

Episode 22: Saint Leo Alumna & Recent EdD Graduate, Dr. Cheri Gallman

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360, a 360-degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Hi there, and welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 podcast. Once again, this is your host, Greg Lindbergh, here with you. On this episode, we are speaking with one of our alumni, and she has several degrees from Saint Leo University, actually. And her name is Dr. Cheri Gallman. Dr. Gallman, welcome to the Saint Leo 360 podcast.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. We definitely have plenty to discuss here.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

The main focus we do want to talk about is the Doctor of Education program that you completed with us most recently, but we certainly want to get into just your background with us in other areas in your career and whatnot as well.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Okay.

Greg Lindberg:

So to start off, just kind of introduce to everyone, who is Dr. Gallman? Just give a little brief bio about yourself.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Okay. Well, my name is Cheri Gallman and I live in Alachua, Florida. I have three adult boys now, and my oldest just had his first baby, so my most important job is being a grandma. I hold that to be the most important. And in my spare time, which is not much anymore, I like to play tennis, hike, and golf. And on occasion, horseback ride. I don't have much time with those three jobs I have right now, but those are what I like to do, and that's usually what I do in my spare time.

Greg Lindberg:

Very cool. Very well-rounded, I must say.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah. Yeah. It's a lot.

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Greg Lindberg:

Oh yeah. A lot on your plate.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Too busy.

Greg Lindberg:

No doubt. Yep. So just starting off specifically with Saint Leo and your higher education, talk to me about how you initially found out about Saint Leo and enrolled with us for your bachelor's degree.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Okay. Well, I homeschooled my three boys and I really just discovered that I love teaching. So when my youngest went to traditional school, a brick and mortar school, I knew I wanted to keep teaching. I just really had a passion for it. So I went to our local college where I met Dr. Roberts, and she really did a lot to help me get started on my new career path. Got me straight on what I needed to do, what classes I needed to make up. I had some undergrad experience from the University of Florida, so we got that done.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And then I went on and I realized I wanted to help struggling readers in my school that I worked at as a teacher, so I got my master's in reading, and that's where I met several wonderful instructors that ended up staying with me throughout my doctorate. And so I went on and got an EdS with them. So I also learned a lot of skills and leadership, which I use with my job now at Florida Virtual School. I'm a teacher in language arts and I also train interns and new teachers, so that came in handy. My degree came in handy for that.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And I discovered that I wanted to keep going and I wanted to do some research. Teaching online, I realized there's a lot of barriers for students, so I wanted to do some research on how to overcome those barriers. So I went ahead and went on and did research, and actually my dissertation was providing support to increase student engagement and help those completion rates. And I researched methods of keeping sixth grade language arts students more engaged and better positioned to complete their courses online.

Greg Lindberg:

I see.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

Very interesting.

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Dr. Cheri Gallman:

So I went ahead and got my doctorate.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice. Yeah. And then just rewinding a little bit back to your undergrad. So then you did attend the Gainesville, Florida location of ours at one time, correct?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right, right. That was in Gainesville, Florida. I'm not sure if it's still open, but that's where I started. They were in the local college. Their offices were there and I actually got to take the classes. It wasn't online in the beginning. I actually attended two nights a week, I believe, which was good because I could do it in the evenings after work and it wasn't far, so that worked. And then it switched to online when I went to the master's program.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. And then when you were at the Education Center, I would imagine it was more so the adult learners that were attending there?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yes. Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

Gotcha. And did you really feel like you fit in? And what was kind of the dynamic and atmosphere like there?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

In the undergrad?

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well, Dr. Roberts was like our mother, so she really kept us going and really guided us because it was new to us. Everything was new to us and we were a little nervous, and I remember young people too, young brand new teachers in there as well as some that were in the school system already. So yeah, she really kept us going, and I feel like that strong bond really just inspired me to keep going. And the teachers that they had and the program really gave us great examples and worked with us and just really showed us all the things we needed to do to succeed.

Greg Lindberg:

Very nice. And then advancing on to the master's program, and obviously you said that was an online program. And talk to me about that transition going from the in-person classes to the online.

