you could call it economic survival. I think especially in the coal states with first generation students, we have to think about educating the whole family unit. A lot of my students were accepted to universities out of state or in a very or northern California and they weren't able to go. Why? Because they couldn't have that conversation with the parents about why, you know, why are you moving outside of the house? You know, why don't you stay here so you don't pay rent, don't go to use the Santa Cruz because, you know, it's far away. You know, we don't know what it is. And so part of this higher education project has to evolve. We have to involve the parents in those decisions. The study abroad is very similar. What usually happens is that the students is interested in going and this forces a conversation in the family and some some conflict.

Julian Jeffries: *Mentoring students in terms of how to have those conversations. Mentoring students on why. What is the importance of a higher education degree? What is the importance of going on study abroad? What is the importance of going to a masters is key too, to our students. Being able to in some ways get some more cultural capital, being able to, you know, to become more educated citizens here. And so how do we do that? Yeah, right. I'm trying to figure it out. The parent potluck is the beginning of that conversation. I invite parents to come to certain sessions that I have in the class where students are doing presentations. And I've been lucky that some have come. But we need to have a conversation on campus as a whole. You know, how do we make it a welcoming place? How do we integrate? Some of their first language is that it is a welcoming space so that we recognize that many of our first generation students make decisions as a family unit. How do we honor that?*

Oliver Wang: *It sounds like part of how you've learned how to do this is because you had to do the same thing with your own family, right? Yeah.*

Julian Jeffries: *Hey, it was. Here it is. It was quite a struggle for me. I struggled explaining what I was doing. My father couldn't understand why a masters and why a page to you.*

Julian Jeffries: *Why so much education? I mean, what are you doing? Why are you reading so much? It seemed to him and to my brother that maybe I was just hiding from the world, and maybe I wasn't a little bit. But I had to learn how to explain that, you know, I had to learn how to explain a world that I didn't fully understand.*

Julian Jeffries: *Why a masters why do an internship? Why are you doing a huge team, more college. Through the decades it became an easier thing to explain... when I was self-sufficient. they were more relieved. The moment that was transforming for me was when I was able to invite my both my parents to one of my classes and they were able to understand that I was using my experience as an immigrant to relate and to explain immigration and the role of immigration in my students lives. And that's when my father understood and was at peace with my decision.*

Julian Jeffries: *But it is a lot about helping our students communicate to their families. What is this higher education project?*

Oliver Wang: *I'm a second generation Chinese American, so my parents immigrated from Taiwan and they both came here for graduate school. So they were well-educated coming in. But that said, you know, like my peaches and ethnic studies and trying to explain to my parents what an ethnic studies degree is. There is literally at the time at least, there was no way to translate that into Mandarin. And so they would introduce me to other Chinese speakers as a sociologist graduate student because that was what my bachelors was in, but didn't have a way of it literally translating ethnic studies. And so, you know, I can certainly relate it to at least that degree of it. Is that as well educated as they were there is still a gap between their education and sort of the education that I received and trying to bridge that difference. It took a long time. By my own experience, because they would have preferred, especially as they themselves were these upwardly mobile middle class immigrants. They really wanted folks like me and my sister to be able to become doctors and lawyers. I mean, kind of very stereotypical, if anything. And when I decided I actually wanted to go into academia and in particular, you know, get a degree in ethnic studies, you could just see that sense of I don't know what it's like. What is that like? Why would you want to do that? Can you get a job with that? And it*

wasn't until I think I was you know, I got my job at Long Beach and all these things that they finally like, similar to what you're saying, they think they'd sort of understood that.

Oliver Wang: *In any case, to come back to the abroad programs that you've been spearheading, your programs are two weeks, which is less than I think a lot of conventional abroad programs are usually by the semester, if not a full academic year. And can you give us a sense of what do students do or learn within those two week blocks, whether in your program in Puerto Rico or in Guadalajara?*

Julian Jeffries: *Yeah, the short term part is important because we have to make it easy for students to go. And it's not the expense of the trip. It's more like students work. Right. And leaving for six months to Paris is not. Or in other places, it's difficult for them to manage. You know, they're not just paying for themselves, but sometimes making significant contributions to the family.*

For me, the key thing while we're there is to meet and work with locals. So, for example, we go to Puerto Rico, we're partnering with the University of Puerto Rico, and we're staying with and taking classes with them, doing activities with professors and students in real projects. This time, we're going to go to a center community center in New Macao that is heavily working on hurricane relief to do educational and recovery efforts. And we'll be doing it there. And then we're going to vieques, we work with a nonprofit that helps locals develop their own businesses. It's key for me that, you know, in these communities there's no English spoken. Our students are communicating with them in their native language, connecting with them and learning from them and also telling them about their own struggles here, the many struggles that Latinos have in Orange County and in Southern California. It's now very different to talk about gentrification and because Puerto Rico than it is to talk about gentrification and Santana, where most of us students talk about so they can share these ideas. And it's an intense experience. Two weeks usually is a lot of time.

