

Brenna Clarke Gray:

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's episode is coming to you from the end of a week that has been a year. Normally I try to record these essays early in the week before I am too wildly ground down by pandemic life. Didn't happen this week. And I want to talk a bit about why. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So I am not too big to admit that I have spent my entire week sucked into social media drama. Like, oh my goodness. People who aren't in ed tech Twitter, and let me just recommend to you that you not get into ed tech Twitter, there's been a big discussion, with a whole bunch of backstory that I'm not going to explain, about Course Hero this week. If you're not familiar with it, Course Hero is a peer to peer sharing tool. Students upload their work and uploading their work gives them these credits that then lets them look at other students work. And of course it's framed as being a way for students to share course material that they may not have access to because they missed a class or whatever. But of course, it's also used by some folks for plagiarism purposes. I think I've talked on the show before about some of my ambivalence around the way we talk about academic integrity and cheating and plagiarism and the sort of police state we construct around those concepts.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's not really why Course Hero bugs me. Course Hero bugs me because the one thing I do always care about is student data and whether or not we're doing a good job of educating students about A, the value of their own intellectual property, and B, the kinds of data that they release out into the world. I've never been per persuaded by the argument that students don't care about data privacy. Every time I've had the opportunity to have a real conversation with students about data privacy, I'm reminded that there's a paucity of good information that they have access to. And I really believe that the mission of the university, and especially the public university, needs to be educative about these things. I'm less interested in talking about whether or not Course Hero is a bad actor because students are sharing materials and more interested in talking about the fact that Course Hero is a bad actor because it's sight up tons and tons and tons of student data. I'll share some links in the chat to some information that's come out over the last week.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm deeply interested in this issue, because I've been thinking all week about data ethics. Well, I'm always thinking about those. But the ethics of educational technologies, how we talk about them, how we teach about them, I spent the early part of this week frantically finishing a SSHRC Insight Development Grant proposal to do some work in this field. And so it's all just really top of mind for me right now. I think we do a really bad job of protecting students and we do a really bad job of talking to them about what it means to share of themselves. That makes me sad for a lot of reasons, because if we're not teaching that, who is? And if we're not taking care about the tools that we bring into the institution around data, ethics and privacy, then why would we be surprised when they turn to a tool like Course Hero? Which also doesn't care about their privacy.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Guest of the show from last week, Noah Arney and I were talking about this on Twitter, and we started talking about how the legalness of these tools is the least interesting thing about them. Honestly, FERPA and regulations around legality of data sharing is the floor. It's the floor. It's not an ethical standard that we aspire to. It's the minimum legal requirement. And I don't think the gap between those two concepts is big enough these days. Treating data and student work ethically is a way that we embody care. We tend to think of care, I think, as touchy feel and data as hard and concrete, but I actually don't think that that's true. Whether or not we respect student data and privacy, and whether or not we educate them about why they should care, those are acts of pedagogies of care. I really believe they are.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Anyway, I know data privacy is only of interest to like a small portion of the listenership. And I know the ones who are probably most interested have already seen me go off on Twitter. So I'll drop it here. And in fact, it's a good place to drop it because just as I'm wrapping up talking about care, I'm excited to have Stephanie Tate on the show. She's a repeat guest. We talk to Stephanie Tate about her role around academic integrity when she was a learning strategist. And she's in a new role now over at TRU World. One thing that is always important and inspiring about my conversations with Stephanie is the way that she enacts care for our students and our community in everything that she does. I think that she's an example of someone at TRU who we could all aspire to be more like, and I'm going to let her show you why in our conversation today.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So today on the show, I am delighted to be joined by Stephanie Tate. Now, Stephanie is the first ever return guest on the show who isn't one of my coworkers who I can make do the show whenever I need them to, but you'll know that in season one, I interviewed Stephanie about her work as a learning strategist. She has since moved over to a new role at TRU World. So I wanted her to come and tell us about what she does over there, and maybe a little bit about the work of TRU World more generally. So Stephanie, hi.

Stephanie Tate:

Hi, good morning. It's so nice when I hear your voice, because I just automatically smile. I'm here grinning at the computer. And obviously folks can't see me, but I'm excited. So hi. Thanks for having me back.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yay. Would you introduce yourself with your shiny new title and let folks know where they can find you on campus now that you've moved?

