

Kara Snyder

Hello, and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the Assistant Dean of Marketing, Communications, and Constituent Relations for the college. Each episode, we're sitting down with an alum of the college, and today we have a chance to talk to Cindy Cortines-Voet. As an alum of the Physical Education Teacher Education Program within the School of Kinesiology and Recreation, Cindy currently serves as an elementary physical education teacher at Washington Elementary School. She also serves on the IAFERD Executive Board as Social Media Chair and is a member of the IAFERD Technology, Grants and Awards, and Governmental Affairs Committees. Welcome and thank you for being here. Thanks for having me. Well, this is going to be fun, Cindy. Let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose ISU?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Well, I knew that I was going to be pursuing a career in teaching, and at the time, I was trying to find something that was somewhat local, not too far, and affordable for me. And so then I started researching schools that would be good for education, and ISU was one that came up at the top as a very good educational school. I know that they're known for their education program. I believe that they started as a teacher's school way back when. And so that was a big part of why I chose Illinois State.

Kara Snyder

Yes, your history lesson is correct. We did start as a teaching institution way back in the 1800s. Tell me, why was teaching on your heart? How did you pick that major?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

You know, people have asked me that in the past recently, and I don't have this fabulous story regarding my choice. I was really somebody that had worked full-time, I had gone into retail management, and I had worked for a lady footlocker, and I just did not want to do retail for the rest of my life. And I started thinking about, you know, if I go back to school, what would I pursue? What are my interests? I've always been someone that likes sports and physical activities and moving and I always loved children. So I was having a conversation with the bus man at our wedding. We were waiting for my, at the time he was just a boyfriend, but we were waiting for him to finish work and we were in the city. And I think we were going, we were in an escalator somewhere, I don't remember which building, and he was asking me that question. And he was the one that suggested, well, I've never thought about going into teaching and teaching PE since you love sports so much and you like being around children. And that was really what sparked it all. It really wasn't anything fantastic. But after that, I started researching a little bit more of what that would entail. And I really felt like that was a good fit for me. So that's how it all began. And I was just starting out. All my friends from high school were graduating that year, and I was just getting ready to start my educational journey. So I was a late starter. I don't think I went away to school until I was 22 after finishing my associate's degree. Meanwhile, all my friends were finishing

up their college careers and getting into the work world. I was just starting out my school experience.

Kara Snyder

So what was that like for you starting as what I'll call maybe a little bit of a non-traditional student, you know, not that 18-year-old right out of high school. What was that adjustment to campus like for you?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

There's pros and cons to it. One, I felt comfortable because I knew my roommate going into school, somebody that I worked with, and she was my age as well. So the Illinois State had an older dorm, it was Dunbarton, I don't think it exists anymore, but it was shared with the International dorm, the Walker Hall was where we ate. And so it was a good adjustment in the sense that there was a lot of other non-traditional students in the nearby vicinity as me. And also it helped that I knew my roommate. But yeah, so it was times where I was like, gosh, I feel so old compared to the students that are in my classes. You just kind of get used to that and you start to overlook that. You're all there for the same reason and you're wanting to better yourself and take some classes and get your degree and start your life down this career path. So I feel like being older was a great thing for me too, because I was very driven. I wanted to get through the program. I wanted to do well. I had my priorities in check. And so I think that was helpful to wait, because if I would have gone away right out of high school, I'm not sure how successful I would have been or if I was really certain as to what career path I wanted to take. So it took me, you know, living my life and doing some other things in a non-traditional way and to really figure out that this is not what I wanted and I wanted something different for myself.

Kara Snyder

Well, and for you to have that self-awareness to know that maybe waiting was the correct thing for you at that point in time, I think is really special. Not everybody has that. So kudos to you for being aware and then coming to ISU when you were ready. What do you miss the most about your time on campus?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Oh my gosh, Illinois State is a beautiful campus. I loved the quad area there. I loved, I think what I miss the most is just you really don't realize how easy and great you have it when you're a college student, right? Because when you graduate, you're really thrown into the adult world. You have to adult right away. And, you know, you're in college, your focus is getting good grades in school, accomplishing your, you know, doing your projects and your assignments. And, you know, if it's clinicals for those in the teacher program or student teaching, like you're focusing on your school and everything else, it's fun. You know, you're socializing with people that are in the same major as you. You might branch out and meet people on your floor. I lived in a dorm that was an over 21 dorm, which was nice for me because I was not in the same situation as an 18 year old. But I miss the camaraderie of my roommates and all my friends, just being carefree and only having that school portion of

life to really worry about. So I would say definitely the friends that I had, that feeling of community that I had within the dorms, and then even after we moved out of the dorms and into apartments, just that feeling of community. And really the relationships with the professors. It's just so cool when you go through a program and you start going through it and you're further along and you just, you build relationships with your professors. I still keep in touch with a couple of them through Facebook. So you know, great things about social media allows you to keep in touch with people that are from your past.