OW: That's Dr. Julian Jefferies, Associate Professor of Reading and Literacy at Cal State Fullerton. We'll get back to our conversation in a minute. But first --

[Ambient Sound – Potluck]

OW: Geymael [hey-meh-el] Goxon did this study abroad to Puerto Rico in 2017 and came to a similar potluck with his sister and mother.

Well, to be honest, my mother didn't even know where Puerto Rico was. So we had to start from scratch.

OW: But before he had to convince his mother, he had to convince himself. The thought of traveling that far and for that long, made him nervous. Ultimately, he trusted Jefferies who suggested the trip would be good for his future. And here's something to keep in mind, for students like Geymael, these aren't the usual travel jitters.

Okay, so I came here when I was eight years old. I'm originally from Mexico, and I lived in Orange County my entire life, and I didn't really get out much. I am also a DACA recipient. So traveling outside of the country is not a possibility. So going to Puerto Rico was, you know, was scary. I didn't know what to think. So it was definitely a risky move, at least I thought it was, but it was definitely worth it.

OW: Geymael says to get ready for the trip the class studied the history and the geography of Puerto Rico as well as environmental justice issues.

But once you actually go there and you actually see it for yourself you see the buildings you see the people you see you know the traffic you see just everything like it's much different Reading about it in the book then then you know actually going in there and seeing it for yourself. So that was actually pretty shocking.

Oliver Wang: *The ways in which you're taking students in particular out of the classroom to me aligns with the ways in which increasingly a lot of thought and concern and discussion within higher education around the idea that there are modes of learning that extend beyond just a conventional classroom. I think in your own work you refer to these as examples of impromptu learning. And I wonder if you could just elaborate on what you mean by impromptu learning.*

Julian Jeffries: *What I mean with that is that I think that our most powerful education and experiences are most transformative education and experiences are not planned. And really study abroad is a great opportunity to put the students in those situations. You know, you're going to a new place where planning and timeliness is not the most important thing. And you're putting students also on their edge outside of their comfort zone. You know, the weather is different. The mosquitoes are different. The timeliness is different. You know, people tell you 9:00 and it's, you know, 10:30. And, you know, we're still waiting for somebody. And when you're in those situations, you're traveling around you. Things happen. You know, things happen that you don't plan. And sometimes students this this situation of discomfort and make students lives, things that they don't usually do and respond to things in and get to know themselves. I really do think that that's learning on steroids.*

Oliver Wang: *One of the things you also do want for your programs is you invite along a career counselor. And so what is the role that they play?*

Julian Jeffries: *Yeah, my assumption is like me and as a freshman generation students, I didn't know what professions were out there. And as students struggle a lot with that, too. And when they're a campus thing, they're not too able to go to the career center and don't have time for that or. And so I do bring a career counselor for the whole two weeks. A lot of mentoring occurs, conversations over breakfast or lunch or dinner or walking somewhere or driving back from somewhere and some purposeful activities to have students start to think about where they are, what they want to do, what they were, careers they want to explore. This is transformative for them to have a space where they're living with professionals that have gone through what they've gone through and have now in some way achieved some sort of professional status and can be very clear and explicit about how to get there. What is the importance of an internship? How actually the CV is an important document. How to one of the workshops that we do is how to tell your story. You know, that statement of purpose, that letter of intent is so important. And how do you tell that story and who's the audience there? And how do you translate all of the wealth that you have? Being bilingual, being bi cultural, having, haven overcome so many obstacles. My socioeconomic sometimes and to be in*

higher d So that kind of like intense explicit mentoring I think is key to helping a first generation college students.

Oliver Wang: *What do you see happen to students when either when they're there or when they come back as well? How did these experiences change them as students? What whether you see it in the classroom, whether what you see in terms of how they are on campus, within the local communities, etc..*

Julian Jeffries: *One of them is the sense that they belong on campus more. That translates into doing better academically. Also joining a lot of clubs on campus. I've seen also that they have a stronger social justice orientation. I see that they're more proud of their culture and seek more opportunities to practice their Spanish. They go on more study abroad as an interest in graduate school. I'm very interested also in that there's greater gains in their ethnic identification. And this is powerful owning and going back to their original name and in some ways being able to be clear in terms of where they live. You know, they live in the United States and they live in a culturally in a very white space. This is something that is kind of for them kind of an everyday violence in some ways. And they're better able to negotiate that because they're more proud of who they are. And they realize that they're American, but they're Latinos or they're Mexican. And I see them better able to navigate in white institutions, staying authentic to themselves while doing well academically and professionally in your work.*