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Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well I teach online now and I realized that you could still form very strong bonds online, and I met some wonderful instructors. The master's program was probably my most favorite because that was my area. It was in reading. Concentration in reading. And I really, really got the most probably out of that for what I did at that time. And I met Dr. Aefsky, Dr. Carver in those programs, and I continued with them all the way through the doctorate. So I felt like that started that family atmosphere that continued and just really helped to get my cohort through all the way through the doctorate.

Greg Lindberg:

Very nice. And then was it pretty much a no-brainer and easy decision to kind of polish it off, so to speak, with that terminal degree with that Doctor of Education?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well, after the master's, I really thought I was going to stop. But I realized that you can always keep learning, and I did want to have somewhat of a leadership role. So after Dr. Aefsky mentored me a little bit, I went ahead with the EdS program, education specialist program.

Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And of course, that was just phenomenal. I learned how to research and I learned about diversity and leadership, and I just wanted to keep going. So that's why I went on with the doctorate program, and I really wanted to hone in on my research skills, which the doctorate program really helped me do.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very interesting. And then I guess we could speak about both the education specialist as well as the EdD, and in terms of specific classes and instructors, if you could speak to a little more, any particular instructors that stood out or any courses that really stood out or made an impact on you?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. Well, yes. And as I said, I met Dr. Carver and Dr. Aefsky and Dr. Lamb in the EdS program as well. And the EdS program really helped me prepare for the leadership roles that you would take, and educational policies and perils and technology, which was really important to me because I work online during the day as a teacher. And so, it really helped me just get more experience and being more comfortable with just applying different strategies.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And also, when I wanted to go on with the EdD program, I felt very prepared for it because in the EdS, I was thinking about, "What do I want to research? What do I want to go on with?" And when I got to the EdD program, I kind of had a mindset about what I wanted to research and what was important to me. And the skills that I learned in the EdS program really, really helped me go on with the doctorate program. I felt like I was well-prepared to begin my research.

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Greg Lindberg:

Nice. So it really did set you up well and then was a great kind of springboard for that.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yes. Right. And those instructors are still with me today.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Awesome.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

Let's talk about the availability of your instructors, and if you had a question about something or really needed to reach out to them and their responsiveness.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Oh, man. Yeah. As I was saying, so for example, Dr. Carver, I met her first on my master's program. Well, when I first started the doctorate program, I was taking a class that was stumping me just a little bit, and she wasn't the instructor. I could call her and I could get feedback from her even though she wasn't my instructor for that particular course. I feel like this strong group of educators in this department, they really support each other and the students. They're available all the time. They call back immediately, they really help calm us down, our cohort, when we were going through our doctorate. We needed a lot of that, a lot of hand-holding, but we also needed some stern words at times like, "Don't quit."

Greg Lindberg:

Sure. Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah. Yeah. I remember Dr. Aefsky in particular would be saying, "Done by December. Remember, repeat after me. Done by December." None of us were done by December, but pretty soon after that. We were scared not to be.

Greg Lindberg:

Oh yeah. But hey, close enough. It could have been worse, right?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. Right. Yeah. And when we had our graduation for EdS, it was a beautiful ceremony, and that same group of instructors, they were sitting there in the audience and they were like proud parents, I have to say. And that really made our cohort feel really, really great and really supported. And we didn't get to have a ceremony. We had a virtual ceremony, but we didn't have an actual ceremony for the EdD because of the pandemic. But we had a nice EdS one.

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Greg Lindberg:

Very cool. Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

And then as far as your fellow students in the cohort that you mentioned, talk to me about how you maybe supported each other or what those interactions were like with your fellow students.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. And we ended up, there were five of us at the end, and some of us met in the master's program, some in the EdS, and to this day, we are still very close. We're all done. We all finished. And we're very close to this day and we've needed each other. One of the things I learned going through this program is teamwork really, really makes the dream work. Dr. A used to say that, Dr. Aefsky used to say that, but it does. It really does. My cohort was there for me when I needed them, because going through a doctorate program, you hit walls and you can't figure out, "How am I going to accomplish this?" And you help each other and you learn from each other.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And it's really good that you have each other for that support because you need that support as you go through something that stressful and rewarding. And we also celebrate each other. So I know that every time we would get ready to defend, we all knew when each other would be defending, and we were there to say, "Congratulations. Congratulations." So we're still very close, and that's one thing I was saying, in a program like that, it's so important to have that encouragement and that constant unwavering support. It really gets you through.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow. Very well said.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