Stephanie Tate:

Yeah. Absolutely. My name is Stephanie Tate. I use a pronoun she, her. I am one of 10 international student advisors here over at TRU World. We're located in IB on the third floor. Definitely come by and come say hi. I have a beautiful new office over here. I look out towards Mount Peter and Mount Paul. It's so beautiful. It's fun being an international student advisor. This is a new role for me. I just started actually last May.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Nice. And I know from experience that your office is typically a very cozy space. Do you have tea? Do you have the coziness all set up in your new space yet?

Stephanie Tate:

I've got cozy, I've got tea, I've got plants that are living. I've only had to replace one. It's a beautiful space. It was really important for me when I created my space here, just like the one that I had over in Old Main. When students come in, that they could literally and figuratively take off their backpack and take a sigh of relief and ground themselves before they jumped into what brought them in.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

We don't always think about the physical teaching and learning spaces, but they're really important. And a lot of them are really scary and intimidating. So carving out space where that's not the case, especially because I'm guessing as an advisor, you have to have some pretty difficult conversations with students in that space.

Stephanie Tate:

Yeah. I think that one of the biggest things that I've learned in this role in the almost year that I've been here is that students are coming through my door for a variety of reasons. So as an international student advisor, I'm virtually meeting with students when they've received their admission to come to TRU. So they're super excited. I'm really excited to share about my experience as a TRU student and about the work that I do and then of course living in Kamloops, I'm a huge Kamloops fan, and so I'm excited to share that information.

Stephanie Tate:

And then my role shifts to when they do arrive on campus, then it's more exciting, because now I've actually met the person that I've either been on a Zoom call with, or multiple, multiple, multiple emails, and I've gone back and forth with the student, and then to the students that are in second or third year to finishing up, to then being able to have conversations with them about their next steps and their next plans. And of course in between sprinkled throughout that are students that I meet with that are going through some hardship. And so there are those difficult conversations, especially around midterms and finals. Having that space where students can just come in and take a breath, I think that's always been really important for me to allow them to feel really comfortable.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I was just thinking, when you said you love telling them about Kamloops, you are one of the biggest Kamloops boosters I know, and I know that any time I complain about Kamloops on Twitter, either you or Melissa Jakubec will jump on in and defend the city and check me. So I can't think of a better ambassador for the town than you are. I wonder if you could tell me, I think I made you do this for the learning strategist role as well, but I don't think advising is a well understood role. And I think particularly international student advising is maybe not well understood. I wonder if you could give me like a little bit of a day in the life. What does an average Workday look like for you? And maybe you could tell us a bit about maybe your portfolio, how many students you would see over a term, those kinds of details.

Stephanie Tate:

Totally. So I want to really preface this by saying that I am listed as an international student advisor, but I definitely do not do any academic advising. Those are my wonderful colleagues over in advising housed in Old Main. Also the program advisors, like in OLARA and all of the different program advisors for the different faculties, those folks are amazing. I definitely don't do that job. I refer all of my students to those folks because they're the ones that know the programs. So we work collaboratively with them for student support.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I did not know that. So thank you.

Stephanie Tate:

Yeah, of course. A day in the life of an international student advisor is great. So we have this new app called QS where students can virtually log to a virtual queue to either see ISA, so myself or any of my colleagues, at our front desk. So we have a help desk. We call it a help desk, but it's really just general inquiries. We're there from ten to four. Students can pop in, ask a quick question. So that could possibly be part of my day. Emails are definitely a huge part of my day. And then also planning events and planning information sessions for students that are new and coming. So out of the 10 ISAs, our students are kind of separated to us by country and culture and languages. So I have a colleague, her name, Sonali. She is one of our interns. We have two interns that just started in November. So amazing. I could cheer you for having that program. So both of our interns are new grads, which is really cool because I think that there's so many jobs out there that they're like, you need a year's experience. So this is such a great opportunity for both of our interns to get this experience. So Sonali came on board in November and I was super stoked because I was the only ISA for Indian students, and I don't know if you've seen the demographic around town, but we do have a lot of Indian students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I would say you probably need more than one for that role.