Kara Snyder

Absolutely. So, tell us, you have that degree in hand, what was the initial job search like for you? Well, I think

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Illinois State really did a great job of prepping their student teachers. I mean, we had different seminars during our student teaching semester, so that there was times where we would come back to campus and we all got together as student teachers and there was different seminars and they focused on different things. One might have been resume writing, one might have been like interviewing and just doing some celebrations of people that maybe were already offered jobs or how their student teaching experience was going. And they also had a really large, I remember it being quite large, job fair that was towards the end of the school year. So I'm thinking probably late April, late April, maybe May. And so I feel those seminars were really helpful in helping me develop my, my resume and help me with it and then just teaching us, you know, where to look for jobs, who to contact, and, and all that, that whole process. So I remember I didn't want to stay in Illinois. I wanted to, to go out. So I remember, you know, they cover topics like is there reciprocity with your teaching certificates? What are the things you need to do if you're someone that doesn't want to stay in Illinois? So I felt like I was very prepared for that. Allowed me to send, I sent out hundreds of resumes. I mean, I sent them out all over Texas. I think I sent them to Florida as well. And I didn't even, I didn't hit Illinois at all. And so that was one key point, and I feel like it kind of paved the road for us to be successful. We had a really high percentage of students finding employment right out of college. And then the job fair was huge, and I got offered a job, and it's the job that I ultimately took right out of college. There was a lot of school districts from Texas that came, and being bilingual, I'm sure I was very appealing to them because I was able to speak both languages and the areas that I was looking at in Texas there was, you know, higher Hispanic population, so it was definitely useful to have that that skill set. So I would say probably not as stressful as it is today because I have three college-age students or children of my own and two are seniors and one is a junior and so the girls are, you know, going through that process and it's stressful to not really know what direction you're going in. The job market is so much more competitive now, and so I feel like I was very blessed in the sense that I was very well prepared. And it's also the career that I chose. I think it's a very straightforward type of career. You know where you're applying at, whereas my girls have different avenues they're pursuing. One will have a biology degree, the other one has a criminal justice, sociology, and psychology degree, and that's very broad. So you can go in any which direction. It can make it kind of stressful. So I feel like I was lucky. I knew where I

wanted to apply, and I sent hundreds of resumes out, and I was very fortunate to walk away as a college graduate already with a job in hand.

Kara Snyder

And so tell us then, because I know you're in Illinois now, what did that story look like for you? What brought you back from Texas to Illinois?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Well, I just miss my family. I just, I'm very close to my family, especially my mom's side of the family, and I was sad to miss out on a lot of the holidays because as a first-year teacher, you know, I couldn't afford to be flying back from Texas to Illinois. So my first job was in Texas in Houston and I spent three years there. I loved it. Now when I think I'm at near the end of my career and I'm thinking, gosh, why did I move back to Illinois? The weather in Texas is so wonderful. But that's just how life is sometimes. And I just, I think after three years, I just realized how important my family was to me. I was really sad to be missing out on different holidays, different family gatherings that I would have been sure to be present at, and I knew that I couldn't afford to just fly back or I wasn't going to make that drive every time that somebody was getting together. So I loved my time in Texas very much. I think about it often, and I've returned to Texas quite a few times to present at their state conference over the years. So it really reminds me of my roots and where I started and how much I loved it there. It was just the wrong time in my life. I just got homesick and really wanted to be around my family.

Kara Snyder

That makes perfect sense. And tell me, I know teaching, especially these days, it's not an easy profession. Where do you find your motivation and your inspiration?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

It's a great question. I had a former student teacher text me that not too long ago, how do you stay motivated and inspired? And my answer is simply, you have to surround yourself with good people because teaching has its ebbs and flows. And I think most teachers would say the same thing that they fall into these ruts where, it might feel negative, it might feel like you're not making a difference, you might feel burnt out. I mean, the burnout rate, I don't even know what the percentage is anymore, but can be pretty high within the first five years. So I think that you need to make sure that you surround yourself with good people. You need people that are gonna be positive, who are movers and shakers, who are doers, who are motivated themselves. Those type of people are the ones that are gonna inspire you to want to do better yourself. So when you're feeling down in the dumps or negative, or you're just burnt out, if you surround yourself with people like that, that's exactly the path you're going to go down. But if you surround yourself with people that are positive, who are continuously learning, who are trying new things, who are great, passionate educators, then that sparks that inspiration and motivation in yourself. So I always say you need to surround yourself with people that are like-minded and passionate, passionate like you, that are educators that want to continue to learn. Having a great family support has always

