

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello, and welcome to You Got This!, a podcast about teaching, learning, community, conversation, and your digital life made 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 & Innovation. 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 this week, well, this week I'm really thinking about gratitude. Let's get into it.

So at the time of recording, it's Tuesday morning and the email just came out on TRU Connect to say the list of folks who got tenure and promotion this time around, and I'm on the list for both. So as of July 1st, I will officially be tenured and I will have officially been promoted to instructional support II. It's not the best rank in the world I know. Maybe one day we'll work on that.

I'm feeling a tremendous amount of gratitude for that. It's a level of security that I never thought I would actually find a way to achieve. And so that's something I'm really grateful for. I'm also grateful for the opportunities that tenure provides to hold institutions, to account, to be critical. I don't intend to be any less critical now that this milestone has passed, and hopefully I'll find new ways to stand up for things I believe in and to celebrate and support the work of my colleagues and to do so with the confidence that the institution will stand behind my work even when it's critical.

I've been thinking a lot about academic freedom and tenure. We're seeing so many assaults on this structure from our colleagues, and I think the best argument for both tenure and academic freedom is that institutions are deeply flawed. They're built on foundations that are things none of us would aspire to continue on, I hope. I think maybe we argue about degree perhaps, but I think we're all pretty aware that institutions in Canada, for sure, are based on a structure of white supremacy, of classism, sexism, of racism. You just look at who was allowed into many other institutions when they were founded, it tells you a lot. And I think that working for change from within has been slow. It is not always successful, but I think it's important to work in a field, a sector that stands up for the value of critique. And there's problems with that. There have been problems with the extent to which that work is supported, and we've talked about some of those here on the show. But today anyway, I'm feeling mostly grateful and mostly hopeful.

One of the real joys of my job here at TRU is this podcast. I love finding out about the work that people do across campus. Today is no different. I get to talk to James Sudhoff today about his work in the veterinary technology program, which is way more fascinating than I even anticipated, and I already knew it was going to be pretty cool. So I'm excited for you to hear that today. But in general, when I was putting together my tenure promotion portfolio, which is available open access, by the way, and I'll share the link in the show notes, one of the things that really struck me was just what a huge part of my work this show has been and how much I've learned about what a diverse and fascinating institution we are. I'm looking forward to continuing that work. It's, as I say, one of the real bright spots of what I do and we're inching ever closer to a hundred episodes. By probably the beginning of next season, we'll hit that milestone. And I think it's such an interesting record of this space and this place. And even though my short tenure at TRU so far has been not always easy, I'm a real fan of this community, and I hope to keep celebrating it in the years to come.

Anyway, enough about me. What you really are here for is the cats and kittens, right? So I'm going to let James take it from here.

So I am here today with James Sudhoff. James, would you introduce yourself to the listeners, tell folks what you do on campus, maybe what your role is, where you could be found even.

James Sudhoff:

Absolutely, Brenna. Hi there, everyone. My name is James. I'm a veterinarian, one of two that works up at the Veterinary Technology Program up here at TRU. And so we are found just up behind the trades building just up on the hill. If you are driving the road out towards the new early childhood education center, we're on the left hand side of the road on the way out there, and you can sort of hear us sometimes with dogs barking during the semesters when we have animals on board, but that's where we are.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's awesome. Actually, I follow the adoption center on Instagram for lots of great cute animal content from your end of campus. It must be fun to actually have animals around.

James Sudhoff:

It really is. It's a lot of work in that you're providing really awesome husbandry care for these animals. While we have the privilege to have them in our program, at the end of every semester, we adopt every one of them out. And quite frankly, most students are the ones that adopt the animals out, so there are a few that are available for adoption after that, and it's a really happy turnover to see that sort of thing. They're here to help us learn and teach, and then at the end of the day, we find them really great forever homes. And they're placed into just such wonderful environments, so we really have a positive spin when we're working with the animals here.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So for folks who aren't familiar with the distinction, could you give us a little synopsis of the difference between maybe what we think of as a veterinary program and a veterinary technology program?