Stephanie Tate:

Yes. Definitely. So I was super grateful when she came on board. I don't have my winter numbers yet, but my numbers, there were 1400 international students for India. So that's a lot. There's 1400 of them and one of me, so getting clear and consistent communication out to them is really important so we work really closely with our international admissions team, in pushing out that communication to students. So things as simple as like, don't forget to pay your tuition deposit, and tuition due date is this day, and don't forget to register for courses, all of that sort of stuff.

Stephanie Tate:

And then we're also really just aware of what's going on in the world. World events. So like specifically the last couple weeks with Kazakhstan, we have a number of students from there. So just making sure that we're pushing out support to those students, whether it's extension for them, say, paying their fees because they're unable to get money out of their country. Just looking at specific things of what's going on in the world. We have an amazing marketing team that really kind of has their pulse on that. So they connect with everybody on the senior leadership team over at TRU World. And then information is filtered down to the ISAs. But typically we're already usually aware, because our students are either telling us or reading it about it on Twitter. Hashtag Yay Twitter.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's a wild number of students, 1400 students. I know that you're getting information out to them all the time and you've got support with that piece of it. But how many of those 1400 students would you say you have consistent contact with, or are helping to solve a problem or are acting in sort of a pastoral care capacity? That's a lot of people.

Stephanie Tate:

A lot, I would say. So yes, we send out email communications, but everybody's on social. So then when I started this role, I was like, I need to create an Instagram, A, because I didn't want students following my own personal Instagram. I post pictures of my nieces and that's not just something that I wanted to share. So I created my own TRU_Stephanie_ISA. Instagram, which is great because then I can just push TRU information like athletics or this club is looking for people and maybe you want to apply, the farmer's market, because I love Kamloops.

Stephanie Tate:

So that has been a great opportunity. And so I didn't at the time think about how students would also engage with me. And so the engagement is great, but then students also DM. So I've had to be really good about my own boundaries and when and send like a full paragraph question, being like, Hey, do you mind just emailing that to me? Because this is a lot of information. And I typically look at DMs and whatnot when I'm randomly scrolling, like most people. It's not something I sit at my desk to do.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

You kind of have this difficult situation where on the one hand, you want to meet students where they're at in terms of social media or their preferred ways to communicate, but on the other hand, you have a huge advisory load and you need to maintain some semblance of work life balance. I like to say this because I'm bad at it. I like to pretend I'm good at it on the show. But that must be difficult to manage, I would think, because students need you.

Stephanie Tate:

It was definitely difficult last semester until the intern came in. The intern, I call her that. Until Sonali came in. Having her as my second. I'm not first. She's not second. She's first. Whatever. We are colleagues, and having a partner to help manage the sheer number of students has been amazing. And so she also created an Instagram account and so sometimes we go live together and we share information. And so it's just another way for students to engage with us. And so I hope that it's helpful for students, but I don't know. I don't know. Do students all read their emails? Do they read the notifications?

Stephanie Tate:

And so I'm always curious to know, and I do ask students every semester. Are you listening to [inaudible]? How you find orientation? What would you like to change? I remember you tweeted last fall where you were like, "I'm going to teach people how to do a podcast." And I was like, oh, I don't have time on my plate, but please teach that again because maybe I want to do a podcast so I can share that with students. But it's always constantly changing and constantly evolving. And I think that you just have to try. If it works, great. If it doesn't land, then we try something different.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So you've got a pretty good finger on the pulse of at least a particular student population. How are they doing?

Stephanie Tate:

They're so happy to be here on campus.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I was going to ask, do they primarily want to meet in person versus virtual appointments and stuff?

Stephanie Tate:

Yes. Yes. Definitely. Most of my virtual appointments right now are all students who unfortunately had to defer from winter semester to fall. Thank you. Huge shout out to Sophie for allowing a summer intake. Students want to be in person. They want to come from their home country. The sheer amount of travel for students in fall that had to travel through third countries to get here, whether they were traveling from Delhi to Paris, to Frankfurt, to Kamloops, or some students had to overnight in Egypt, some students overnights in Mexico. I have nothing but admiration for all of my international students. All the students, not just from my demographic of India, but all that had to travel and are traveling with COVID and with all of the consistently changing, that's the only thing that's been consistent, is the change with the policies for travellers coming in and the vaccination requirements. They've done so amazing.