been on my side. I've always had, my mom has always been super supportive. My husband's have been very supportive. I've had student teachers over the course of my career that helped me to stay motivated and inspired because I want to pay it forward. I had great, great cooperating teachers at Illinois State and supervisors from the university that I just loved the relationship that I had with them. I loved my whole student teaching experience was very positive. And I know that even within my own class, not everyone had the same experience that I did. And I remember thinking that one day when I got to that point that I wanted to host student teachers so that I could pay it forward and make a young teacher, pre-service teacher feel welcome and inspired to kick off their career on the right note. So I definitely think it's the people that you surround yourself with. I also think that you have to be open-minded and want to continue to learn. So for me, that comes from attending workshops, going to our state conferences, attending out-of-state conferences, going to our national conference, and then taking a step further and stepping outside of your comfort zone, because you only grow when you're uncomfortable. And so for me, it was presenting, deciding to present for the first time. And I'll never forget, my friend Kelly Zerbe would probably laugh and snicker as she hears this, but she was just a very natural, dynamic personality. I just walked into a room and just could get everybody, you know, laughing or whatnot. And I always felt like, gosh, I'm like in the shadows of this great person who's very comfortable speaking to crowds. And I just didn't feel like I had that same type of personality. So for the first few years of us presenting together, I would be so nervous. I could feel my voice trembling, my hands would be shaking, I would be flipping the microphone around trying to figure out how to wear it correctly. And it was like I knew how to wear it, but it was my nerves that were setting in. So I think making sure that you're stepping out of your comfort zone, and for me, it was presenting. But when you present and you go and attend different conferences in different states, it's you're building your network of other colleagues. And remember, the colleagues that are like-minded, that are passionate, that's why they're there, they want to learn. And then those ones that present, they're very passionate. They want to spread the word, they want to share their knowledge, they want to pay it forward, which are all the things that I aspire to do and want to continue doing until I no longer am teaching. So I think it's a combination of things. I think it's putting yourself around people, pushing yourself to be outside of your comfort I think it's putting yourself around people, pushing yourself to be outside of your comfort zone and always being willing to learn and grow.

Kara Snyder

Well, and what I love about that story too is that it's also an example of the advice you gave earlier to be an advocate for yourself, you know, you took that upon yourself, came up with this really creative solution, and now your students and your district are better for it. So I think that's really cool.

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Yeah, thanks. And I think speaking, going bouncing back to advocacy, you know, it's important to advocate for yourself and your program and your students and your building. And so going back to a previous question with message to young teachers or ones that are

getting ready to graduate, make sure that you are advocating for yourself, be confident in your skills and invite admin in to watch you teach or any special program that you might've put together. I have asked program directors to come in, assistant superintendents to come in. I finally got the superintendent to come in and we were going back and forth and she was all for coming in and observing this program But you know schedules are tricky and she's the superintendent of a very large school district So it was hard, but she made an effort to continue to communicate with me and then finally made it in and stayed for I think it was two or three classes for ACT and it was really cool She was very hands-on and so that's a great way to highlight your program and really, really advocate for your needs. And just, if you don't shout it out loud and proud, how will anyone know what you're doing in your building?

Kara Snyder

And so, on the flip side, Cindy, I am curious, what do you find to be the most challenging part of your job?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Well, well, teaching's changed a lot in the course of my career, 25 plus years now. I would say all the changes that occur. You know, you might have an initiative or some sort of change that's put forth and you have to learn it and then, you know, it goes to the wayside and something new comes along and you have to relearn that. So I think being able to be flexible and just kind of roll with the punches and all the changes that come and go is definitely one. But I would say student behavior is probably my biggest challenge, and it has been my biggest challenge the last couple years, two or three years now. You have to remind yourself of the background of your students and what they might be going through, and sometimes their behavior is a manifestation of something that's maybe going on at home that we might not always have all of the information to. So it's reminding yourself to be mindful of what is happening and finding ways to communicate with your students, to find a way to build and establish a rapport with them is super important. But it's hard. It's hard because not every child is brought up in the same way that you might have been brought up. And so sometimes it goes against the way you think or feel and you have to remind yourself you need to be open-minded and consider their backgrounds and what they might be experiencing. You know, and I'd say maybe for many it's a language barrier, but I'm lucky that I'm bilingual and I'm able to communicate freely with all of my students. But that being said, we have a lot of newcomers, and that is becoming a very challenging issue, even being able to speak the language. The last time I checked, I remember hearing that our district alone had 700 new families that were newcomers. And in our building, and these are stats and data from like December, I think it was 35 new families and that's a lot. So the students are very, they transition all the time. I get new students every week, all the way up until the last week of school. So when they're newcomers, it's even more difficult because we're putting them in a situation in a new country with a language that isn't their native language, with rules and expectations that they might not be used to. And not to mention, we don't know what their journey was like entering this country. So, some of them are very traumatized from that journey, and we don't know. And so, having to remind

ourselves of that, you know, that is a, I totally forgot about that until I started talking, but the newcomer situation is, it's challenging. And I can't imagine being a teacher who cannot speak Spanish and being able to try and communicate with them.