And I think that really goes back to our core value. One of Saint Leo's core values of community and just supporting each other, whether it is at university campus, whether it's at one of our Education Centers or online, in your case, everyone is always so supportive. And if you ever have a question about anything or need any kind of help, really, it's just so awesome. What you're saying is just such a perfect example of Saint Leo University in general.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons I stayed with Saint Leo for so long because I felt like I didn't want to leave my family. It's just such a cohesive group, and one of our members actually lives in Tennessee, but you wouldn't know it. We feel very close and we've met a few times, and on campus we met at the beginning of the doctorate program, which I really love that because we got to spend a few

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days together with all of the instructors and with our cohort, and it really helped. We had a strong start that way. And as I said, you learn from each other. So we each were pounding out what our purpose statement was going to be, talked about it, and got an idea of what we were going to go home and start researching. So it really, really helps to have that cohort.

Greg Lindberg:

For sure. Yeah. And I am really glad you brought up the low residency aspect of this program.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

Obviously, a lot of other programs out there are just strictly online. You might see someone on your computer, on a webcam, whatnot, on Zoom, but with this program, we do have the low residency portion where you actually get that face-to-face-

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Oh. That was my favorite.

Greg Lindberg:

... in-person interaction. Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yes. I took time off from work and it was a priority. And we went and I got to meet my cohort, a lot of these girls I had never met face-to-face, we just knew each other from online, so it was really good to meet everybody. And you just felt a little more comforted by getting to see everybody and spending time, actual time, and having meals with them, and just having a real intense few days.

Greg Lindberg:

No doubt. Definitely.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah. Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

As far as your dissertation, I know you did touch on that earlier, but let's talk a little further about the topic of your dissertation and kind of how you approached that and just that whole process.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. And that's part of what we did when we met on campus in the beginning. I knew sort of what I wanted to do, and I had talked to Dr. Aefsky about that before in the EdS program, so I had in mind that I really wanted these online students to succeed. A lot of them would fail and we'd ask ourselves, "Well, why aren't they succeeding? What are the barriers to online learning?" So I really wanted to investigate that a little further and kind of apply some different strategies to see if it would help.

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Dr. Cheri Gallman:

So my dissertation was actually a case study of two classes on the online program in sixth grade. And so I researched different methods to keep these students more engaged in their class and better positions so that they would finish their course. And some of these strategies included the parents and different technology barriers, and the biggest barrier that I found was that they need to feel like they're part of a learning community. So I had to figure out ways to make that happen. And so that's what we did during the study.

Greg Lindberg:

Interesting. And it's just obviously so relevant now during this pandemic and millions and millions of students learning online that normally would not. So that's fantastic research.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. Online students need to still feel like they're part of that community, and so there are different ways that you can go about doing that, and I found that a lot of people use Zoom now, but there are other ways with different apps on your phone and all to still connect with them. I send them videos through the phone because a lot of students like their phones. They'll use their phone before they look at their computer. Yeah. We try different things and getting the parents involved and different strategies. And it ended up being a really good study, which I'd like to continue.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

And then as far as, I guess we could talk about both the EdS and EdD as well for this one, but what kind of advice would you give to a student considering Saint Leo University, and specifically those two programs?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well, as I said, they're very strong programs, and the instructors are a very great group. They're highly approachable and they are available all the time. And the other thing is, just being in a cohort, it's really important. I know some people think, "Well, I can just do it alone. I'm too busy." That's not a good way to go about it. The best way is to develop that cohort bond and you'll be successful because there's a lot of things that you can learn from each other. Everybody comes in with different experiences.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And so having those discussions is great when you turn in your discussions each week, but actually being able to talk about things with your cohort and just pound things out really helps you develop your skills and helps you get through the programs.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice. That's great advice right there.