James Sudhoff:

Yeah. You bet, Brenna. So a veterinary technologist or technician would be a rough comparison to a vet would be to a doctor on the human side of human health. So on our side, a veterinary technician is providing a lot of the supportive roles, organizational roles, diagnostic work, animal care, compared to a veterinarian that would be making the decisions for treatment plans, for workup on medical cases, doing the surgeries, doing dental extractions, et cetera. So a big thing that we are doing, our program up here is a two year cohort program that takes in 25 students per intake on site. And we are specifically training them to become veterinary technicians, and then technologists. And when they graduate out of the program, and then apply to their provincial board, then write their qualifying examination, then they're deemed a registered veterinary technician in BC or in the province from where they're originating from. So this would be different than a veterinary college that would be strictly training and teaching veterinarians to do sort of the doctor's work of the equation, if you will.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

My understanding is that this program is in really high demand, right? You guys have a full cohort every single time you run?

James Sudhoff:

Yeah, you bet. And both the veterinary technology program and the veterinary program is in quite high demand. They're both a competitive application process. So for example, here, we have sort of two

programs running in complement of each other dealing with veterinary technicians. We've got our onsite program that accepts 25 applicants per year, and we're probably in a base of about generally between a hundred and 150 applications for those 25 spots. And then the distance program that is in cooperation with Open Learning, they accept 50 students a year, and those applicants can be coming from across Canada. So in total, there's a lot of applicants for those positions. And to get into vet school in Canada is quite a competitive process as well. There's just not very many vet schools across Canada, the most recent one being the the veterinary college that had opened up at University of Calgary. Beyond that, it can be fairly competitive to get into vet school in Saskatchewan, for sure.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, I guess what prompted me to invite you on the show was I was listening to the announcement from the provincial government about... I guess there's some agreement with the school in Saskatchewan where the provincial government here provides funding for seats for BC students to take slots. I guess in that program, they kind of reserve some spots for students from BC. And in that press conference, they were talking about just how hugely in demand all kinds of veterinary training, whether technologist or veterinary college or anything to do with working with animals is in super, super high demand. And anybody who has a pet and is looking for care knows that there's just not enough folks caring for animals, right? So there was a good opportunity, I thought, to reach out to you and invite you on the show because I really don't know anything about this program that is obviously both in really high demand and very well regarded. Do most of our on-campus students come from here in BC, or do you guys have demand from across the country?

James Sudhoff:

For the students that join us on site, typically they are coming from a BC catchment, but not necessarily. We have some students from Alberta, we've got some students from the territories up north, and then some students that have joined us all the way from Ontario. They'll come and sort of find place to live here, and then they get in. So it's a very demanding program in that our students, they not only are learning and doing labs and lecture type series, but then they're also helping with animal care for the animals that they've been assigned through the semester. But basically, they're just kept really busy. There's not a huge opportunity to get out and do a lot more, bumping around to other schools, I guess you could say, to other tech schools around the province or in Canada. You try to get into one. If you don't get into one, you go to and you try to get into another one.

And then we have a waiting list every year of students that might not have been successful completely are the top applicants that year, so we try to give them some feedback as to what they could do to improve their application and try to get in subsequent years.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Every time there's an announcement around funding for these seats out of province, there's always some discussion on Twitter or in the comment section of the news story or on college shows, it's this idea of BC needs of veterinary college within the province. I was wondering what your thoughts are on that. And I know we have one vet tech program, and I think the other one is at Douglas College, if I'm not mistaken, right? Do you see that as a long-term goal for TRU? Do you see it as a necessity in the province? Where do you come down on that?

James Sudhoff:

It really comes down to, I guess to accessibility. Do we need more vet schools across Canada? All across healthcare, whether you're on the human side or veterinary side, I feel that there's a huge demand to graduate really skilled healthcare workers, no matter what aspect of the field that they're entering in, whether it's at the DVM or veterinarian side, or whether it's at the RVT veterinary technologist side. And so if you're in Western Canada, for example, and you want to go to vet school, the school that accepts students from British Columbia would be the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatchewan. Each province subsidizes seats at the veterinary college. And so if you want, for example, more students than your allotted number of seats to go to vet school, those students can apply for... If there's vacancies from other provinces, they can apply for those seats, but then they need to have a subsidized. They have to pay for being basically almost like the same as being an international student. So they're paying a huge, huge increase in tuition fees. It's over \$50,000 in addition per year.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Holy cow.