Kara Snyder

Absolutely. I could see that being a huge challenge. And I think just reminding yourself, too, you only see these students for such a short window of time and really making sure that you're teaching to the whole person and not just the person you see for that short period of time every day. I think that could be really challenging.

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Agreed. I would 100% agree. Like the infrequency that I see them is definitely challenging. And it's the first district I've taught at where it's a once a week program. So even as a veteran teacher coming into this district, my mind was just blown. I had a really hard time grasping the curriculum and how I was going to teach to students only once a week. I would love to see them more often, and that definitely poses a problem. And in my building, there's a lot of absences. So, you know, if they are sick or they don't come or there's some situation at home and we're on a trimester and it's maybe 10, 8 to 10 weeks, 8 to 12 weeks in a trimester, I might see them eight times. I might see them five times in a trimester. It's very hard to build a relationship that way. So I'm lucky that once I started here, I stayed here and because I've been here a number of years, I'm able to, you know, establish a relationship with them and get to know them and their families. And that was not the case in the beginning. It took me a while. This is my sixth year here. But I know when I started here, those sixth graders that I had my first year probably had seen six different PE teachers in the course of their time here. So, yeah, definitely challenging when you don't see them very often.

Kara Snyder

Absolutely. Well, I have learned so much today from you, Cindy. This has been so enlightening. We are going to finish with a speed round. So just go with your first instinct on these questions. We'll get to know you just a little bit better. Tell us your favorite day of the week.

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Well, it's important to have a good balance between work and personal life. That would have to be my answer too.

Kara Snyder

I love it.

Kara Snyder

Tell me, what are you currently listening to?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Well, currently I'm listening to a playlist that my son put together and it's Las Canciones Españolas. So it's just a mixture of old and current Spanish music, whether it's salsa, merengue, English influence. So I've been listening to that a lot lately. I love being able to listen to some of the Spanish music because it keeps me in touch with my roots. And so I love it even more that my son created it. So that's what I'm listening to right now.

Kara Snyder

I love that. That's so special. What is your favorite thing to cook?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

I love to cook. So if I was not teaching, I would own a restaurant and cook for others. But I love anything Mexican. I've been known to make a very good guacamole, so my friends are always wanting me to make that, and I enjoy making it. But I also love to make soups.

Kara Snyder

And you know, we're coming off of soup season, too. I think I've been making soup once a week for the last five months, so I'm totally with you on that.

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

It's a good comfort food, so it's been hard to do that.

Kara Snyder

Absolutely. What is your favorite PE unit to teach?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Oh, that's a hard one. Probably anything cross-curricular, so not really a unit. And any of the fundamental skills. I love teaching striking because there is a variety of implements and manipulatives that you can use. And it allows you to be very creative and exposes the students to a variety of activities.

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Because at the end of the day, that's what I want. I want them to be exposed to a lot so that when they leave me and they continue on their journey that they'll find something along the way that's their niche and maybe continue to do that as adults.

Kara Snyder

And Cindy, I ask everyone on the podcast, Avanti's gondola or Pub 2 cheese balls?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Oh my gosh, those are just blasts from the past, because it's been a long time since I've been back at ISU. Wow, you can't go wrong with Avanti's or the Pub. I would probably say the Pub, the cheese balls, just because that was a place that we frequented often. You know, we would watch sports there, roommates would all hang out there, and yeah, I'd have to say that, and the cheese balls, they're amazing.



Kara Snyder

One last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, what would you say?

Cindie Cortinas Vogt

Get involved as soon as you graduate and you get your first job. Reach out to other PE teachers. Get involved on social media. Attend your state conferences. Find yourself people that, you know, inspire you and be their shadow. Follow them around. Get words of wisdom for them and that hopefully you become someone that gets involved in the organization and takes on a leadership role early in your career. Don't wait until the end.

Kara Snyder

Well, thanks again for being here. That was Cindy Cortinas-Vogt, elementary physical education teacher at Washington Elementary School. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories teacher at Washington Elementary School. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our CAST alumni.