

Hello and welcome to You Got This! A podcast about teaching and learning and sustaining community for everyone at Thompson Rivers University. I'm your host Brenna Clarke Gray, coordinator of educational technologies, and this podcast is a project of your friends over at Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed within Open Learning, but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast in Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within the unceded traditional lands of Secwepemcú'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you. And today, today is our last episode of the fall semester. I'm thinking then about New Year's resolutions and what I want to be different for me and for you in 2022. Let's get into it.

I'm thinking a lot about New Year's resolutions this year even though I don't know they sometimes feel kind of futile. There will be no systemic changes made but I will reinvent the wheel; I'm sure it'll work out fine. It's classic me. But there are some things I'm planning to do differently next term. I really want to plan out my workload a lot more effectively. I've found this term that I have spent a lot of time flailing and I'm over it! I don't want to do that anymore. A couple of really simple, concrete things that I'm going to implement: I'm actually going to try to block out time to work on projects. I really struggle with that piece of my workload right now because like many of you my calendar gets eaten up by meetings. I have regular days where I spend pretty close to 9-to-5 in meetings and then I end up working on projects after hours because there's no other time to do it I really want to stop that practice in the new year, and so I'm going to try to protect time in my calendar. Boundary setting is something that I'm always working on and this to me is another example of setting boundaries. I'm going to block out time on my calendar when people can't book me and I'm going to try to stay really committed to it. It's hard because -- I don't know -- a frequent question I get asked is, "So is that time blocked out in your calendar real or..." and if it's not a concrete meeting, my tendency is to say no. Like no, that's not real time you can book me then. But I realized that this practice of devaluing my own time is something that leads directly to burnout. So I'm going to try to do better.

The other thing I want to do better on is email. Consider this a blanket apology if you're waiting for a response from me. Am I allowed to do that? Can I respond to emails via my own podcast? Probably not. It's something I'm really working on though because I'm bad at it. Um, so I've actually already blocked out the first hour of my workday every day to deal with email volume. My hope is that after the first couple of weeks of doing that I won't need the whole hour every day. But I'd really like to get back into the practice of knowing that everything in my email box has been dealt with. I really love the Getting Things Done strategy for dealing with email -- if you've ever read that book, if you're nerdy enough to read productivity books like I am. It's just sort of saying to you like don't treat your inbox as a to do list, deal with every item in your inbox either by writing it down that you need to do it or by dealing with it. Um, and then get it out of the inbox. So you're not staring at it all the time. And that system works great until you get a little bit overwhelmed and then it all kind of goes to heck. So my goal for 2022 is to not get so overwhelmed.

There's obviously a theme here. The theme is trying to balance my workload more effectively. The theme is trying to feel a little bit more in control of my workflow, two things I really

struggle with almost all the time. And so yeah I guess that's really what I'm thinking about. I hope that you have some time between finishing up your tasks -- whether that's finalizing your marking or getting through that to-do list or emptying that inbox -- and the start of the new year to really think about what practices you could change to improve your own quality of life. A little bit. I'll update you around mid semester sometime when the wheels fall off the bus and I forget to book a guest about how things are going. But. I'm optimistic.

It's hard to feel optimistic right now. I'm not foolish enough to use this podcast space to talk about the stories that have TRU in the news right now. I do have some sense of self-preservation, though I know if you follow me on Twitter you might question that. But I am thinking a lot about what it means to build a healthy workplace and what it means to treat each other with respect and also to recognize the struggle that we're all going through. The word toxic gets thrown around a lot. But I think the iteration of it I'm most interested in is the notion of toxic positivity. I think I've been guilty of this in the past, really trying to be my own hype man and be so excited and positive about everything that's going on even when the wheels are falling off the bus as they so often are. I've often struggled with how to talk openly and frankly about the problems that I'm facing without feeling like I'm making things worse or bringing someone else down who's already, you know, feeling pretty okay.

A couple of weeks ago I reached out via faculty-I and just sent an email saying, like, hey everybody I hope you're doing okay, the world's kind of on fire again, I see you working hard and I'm really grateful to know you. The response to that email really surprised me I think that sometimes all we really need is to know that other people can see us even if what they can see is a struggle. It's helpful to name it and once a problem is named we can start to work on solving it right, I hope. An unnamed problem, an unnamed struggle is unsolvable. I'm pondering all of these things because I think that 2022 is going to bring some unique challenges to our community and how we go about solving those together, well, it's going to be complicated and it's going to require naming the problem. If like me, you're not sure that's your strength, that can feel kind of daunting. I wonder if there's a way for us to get to a place where we can name systemic issues and we can work towards resolutions together without anyone feeling so attacked and defensive that we can't progress or move forward. We're all people and we all struggle naming our struggle. It's part of being human.

I think about that all the time because in many ways I joke to my colleagues that this podcast is a little bit of an exercise in presenting my professional vulnerabilities. Like these essays every week, it's like here's a thing I'm bad at. Friends, how are we going to resolve it? All my life in academia I've been cautioned against that kind of open-hearted vulnerability, and yet making this podcast is my favourite part of my week. It's my favourite part of my practice. So the cautions can't all have been correct. Can they?

Anyway, these are the things I'm thinking about and I hope that we can come to the conversations 2022 is bound to bring us with an openhearted vulnerability and a recognition of the things that are true. The things that are true. Oh I just got that I made a pun -- the things that are TRU. The things that are TRU are care for our students, care for this community, our

care for each other: those can be central values regardless of the discoveries of the next few months. Although we may be in a position where we have to collectively work really hard to demonstrate our values. I want to believe we're up for the challenge because I know how hard each and every one of you works to feel a sense of collectivity and a sense of care for the students we serve and for each other, and maybe if we can keep that in mind we can actually build something pretty great out of all that is around us at the moment.

If you're listening from outside TRU and you're like wow this is the most cloaked conversation ever, send me a DM. I'll fill you in.

My friends the holidays are upon us. If you celebrate, hopefully a break is upon you. Even if you don't, let's take some time to think about who we want to be in 2022, how we'll come to work ready to be that person, and I think everything else will flow from there if we can do that collectively. I'm not often a hopeless optimist in this space. But I know you.

So that is it for Season 2, Episode 13 -- and, indeed, this is the Fall term finale -- for You Got This! As always if you want to write to us you can email me. I'm [bgray@tru.ca](mailto:bgray@tru.ca). I'm also on Twitter [@brennacgray](https://twitter.com/brennacgray). And in both cases that's Gray with an A. All of our show notes and transcripts are posted at [yougotthis.trubox.ca](http://yougotthis.trubox.ca). Of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there.

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. You've got some time (maybe, ha!) between now and the January start. I always felt like this was the cruelest break, by the way, between semesters, because there's nothing low-key or stress-free about the holiday break for many of us. But regardless, between now and January, I want to extend an invitation to you to take a look at the syllabus that you're planning to present to students in a few weeks time. Does that syllabus present who you want them to see on the page? I'll include some resources in the show notes about writing a syllabus that reflects you more honestly and fully. Oftentimes, because of pre-written mapped out language, our course outlines, they sound really contractual and really formal and often really adversarial. But if that's not the person we want to be, maybe we can find spaces for an alternative syllabus, an additional syllabus, another way of framing the course materials for students that feel a little more human. My challenge to you for this time is to think about that. And in a few weeks we'll come back together and we'll talk again. Happy holidays to those who celebrate, happy break to everyone. I'll be thinking of you. Take care of yourselves. Buh-bye.