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Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

Now let's dive into your career a little bit more. Talk to me about kind of how you got started initially in your career, and was it education initially? And kind of just take us through that whole road and path.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. Well, I had a whole different career. I was a court reporter and was going to school to be a veterinarian.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And well, I started having a family, and once I had that first baby, I didn't want to work. So I stayed home and I homeschooled them. And as I said, when they got to go to different schools, they went at different times, I should say, to the traditional brick and mortar school, and I found myself just really wanting to teach. I really enjoyed that. So that was my passion. So I started, like I said, at the local campus, and then I got a teaching job at an elementary school. And then I led the 21st century reading, their after-school program, and I developed a new program for them. And we used a farm. We used an alpaca farm and developed a after-school for kids that needed that.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And we used animals. Yeah. We used animals to help struggling readers. So I'd give them things to do like comparing and contrasting different animals, and so I started doing that and I really enjoyed that. And then I moved to middle school and I worked with low readers. I had low readers and gifted readers, and that's why I wanted to get my master's in reading because I wanted to have new strategies, figure out ways to reach them, and now I'm working online. I've been for seven and a half years online teaching language arts. I work for Florida Virtual School on the day, and I have one class I teach with Saint Leo, reading in the content area.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow. That's great.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

And can you kind of speak to specifically how your education, your many degrees from Saint Leo University have benefited you in your career?

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Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well, it absolutely has for number one, in the reading I feel very confident in teaching low readers and finding different strategies I can pull from and how to help them become successful. And they're reading across content areas because that is a big problem. There's a big gap, and reading across the curriculum is not always easy for students. So I feel like I'm better prepared to handle teaching students to be able to do that, as well as teachers.

Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah. And I'm also on the research committee with Virtual School, so definitely going through the EdS and EdD has helped me be on the research committee and look at other people that are trying to get their EdS and EdD look at what they're submitting and offer advice. And being able to teach at Saint Leo, it's helped me feel competent to do that. And confident.

Greg Lindberg:

Exactly. Yeah. And I know you are an adjunct with us, if you could talk about what you've taught for Saint Leo as well.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Well, I'm new with Saint Leo. I'm teaching reading in the content area, which I just love doing that. That's my area. That's my thing. So it's really nice to be able to share my knowledge with teachers that are trying to get their master's degree. So absolutely, I'm excited about it. I just started last week.

Greg Lindberg:

Yep.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah. So I'm new. A newbie.

Greg Lindberg:

Nice. Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

I just can't leave Saint Leo.

Greg Lindberg:

Oh yeah, it's in your heart, right?

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yep, that's right. Once it gets there, you have to go with it.

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Greg Lindberg:

No doubt. A lot of students and alumni have told me the same thing, so I'm definitely glad to hear that.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah, it's a great school.

Greg Lindberg:

No doubt. Yeah. I did also want to touch on how you were an adult learner and pursuing higher education a little later in life, we'll say.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yes. Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

And how did that work for you? Obviously I guess your kids were probably more so grown-

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

... by that time.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Right. And when I first went into teaching, two of them were still in school.

Greg Lindberg:

Gotcha.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

But I was older and I was scared to start something completely new at school because I had been away from school for a while. But I'll tell you, Dr. Roberts was so good and really, really built me up and gave me the confidence to actually, "You can do this. You're not too old. You can do this." And I have an interesting story. When I finished the EdS and I said to Dr. Aefsky, "Well, I don't know if I should keep going because I think I'm too old and I feel like I've gotten passed up on other jobs where I work during the day because of my age," and she just really laid into me and said, "You are not too old." And you know what? She lifted me up so much doing that, that I had more confidence.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

And really, that one day when she said those words to me made all the difference. It really did, because I was feeling kind of bad. "You're too old to do this at the Virtual School I was working at, you're not going to get that. You're too old, they want younger people, new blood," and I didn't feel great, but then when she said that to me, I just got more confident in myself and I kept going.

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Greg Lindberg:

Nice. Yeah. Well, hey, perfect example of anyone out there who might be listening to this and thinks maybe they are too old or that it's just-

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Nope, you're not. Yes.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. That's great advice. Yep.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Yeah.

Greg Lindberg:

All right. Well, again, we've been speaking with Dr. Cheri Gallman here on the Saint Leo 360 podcast, and Dr. Gallman, I really appreciate the time and just want to thank you so much for joining us here on the podcast.

Dr. Cheri Gallman:

Oh, well, thank you for having me.

Speaker 1:

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