Stephanie Tate:

I'm so proud of them. They've been able to really showcase their soft skills of being adaptable and being able to take what's given to them and, and fly with it. That's a good pun. Fly with it. I admire them so much. And so yes, back to your question. They love being on campus. They're happy they've found jobs and they're enjoying their studies. A few of them have failed some classes. And so that has been a bit of a bit of a wake up, but for the most part, they're really enjoying their experience here on campus. And they enjoy the one to one. I'm a student, myself, finishing my M.Ed. And so from a student perspective, I'm not an online learner by far. That interaction that you can get in a room with your peers is something that is, and I don't mean this negatively because I know what you do as a job, it's hard. It's sometimes hard to like mimic that in an online setting.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No, I mean it is. And we transitioned to something that wasn't really online learning. I mean, I don't mean that in the No True Scotsman kind of way, but like it wasn't planned or organized or set out by an instructional designer. It was a pretty haphazard experience. And I think that for a lot of students it was uneven.

Stephanie Tate:

Yes. I think that's such a good word. That's such a good term. And I think you're right, because there were some classes that I was like, "Okay, this is great. I could do this." And somewhere I was like, "Oh, okay, okay. This is very different from what I did last semester. Okay. I can do this."

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And there's a big difference between signing up for it, choosing it. and if you're an international student wanting to come to Canada, having seen all these pictures of mountains and desert and cool landscapes, and I think that it's a big ask to then transition to a fully online modality. So I'm not surprised that an international student who has big dreams and big plans would really rather be here. I think that's fair.

Stephanie Tate:

Yeah. And we think about all those other things too, like time difference and bandwidth for your wifi and all of that sort of stuff that I take for granted here. I walk into places and there's wifi available to me. All of those things play part in your learning. Accessibility to your instructors and to other supports on campus. Campus as a whole did do an amazing job to be able to offer so many different things virtually. I think of Jenna and the Write Away through the writing centre. Amazing. But I think for the most part, most of them are very happy to be here and starting their journey.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I wonder, you speak so eloquently and thoughtfully and compassionately about your student population, which you always do. It's not hard to see why you are doing an M.Ed. and why you are in a student facing role. I wonder if there's anything you wish that the community as a whole, faculty as a whole, knew and understood about international students, if there was something you could talk to the general population about this student population that you know so well, what would it be?

Stephanie Tate:

One of the things that really surprised me, Brenna, was that my population is changed, and to even my expectations, when I came into this role, I really thought a lot of my students would be really in the 20 to 24 age range and younger have done one degree in India or from which country they're from and are here to do a post doc or continue with their studies. But I'm actually really surprised at the number of students that are older. We're talking in their late thirties, early forties, coming with spouses, coming with children. I have this one couple, actually each semester, I've met a family that I've for some reason have connected with. My latest ones are from India and they have a little that has with him and he's going to school over at Beattie, and the mom is looking in community to kind of set some roots down and volunteer and maybe look for work.

Stephanie Tate:

And so it's funny because I'm supporting them almost, I think, and maybe more than my student who, who is the dad and he's the student here. And so I think that when we think about the demographic of students, that is slowly changing, that lots of folks are coming, having left really good jobs back home, have left spouses and children sometimes back home. And they're now applying for them to come over. So their focus to me is very different. So, that was a really big eye opener. I think for me in that the demographic has changed. And it's not just my studies and finding a job, but it's also being a dad to, to my little boy who's going to school it Beattie.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think that's such critical pastoral care work that you're doing. And it's something that we probably need to be more cognizant of. I've never studied internationally, but when I went to grad school, I was in a really small town and I loved it. I adapted really quickly. But I remember a woman in my program who was in her late twenties, and she brought her husband with her, and he was used to a big city and he felt a lot of culture shock being in a small place. And there were really no supports for them as a couple, as a

family. And she dropped out of the program. He hated and they went home. That's obviously a very different situation in a lot of ways, but it does to me speak to the need to see the whole student, not just their academic experience, but the other parts of their lives that are shaping and changing their focus and providing support and also barriers to their success. And being able to recognize that as a university community, that's true inclusivity.

