

Kevin Minor: 0:02

Greetings and welcome to the NASPO Pulse the podcast where we are monitoring issues in state procurement. We've got our finger on the pulse and we are so excited to be back. We took last month off and it is so exciting to be back with you. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and I'm Josh Dakota. Josh is NASPO's very own procurement content manager but, more importantly, he's the Pulse's new co-host. Josh, why don't you tell the people a little bit about yourself?

Josh Descoteaux: 0:31

Thanks, Kevin. I am truly honored to be here and to be your new co-host. Amanda, your former co-host, was a rock star on here, so I definitely have big shoes to fill. So I'm really excited to be here and get this going. A little bit about me I was the procurement lead there in the great state of New Jersey. I was working in the central procurement office, where I was in the IT purchasing group. There I learned a lot of great skills. I had great experience and I really hope to translate that and bring that to all of our listeners out there and to be able to engage in thoughtful conversation around the world of procurement.

Kevin Minor: 1:10

Josh, if you could interview one person, anybody, who's your dream person?

Josh Descoteaux: 1:14

Well, Kevin, I am a Yankees fan. I grew up being a Yankees fan. It was the golden age in the mid 90s to be a Yankees fan. Derek Jeter I would love to interview because he is a man of few words and so it would really stretch my podcast interview skills to maybe draw some interesting answers out from him.

Kevin Minor: 1:33

So, speaking of interesting guests, today, Josh, we're talking with Brandi Ann Willard. She is the academic affairs manager for NASPO. That's right, it's a staff three-peat. We'll discuss NASPO's academic Affairs Department and what it offers, why it's important to have procurement of the supply chain management offered at a collegiate level.

Josh Descoteaux: 1:54

We also ask, Brandy, the best courses to take to prepare you in the field of procurement. Also, how states can take advantage of NASPO's Academic Affairs Program and get involved.

Kevin Minor: 2:03

Got questions, comments, email us. Podcast at naspoorg and if you haven't already, make sure you subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google or wherever you get them. Sweet listens. Make sure to check out the NASPO blog, pulsenaspoorg, and catch up on some procurement articles written by your very own NASPO staff.

Josh Descoteaux: 2:24

Kevin, I've always wanted to say this let's take the pulse.

Kevin Minor: 2:27

Brandy, thank you for joining us today. How are you?

Brandi Ann Willard: 2:30

I'm doing really well. Thank you guys for having me. How are you guys doing?

Kevin Minor: 2:33

Good, I'm doing well. I'm doing well. It's really great to talk to you. It's been something we've been wanting to do for a while. Brandy, you are the academic affairs manager here at NASPO. Can you briefly describe your background in this field and then, what are your roles and responsibilities as the academic affairs manager?

Brandi Ann Willard: 2:55

Yeah, thanks for asking, Kevin. So I have my degree in higher education. So I do come from the world of working with college students, primarily on college campuses. So it's a lot of fun in this role as academic affairs manager to really network and connect with our academic partners. So my background is in recruiting, which is something that I do a lot with this position specifically, and then I also have a background in diversity and inclusion and housing as well. So in this role as academic affairs manager, I not only manage our relationships with our academic partners, but I oversee our NASPO internship program, which we'll talk a lot about, I'm sure, in today's episode, and then, I also promote and increase our student membership and engagement.

Kevin Minor: 3:46

Okay, excellent. So when you say recruitment, what exactly does that mean?

Brandi Ann Willard: 3:52

Yeah. So when it comes to recruiting, you know we love to go to our career fairs with our academic partners so we can be in front of our students, give them all the information that they need to know about NASPO and about public procurement and the type of profession that they can go into. What do those jobs look like, what are the benefits of going into this career field and really just bring awareness to public procurement and answer any questions that our students have.

Kevin Minor: 4:21

Do you find that students are usually pretty interested, are usually pretty curious?