James Sudhoff:

And so this announcement from the government to offer or to support an increase from 20 students that are able to go to WCVM from British Columbia up to 40 students starting in the 2022 - 23 year for intake is absolutely huge. They've effectively doubled the amount of students that can go to vet school affordably from British Columbia in Canada. And so when I went to WCVM, I was a graduate of 2006, there was 15 students allowed from British Columbia. The college already was being updated and was having an expansion on it to account for increases in teaching technologies, increases in students that were happening.

There was quite the demand. And just like any awesome structure, there is a finite limit to how big you can expand those structures. And so if those institutions are reaching their critical peak of how many students they can take on... Because it's not just about opening up new seats to allow students in, there's also the things behind the scenes, so instructors, actual space to fit them in, lab demonstrators, animals for them to work on. There's a lot of different things that go into simply adding another student to go to school. And so it comes to that point. How do we maximize the number of veterinarians that can come out? And the thought of should a vet school happen in British Columbia, it's been a very attractive possibility and opportunity. And I do know that TRU has been opening up the conversations with the government to try to solidify, instead of continuing to increase funding to Saskatchewan to subsidize extra seats, could that money be spent provincially by supporting a new vet school and by starting something, for example, at TRU?

And that brings up a really interesting side point in that, again, it's very great to have a vet school. It's the startup costs, and basically the framework and just the buildings and the faculty to get something from the ground up and going. So it's quite the upstart, if you will.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Because you're one of two doctors of veterinary medicine, right, at TRU? That would need to expand, I would imagine, if we moved from a vet tech program to a full college.

James Sudhoff:

Oh boy. In total, just for our program, not only are there two DVMs, myself and another that are working here at TRU, we have a third DVM that works with Open Learning to help run the Open Learning

sessions that are happening there. We have seven RVTs that work on site, along with the two DVMs, and 12 RVTs that are working with that DVM with Open Learning. So we combine to have 24 faculty basically for the 75 students that we are taking in each year. And we are teaching definitely to a different level. So a registered veterinary technician is a two year diploma program, whereas a veterinary program would be a four year doctorate that would have just different admission requirements. And so in order to train doctors, you're going to need a different tier of veterinary professionals, often ones with not just a DVM distinction, but certified or boarded specialists in their various areas to be teaching the up and coming DVMs and providing their mentorship as they're going through.

That whole topic of recruitment and retention then opens up how do we introduce DVMs of the proper or high enough distinction, I suppose, that would be applicable for teaching veterinarians, as opposed to what we're doing here at TRU, teaching registered veterinary technicians.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Gosh, it's a lot more complicated than I understood. That's definitely clear. We should be thinking of it like an equivalent to a medical school, right? And what would it look like to start that from the ground up at an institution like TRU? It's I think a... I'm understanding now that it's a lot bigger than I might have thought on the surface. Hey, it's a big question.

James Sudhoff:

One of the nice things that TRU has that is really attractive though, we definitely already have infrastructure in place that can facilitate for doing some lab works, or even have buildings that are available in land that is available to accommodate the growth. Our location within the province, as well, is really desirable in that we're sort of a central hub so people can get to Kamloops from many, many different areas. And so that also is very attractive for Kamloops, and thus TRU as a location. When we're thinking about veterinarians... And you brought up a good point. Anyone with a pet would understand the need for veterinarians right now. And again, when we look at the whole scope of what veterinarians are, are desperately in need as well.

You've definitely got your vets that take care of our "pets," our domesticated animals that we live with in our home, but then there's also the domesticated animals that we rely on for a safe food supply for all of Canada, our ranching, dairy, our pork, our chicken, all sorts of different industries, and I'm definitely not touching on all of them, require veterinary either oversight or at least discussion with them and working with a veterinarian to help keep their various flocks or herds, et cetera, quite healthy. And that's where veterinarians are in the most desperate demand, I would say, is in rural communities where we're working with industries that help to promote or help to maintain Canada's safe food supply.