Oliver Wang: *You've talked about the importance for in particular first generation college students to be able to be aware of and to learn the hidden curriculum within colleges. And could you explain what you mean by that?*

Julian Jeffries: *What I mean and is this phrase has meant different things to different researchers. So what I mean is, as a first generation student, it's difficult to know that you do have to make an acquaintance with at least two or three professors in your undergrad because you need letters of recommendation. It's not in any course or in any book, but it's preferable if you go to office hours for three of your favorite professors in which you've gotten good grades and go see them on office hours, establish some sort of relationship with them and maybe do some work for them, maybe, you know, be a*

research assistant. Why? Because they need to know you in a way that not just as a student, so they can write a very good letter of recommendation for an internship, for a scholarship or for a job. Graduate school. Right. This kind of knowledge is called the hidden curriculum. If your parents are college professors or professionals, they'll know this and you talk this over dinner. But if that doesn't happen, there's no way you're going to know. These are examples of, you know, have been explicit about the hidden curriculum with students and study abroad. It's a good space to do that. Conversations over lunch and breakfast and, you know, uh, so that we're able to mentor our students to, you know, to take advantage of this, you know?

Julian Jeffries: And I also you reminded me of, you know, maybe something that we're not talking about. And it's that study abroad to me. I see it as a space where they can at least temporarily be outside of whiteness because universities are still white institutions and students are navigating their own identities in a white space. And that sometimes makes them not express their true self. I see study abroad as a space to get out of whiteness in order to heal a little bit, because we need to talk about that they're immigrants here in the United States. The public rhetoric wants them to assimilate to white Anglo Saxon values and beliefs. Well, that's not possible, really. There's not really a space for them there. So the second generation here in the United States has this this quandary of, you know, where do I go in terms of identity? What what options do I have? Right? And to me, it's very clear that being bi lingual and bi cultural is the most productive and healthy option for them.

Oliver Wang: I want to come back to the challenges that the Cal State system faces in educating such a large percentage of a first-generation college students. And obviously, this is something that many, many people throughout the system are constantly thinking working about, given your experiences. If there is one thing that you would like to see this system move in a new direction or to set, you know, a particular kind of concrete agenda to move forward that you think would improve the ways in which we educate first generation college students, what would you like to see?

Julian Jeffries: The first thing that comes to mind is a language I would like to see more classes in the student's first language. I mean, it's such an untapped resource,

such an untapped resource. I would like to see classes in Spanish, in Mandarin and Vietnamese, in Korean and whatever languages the students bring. This sends such a clear message to the families. I would like to see events done in the the community's first language. The language is so tied to culture and a sense that it's such a strong message to our communities that the university is the place that you belong, that you're welcome here, that all of who you are is welcome here.

Julian Jeffries: *And so I think we need to move in that direction to be able to offer classes and more than one language to offer degrees. You know that our employer, the employers of our students want them to be bilingual and by cultural. So what are we waiting for? Yeah.*

OW: That was Dr. Julián Jefferies, Associate Professor of Reading and Literacy at Cal State Fullerton.

[Ambient Sound - Potluck]

OW: At the potluck Geymael tells the assembled parents that his trip to Puerto Rico helped him decide to continue his education and that he is almost done with his masters and looking at Ph.D programs. It's the sort of outcome Jefferies and the other professors hope for. Geymael says the study abroad changed him in ways he could not anticipate.

Geymael: I learned to just be a little bit more true to myself. Like really ask those difficult questions that I try to avoid whether it's my personal life or educational everything's all tied in. It's life changing like you. You come out completely different out of this. And they told me this before like I went on the trip. I didn't see how but I can definitely see it now. Like it's just it's different now.

SHOW CLOSE

OW: And that's it for this episode of Higher Ed Rewired. To subscribe to our podcast please head to our website [HigherEd Rewired.com](http://HigherEdRewired.com)



[CLOSE SHOW PROMO - :30]

PROMO: Higher Ed Rewired is produced by the California State University Office of the Chancellor and the Vox Pop Collective. Our music is provided by Conjunction Entertainment. Our artwork is designed by professor Mario Estioko of Sacramento State University. This podcast is made possible, in part, by the support of the College Futures Foundation: more graduates for a thriving California. Learn more at 'college-futures-dot-O-R-G'. Subscribe to this podcast at HigherEdRewired.com, or on your favorite podcast app.

From sunny Long Beach, California -- I'm Oliver Wang... and for all of us here at California State University -- thank you for listening!

[MUSIC POST - AND OUT]