Brandi Ann Willard: 4:27

Yeah, I would say they are. You know we partner with supply chain programs because that is the, you know, closest degree field to the work that our state members do. A lot of our students, you know, perhaps they've taken a course similar to public procurement. A lot of them actually don't know what this degree field is. So it's really important for us to be in front of those students and to kind of get that conversation going so they understand a little bit more about their opportunities, especially in the public sector.

Kevin Minor: 4:58

And you mentioned that there are several academic initiatives that NASPO has, and we're going to get into that a little bit more. But first I want to just look at this more broadly, right, why is it important for us as a national association to have an academic affairs department?

Brandi Ann Willard: 5:19

Yeah, of course. So the whole point of having an academic affairs department is we really want to meet this need of bringing not only awareness to the important work that our members do in public procurement, but we also want to create this type of pipeline to meet the need of filling positions in public procurement and, honestly, that starts with our students. So in 2016, we started pursuing these higher education initiatives with the goal of elevating public procurement as a profession, and most of the people that I've talked to they kind of came into public procurement by chance. It was that happy accident, and that is something we kind of want to change for our students. We really want them to be thinking. You know, when I graduate from college, this is a career field that I want to tap into. So through our academic affairs department, we've built these relationships with eight academic partners and you know which we'll be going more in depth with but we're really able to bring that focus to the students through various programs that we do.

Josh Descoteaux: 6:26

And Brandi, I really connect with that because I was one of those happy accidents. Actually, I was a business major but I didn't know what I would do after college and everybody was just like, hey, it's such a broad major, you could get into whatever it is. And I just kind of fell into it after a couple of rolls out of college. And so my question is, when

you're out there recruiting and you are having these career fairs, are you talking to students that are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, all of them, and do you encounter ones that are kind of lost even at almost the end of their college career?

Brandi Ann Willard: 7:09

Yeah, you know what I will say.

Brandi Ann Willard: 7:11

It's every group that you're saying.

Brandi Ann Willard: 7:15

So our freshmen to seniors, each of the schools are a little bit different that we partner with as far as when the students are actually in the supply chain program, with as far as when the students are actually in the supply chain program.

Brandi Ann Willard: 7:27

So when we do attend these career fairs we really try to get it in front of as many supply chain students as possible. So some of these career fairs are going to be business majors in general and then some will be those specific supply chain programs itself. But you know, no matter which students we talk to, whether they're freshmen and they know what they want right out of the book, or whether they're a senior and you know they still have a lot of questions. It's so important for not only me, as the academic affairs manager, to assist in answering those questions, but even for our state members to attend those career fairs with us to get that conversation going and to truly share their experience, because there's no better person for these students to talk to than the ones who are the experts and have that hands-on experience to share that knowledge.

Josh Descoteaux: 8:14

Are you seeing that these programs, these supply chain programs, are they adopting this kind of mindset and are they incorporating some of the I guess, specifics of public procurement within their curriculum and in the supply chain program?

Brandi Ann Willard: 8:27

Yes, I love that you asked that question, because part of our relationship with these academic partners is we're having those conversations of how do we implement public procurement courses into their curriculum. So, for example, we actually developed a course with Arizona State University back in 2017. They offer a course SCM 494, which is public and nonprofit procurement and it's really cool because they actually use NASPO's practical guide as their textbook for the course, and we've had a lot of our staff and state members serve as guest speakers over the year for them.

Brandi Ann Willard: 9:06

So, you know, as they're developing their courses, they're talking to NASPO and asking us you know, where can we implement either a full on course or take your NASPO resources and implement them into courses they already have in place?

Josh Descoteaux: 9:21

It seems like this is such a dynamic and emerging thing and NASPO is right there at the cusp of this to almost shape that curriculum. But it also I guess it also makes it more important because there might have not been this initiative prior to this and that's why probably the academic affairs manager which you come in is very, very important in kind of this movement towards talent recruitment and getting you know a lot of those talent, talented students involved at a very early stage so they can consider this career.

Brandi Ann Willard: 9:56

Yes, yes exactly.

Kevin Minor: 9:59

How new are initiatives like this? I mean just supply chain management at a collegiate level.