Stephanie Tate:

I think it can be challenging. They're leaving their home, they're leaving their support system, they're setting themselves up in a new community, now searching out that support system. And we have amazing partners in community house immigrant services who do amazing work. And some of our folks have gone there and utilized those services. And it's wonderful. And I think you are providing support about TRU and our program, but you're also communicating things about Kamloops and our surrounding area. And make sure you check out wildlife, because I'm pretty sure your son would love that.

Stephanie Tate:

All these little things that you don't necessarily think about as an international student advisor. I'm just talking about TRU experience, also an advocate and an ambassador for Kamloops, and making sure that your experience for your whole family is a positive one, because tomorrow, majority of my students, they want to stay and they want to apply for a postgraduate program. And I want you to enjoy being a permanent resident and maybe one day a Canadian. So I hope that my interaction, whether it's for two years or for four years, is a positive one. And maybe one day when you are in a different role and you are working, you can pay it forward to someone else, to a new immigrant like yourself.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, I really like that. That's a really nice way of thinking about it. And I think often we see the international student or the structure of international studies sort of operationally. And we don't actually think about the individual families that the opportunity of international education represents. It's easy to just talk about it when you're sitting in a strategic planning meeting or something from a dollars and cents perspective, as opposed to from this human perspective that I think you're really elucidating here.

Stephanie Tate:

It just hits you a little bit differently when you get to meet those students. You just know. All students are amazing. All students are special, but there are folks that come into your life that you're just like, wow, blinders are on for you. You are super focused. This is what you're going to do. And I'm super stoked to be a part of this journey for you. And anything that I can do, whether it's connecting you in community or connecting you with folks on campus, I want to do that because your success is my success. And I'm happy for you. I have amazing people in my life that have provided me with mentorship or opened a door or a window.

Stephanie Tate:

And to be able to do that to students that are coming for the first time, it makes feel proud and I'm so grateful to do it. And it reminds me of my own family and my own struggles that my great-grandfather immigrated in the 1920s to Canada from India. And maybe there were folks along his journey that helped him and I'm sure there were. And so this is my give back to be able to say that I'm doing it too. So I appreciate that opportunity to do it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I've got to tell you, Stephanie, talking to you is always just a breath of fresh air. We were doing a little bit of carping and harping before we started recording, but as soon as I hear you start to talk about your students and the people you serve, I remember why we do this. And so I'm always grateful to have the chance to talk to you, because I don't know. I just think your perspective on our students and what we offer them and what they offer us, it always puts me back in a good place. So thank you. Yeah.

Stephanie Tate:

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. I really am so grateful to be a part of a student's life from the beginning until they cross that stage of convocation, hopefully in person this year, put that out in the universe. But I'm also so grateful to work with amazing folks across campus that are also doing this work and that maybe don't always get recognized or given a kudos, but there are some really amazing faculty and staff that really do go that extra mile. And I'm so grateful to be a part of that team, because really at the end of the day, I'm here to serve students in the best way that I can. And I feel so grateful to be supported by an amazing team. I guess that's what we are, right? We're a TRU team.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. We are. On the good days. We're also team on the bad days, but it's harder to remember sometimes.

Stephanie Tate:

Yes.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thanks so much for your time today, Stephanie. I just always enjoy it when we chat.

Stephanie Tate:

Thank you, Brenna.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for season two episode 17 of You Got This! As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me. I'm 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. And of course you can always comment on individual episodes there.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. And this week, the Tiny Teaching Tip is to tell you to go to Course Hero and search for yourself, if you haven't before. Search your name and search the course codes that you teach. I don't want you to do that to police the work that's up there. Frankly, once it's up there, it's up a lot of places. And I suspect that going through the DCMA process with Course Hero might get your work taken off the Course Hero website publicly, but not protected in any meaningful way. But I want you to go and check it out because it's important to know what of your work is floating out there.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It may help you rethink some of your assessment design. I know our friends in CELT are always willing to have a conversation with you about making your assessments more robust. And we're certainly happy to have that conversation at LT&I, too. But it starts with knowing what is out in the commons. So go check Course Hero privatized commons, though it perhaps is. And maybe think about whether your assessments need a refresh. And then book a chat, either with us or with CELT to make that happen. That's it for me this week. I'm tired, but I'm always happy to chat with you, and I'll be looking forward to our conversation again next week. Bye for now.