Brandi Ann Willard: 10:05

Yeah, so you know, with NASPO, this program just started in 2016, where we started reaching out to these supply chain programs. But, you know, supply chain management has been around and Michigan State University is a really one of our top programs that we were in partnership with and they have a phenomenal supply chain management program. So we really get to learn from our academic partners as well, because when we have, you know, local colleges and communities that are reaching out to NASPO and asking us, you know, how do we start a supply chain program or how do we get a procurement certificate going at our institution, we can connect them with our academic partners and those contacts to get that conversation going and really truly develop a curriculum that meets their school's needs and also creates that pipeline or that funnel to get more students into those careers that they need to fill in their state.

Kevin Minor: 11:04

And Brandy, you mentioned engaging, our membership and taking procurement professionals along to these career fairs. How much of this is mentorship? Because, Josh, I'm sure you can talk about this too, quite a bit. There's probably a lot of mentorship going on, and even time in a procurement office. So how much of this is mentorship?

Brandi Ann Willard: 11:27

Yeah, certainly.

Brandi Ann Willard: 11:28

So.

Brandi Ann Willard: 11:28

Typically when our members come out to the career fairs with us, they're really able to talk about their internships that are happening in their own state.

Brandi Ann Willard: 11:37

And I think that's where that mentorship is really key there, because through our internship program our states can apply for a grant that's actually going to fund having an intern for the summer, so it'll cover the student's housing if the internship is in person and then obviously, you know, pays to have that intern as well. But I think that mentorship is really key because if any of these students haven't really had procurement courses or haven't had that type of experience, they're able to either be, you know, virtual, or they're able to be directly in that state's office, get that hands-on experience, be able to go to their supervisor or their colleagues in that office and ask those questions to really get the most out of that experience. Especially, you know, if there's a specific focus that state needs and they can just kind, if there's a specific focus that state means and they can just kind of dive into a specific project, they're able to get more of that takeaway that they're looking for.

Josh Descoteaux: 12:37

I think that experience is super valuable and I wish I would have had that when I was, when I didn't know what to do after college and then after I stumbled into after I stumbled into procurement, you know, I was like gosh. This is something that I could have been really interested in and I think the dynamics of state procurement as a procurement professional. In my experience it is a dynamic career and I've learned so much from working with the different agencies, from procuring DOT IT systems to hunting and fishing license systems. I mean knowing all of that kind of diverse knowledge that's almost a selling point. You know. When students ask, well, how, why am I

going to learn this, what? How am I going to apply this? I would say you know state procurement specifically, knowing those things, I think that that is a great opportunity for students to kind of hear about and for you all to be able to market that.

Kevin Minor: 13:39

Josh, I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do after college.

Josh Descoteaux: 13:44

Hey Brandy. So in terms of talking to the students, what, what can be done to gain some interest in those students early so they would be more interested in this profession and start thinking about the possibilities of public procurement?

Brandi Ann Willard: 14:00

Yeah, thank you.

Brandi Ann Willard: 14:01

You know, I really like that question because it's really a goal for us to talk to these students about every aspect of NASPO resources that they can tap into now, and one of those things is actually our student membership.

Brandi Ann Willard: 14:14

So our student membership is truly key because this is an opportunity for our students to get the most out of their membership with NASPO. So some of the key points with having a free membership with us is they get to take procurement you courses, and this is something that I think is so beneficial because, you know, in academia we want our students to the NASPO network. Uh, this is great because they get to connect with students, um across the country that are also interested either in supply chain or public procurement, and they get to connect with our members through the NASPO network as well, um, I, I think that's a great opportunity because they really get to see what our what are, you know, hot topics that are happening in procurement, what are issues that our members are talking through with each other, because, really, through this community, they get to see the benefits of, you know, having NASPO as an association if they were to go into this type of career.

Kevin Minor: 15:26

Yeah, and the network man, you want to talk about hot topics, I mean, that is. That is pretty much the conversation in real time.

Brandi Ann Willard: 15:34

Oh yeah, I love getting the emails where these conversations are happening back and forth, and you have a community of you know all of these States that are working together to help each other out, so you know that you constantly have that support.

Kevin Minor: 15:48

Yeah, and it hit different time zones too. It's insane. You'll you'll see somebody from Alaska talking to somebody in Florida in real time. It's, it's pretty, it's pretty neat.

Brandi Ann Willard: 15:58

Yeah.

Josh Descoteaux: 16:00

All right, Brandy, In terms of talent retention and talent management. What role does academic affairs play in that? To help the chief procurement officers out.

Brandi Ann Willard: 16:12

Yeah, you know, I really enjoy this question because I think talent management is such a hot topic to do in order to really, you know, demonstrate the students of why this is such an important profession that they can actually, you know, gain a lot out of is kind of talking about the impact that they can make as an individual for their state. And, you know, I've asked many of our state members to share their, you know, their testimonial, asking them questions about, you know, what is your experience? How have you impacted your state? What are the benefits that you receive by being in the public sector that could potentially outweigh choosing, you know, a career in the private sector?

Brandi Ann Willard: 17:07

You know, I think, when it comes to retention, we we talk a lot about talent management in the respect that these States want to acquire fresh new talent, because these students are coming straight out of college, they're getting that educational experience in their supply chain classes, but they're also coming in with a supply chain mindset too, which is a whole new perspective for some of these, some of these, uh, state offices, which I think is is really critical as well.

Brandi Ann Willard: 17:38

You know, I think, working directly with students, you see a lot of drive within a student. They're excited, they're ready to graduate, they want to go out into the real world and see where they can make a difference. And I think it's important for students to realize that a lot of our states they actually offer training, they have a full orientation in place. So when you're doing your onboarding process you feel like you're supportive and welcomed in that office. And I think that's really important for that retention piece that we've been talking about, because we will. As individuals, we all want to find the office culture that fits us and I think many of our offices they're really finding those training tools and tactics that are really going to build up that morale and make those students feel that right out of college I'm with the company that's going to help me to succeed.

Josh Descoteaux: 18:31

That's great Cause you mentioned mentorship and then you also mentioned training, and those are two top um factors for talent retention. And then and then also um learning how to um make a difference and wanting a career that is uh, is like socially, that will create social change. I didn't really know those aspects and so I always wanted, I always thought of a mindset when I was doing safe procurement of like I am a steward of taxpayer money. I am one that will spend it responsibly and go through all of the checkpoints to make sure that that purchase is as responsible and as efficient as possible, and I felt like I was making a difference, and so I think that that would be a great selling point to the students that are excited they're fresh out of college, and I think that that's just a really exciting aspect about the academic affairs.

Kevin Minor: 19:22

You know, I think the employer is probably motivated too, because you want people that are going to come in with fresh, good ideas, as opposed to perhaps someone um an employee that's been there 20, 30 years, maybe a little bit jaded you know has a very set way of doing things, isn't really going to change things up. So I think there's a motivation to in the procurement office to get young.

Brandi Ann Willard: 19:48

I think there's a motivation to in the procurement office to get young, new talent. Oh yeah, I completely agree with that. You know, and I think as academia evolves we're learning new things that we can implement into these students studies. So, especially when we have these academic partners that want to implement you know, whether it's a full on procurement course or just procurement topics into their classes, one topic could easily get an idea going in a student's mind where they're suddenly interested and want to tap more into, you know, naspo's resources and that kind of creates that domino effect that we're looking for. So that one moment of exposure and you know we want all these moments of exposure to happen for these supply chain one moment of exposure, and you know we want all of these moments of exposure to happen for these supply chain students, that really could,

could pique their interest and then keep that conversation going and that's where we start to really, you know, build those relationships.

Kevin Minor: 20:40

Right, and, and you mentioned implementing new material, I mean just in the past year, you know, emergency, emergency management. I'm sure that there have been practices learned in real time or that have been applied real world that are now part of a curriculum. Man, I always have such a trouble saying that word Curriculum whatever um curriculum.

Brandi Ann Willard: 21:06

Thank you.

Kevin Minor: 21:07

See from from the academic affairs manager herself um that that are now probably standard right Taught.

Brandi Ann Willard: 21:14

Oh, yes, yeah, yeah, and I I think what's really great about academia now as well is they want to hear from the students, hear their voices. You know, in NASPO we send out a lot of surveys because we're really trying to learn each time how we can improve our methods, and there's no better way to kind of gain that feedback than you know, after our participants have, you know, taken a webinar or have done a course in Procurement U, just to kind of get that feedback from them. It's the same thing in academia, where students want to share what else they want to gain out of specific courses.

Josh Descoteaux: 21:51

And you had mentioned in terms of like sparking that interest and what kind of courses in the supply chain or public procurement courses that they're taking to. Maybe you know they're sitting in class and have that idea and are aware of public procurement being that career path that they might want to take and they're interested in what would you say are the best, some of the best courses to take to prepare you in this field.

Brandi Ann Willard: 22:16

Yeah, you know, in an ideal world, what we're trying to do is really get more procurement, more procurement courses in there, and actually we would love to have a whole procurement degree someday, which would be fantastic. But you know whether it's just courses specific to learning about contracts? You know contract management, negotiating contracts, how to, how to develop those and just knowing the ins and outs of the mechanics of a contract. Taking courses where you're learning about types of bids, how to buy? One of the selling points for these students is, if you like to buy things, procurement is for you, but there's a structure.

Brandi Ann Willard: 23:01

You know there's a structure in that of the proper way to buy and solicit. So those courses you know. Ideally we would like students to get those types of experience, but one of the you know, as we're talking about surveys, one of the questions we actually like to ask our students after they've completed an internship with NASPO are you know what are some of the courses that you took as a supply chain student that you feel prepared you or assisted you?

Brandi Ann Willard: 23:29

throughout your experience and some of the responses were you know any courses and research. So I think it's really important for students to know how to conduct research and pull certain data and statistics that they're looking for um. Project management, you know when it comes to it's very crucial when it comes to you know how to, how to properly manage a certain project, how to delegate delegate those tasks. One of the other courses, computer science. Computer science came in really handy. Communications courses, data analytics. Some of these

students have participated in case study competitions and just having that type of experience has assisted them. And then some of our students have actually done strategic sourcing simulations.

Kevin Minor: 24:23

Wow, resume builders.

Brandi Ann Willard: 24:26

Yes, yes, I completely agree.

Kevin Minor: 24:29

That's awesome. So so, Brandy, how can a state take advantage of NASPO's academic affairs program? Can you give us some suggestions of how they can get involved?

Brandi Ann Willard: 24:40

Yeah, certainly. So what's really cool about these academic partnerships is I know we're having a lot of these conversations about how to attract students, but there's actually many different educational opportunities that are open to our state members. One, for example, is we actually offer mini scholarships through our partner, Chemeketa Community College, and this is actually where state members can take a course that's funded by NASPO. They can receive credits in public procurement study and they also can receive contact hours if they're working towards their UPPCC certification. And some of those courses that we've offered in the past were procurement for state and local government and fundamental of transportation and logistics management, government and fundamental of transportation and logistics management. So I just think this is really great because, just like you know, our students are learning courses and then graduating.

Brandi Ann Willard: 25:34

There's so much that we can be doing with academia as far as professional development goes, where our members can constantly be learning, and if they're interested in a new topic, we always encourage them to let us know what they are interested in learning about. That we can potentially offer through one of our academic partners and then, through Penn State University, we offer what are called virtual supply chain leadership sprints, so they offer different topics every single month, so they offer different topics every single month. They've recently offered a project management certificate if you complete these five day long courses, and it's just a really great opportunity for state members to learn about different topics and issues affecting supply chain and then connect with other industry professionals that are also taking those courses as well, and then, like I said, of course we have those internships.

Brandi Ann Willard: 26:36

You said sprints. There's no running involved, though. Right, you know when I first saw that as well, I was like maybe they're running with a textbook in their hand and they're running.

Kevin Minor: 26:42

There you go. Well, better than scissors, I guess.

Brandi Ann Willard: 26:45

Yeah, there you go.

Kevin Minor: 26:47

So, Brandy, we really appreciate it. I feel like I have a better understanding of just the importance of making those connections at an academic level. Josh, what about you?

Josh Descoteaux: 27:00

I think, Brandy, you hit on so many really good topics and my takeaway and my experience is that it is such a

diverse profession. You are going to learn so much about so many different topics. So if you have a thirst for knowledge and you want to drop some of that knowledge, like in a party or some crazy different facts that you pick up on the way, or if you want to be a jack of all trades, like I am, I think this profession is for you and, brandy, you really hit on all of that.

Brandi Ann Willard: 27:33

So I really appreciate it. Yeah, thank you so much. Honestly, it's it's been a really great time so far and honestly there's there's so much support and such a community within public profession that I really think you know anybody who's interested in this type of work they're going to have, they're going to have a really great experience with it.

Brandi Ann Willard: 27:52

Brandy before we let you go. What's some advice that you would give to our listeners? You know I'm all about sharing your knowledge with others. We talk about having that thirst to learn new things, especially in academia. I'm one that definitely loves to talk and engage with somebody who's just passionate about a certain topic and to learn from them. There's so much that our students don't know about and there's endless information within state procurement in general for them to look forward to Having that conversation. One conversation with that student can really go a long way and you just never know whose interests you might spark and what can come out of that, especially in this type of position where we're constantly talking and engaging with our students and our state members. Honestly, it's just sharing that knowledge and that experience.

Kevin Minor: 28:46

That's great, excellent, excellent. Brandy. Ann Willard is the academic affairs manager for NASPO. Brandy, thank you so much for talking with us today.

Brandi Ann Willard: 28:57

Yeah, thank you both Josh and Kevin for having me. It's been really cool getting to chat with you guys about my experiences as well at NASPO.

Kevin Minor: 29:05

Absolutely, we're just cool to talk to. Yes.

Brandi Ann Willard: 29:08

You guys are the best.

Kevin Minor: 29:09

We're the best.

Josh Descoteaux: 29:12

You know, Kevin, what she's saying about talent management really resonates with me. Why is that, Josh? Well, there are so many bright minds out there that really aren't aware of the career path of procurement. Randy is building awareness, which is super valuable to our members, creating that interest in procurement at that age and when somebody might not know really what they want to do after college and I really relate to that because I had no idea and being able to know that there is a career out there that will utilize a wide array of skills and, if you like to talk to people, that's a great career path as well. So, if you're an analytical nerd who likes to solve complex problems and also help people you know you're a steward of taxpayer money and you're doing good work why not try procurement? Yeah, yeah, I mean, I've always heard you know you're a steward of taxpayer money and you're doing good work, why not try procurement?

Kevin Minor: 29:59

Yeah, yeah, I mean I've always heard. You know you don't necessarily pick procurement, it picks you. And I think Brandy was really eloquent in the way that she said you know that she talked about that talent management. You know, and I know that you've had that experience right, I mean, just coming into the profession you really didn't know much did you.

Josh Descoteaux: 30:21

I was dropped right into the thick of things. I did not know what to expect and, like I said at the top, New Jersey really gave me that experience and that training to be able to excel in the world of state procurement and especially in the IT space. So really it was a happy accident. I think that that's what we said.

Kevin Minor: 30:47

Yeah, you know, and I think it's important what she said too about connecting the prospective student to the industry professional. Yes.

Josh Descoteaux: 30:54

Yes, the pipeline. I kind of just fell into it and I had no idea that this was out there. So services to our members and what NASPO does on this front is just invaluable.

Kevin Minor: 31:08

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Josh Descoteaux: 31:23

I'm Kevin Miner and I'm Josh Dakota and I don't know a clever sign-off and I am still thinking about one.

Kevin Minor: 31:31

But until then, josh, we'll say until next time.