And so when there aren't veterinarians, enough to be able to facilitate that, that's another bigger risk that the government is definitely taking notice of and taking the steps forward to ensure that we have, not only the infrastructure to put a physical building down, not only the instructors, to get the veterinarians trained, but to also attract the veterinarians that are needed in those industries that currently, we're falling a little bit short on and need to rely upon as well for, again, just our safe food supply here in Canada.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Gosh, it is fascinating and far more far reaching than I think I understood before you came to talk to me today, James. I'm really grateful for the insights. Also, I would love it if you could give folks a little bit of a sense of the sort of day in the life or the kinds of roles that you take on, because I suspect people aren't aware of how much hands-on work happens within the vet tech program. And as an example, I will say

you and I serve on a senate committee together, and sometimes you are coming from or going to a surgery when we're meeting at the Senate meeting. And it just did not occur to me that that sort of level of work would be happening right on campus. I don't know what I thought was happening. I think the reality is I didn't think very much about it, but I would love it if you could share a little bit of kind of what your day looks like when you're teaching our VTEC students.

James Sudhoff:

It's really funny, because as much as we try to have a very fully structured lecture and lab portion of learning at the veterinary technology building, it's really funny because you throw in an element, such as animal care, and it puts a variable. It can be very, very variable in any given day. And so most of the animals that we have that come into our program, we're getting from either things such as wait list to get into the SPCA, or we're reaching out to the rescues around Kamloops that are helping to care for cats and dogs that... Sort of what we're looking for is young animals that haven't been altered, so haven't been spayed or neutered. And then we take those animals through all the basic husbandry needs that an animal would have to be very adoptable and to have a great start in life and a great start in their immunity as well.

So if these animals come to us with any illness, we do our veterinary exams on the intake of these animals. We're running diagnostic blood work, urine analyses, fecal exams. We do complete physical exams. So we get an idea of do these animals require... Most of them do, but what do they require for vaccination? For deworming? Do they need to be spayed or neutered? Do they need an identifier such as a tattoo or a microchip? And then based on the information we get from the fecal examination, do they need a parasite or an anti parasite program? So once we get a good sense of the animals that are here, we go about. And students are taking five courses per semester in a four semester or two year program. They're taking a full gamut of lab and lectures that sort of build as they get through the two years here in the veterinary technology program.

So they start off taking your basic groundwork, things like anatomy, things like veterinary terminology and basic animal nursing care. And then as they get more experience, they build on that and they start learning about microbiology and clinical pathology, so looking at cells under the microscopes and building their diagnostic capabilities. They really start to learn about radiology safety and become very proficient at taking x-rays of limbs, et cetera, and x-rays within a mouth, so dental mouth. So a day in the life of our technicians students is quite busy. Every day, we have extensive schedules set up for walking all the dogs every morning, getting the cats that we have on site from their overnight sleeping areas to the cat playground or playrooms that we have, which are little apartments for cats. We get them set up and have lots of... We get the animals taken care of absolutely first.

Then we settle in for sort of... We offset. The second years do labs in the morning and the first years do lecture in the morning, and then the first years are doing lab in the afternoon where the second years are doing lecture in the afternoon. And so in between classes is when we do... If a student has been assigned a surgery with an animal, it would be a team of four, and they're basically going to prep that animal, make sure they're ready in the morning, see them through that procedure, for example, their spay so that they have their spay, and then they get their tattoo and microchip at the same time. Then they're responsible for the recovery of those animals and getting them their next few days of aftercare after they've had that procedure. So they're working hard in their lectures and passing their courses. They're going to lab and doing a number of labs throughout the week as well.

They're working with their assigned animals. And every animal has a primary and a secondary student assigned to them, so they always have somebody that's very much scheduled to take care of them. And then if an animal gets a upper respiratory tract infection or has a bout of runs out the back end or is out

for a walk and they break a toenail or something, then we're taking care of the medical needs of those patients as well. So then we work up medical care plans and get them on a schedule for their treatments and whatnot. So they're really pampered while they're here. And we have behavior plans for all of them, so they get worked on their socialization and their politeness on a leash and decreased reactivity to other animals. And a lot of these incentives are student driven. So they have huge hearts. They have a huge desire to learn and help better the lives of animals, and we see it in all students just how hard they're working to get through this.

So it's an amazing success when we graduate them after two years and they see how much hard work and dedication it was, but they get to look back at all the wonderful things they did and how many lives they're going to change as they graduate and get out into that animal health world.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The animals must be highly adoptable, right? They wouldn't be scared of the vet, they'd be well socialized. I'm just like, that's awesome. They sounds like they have really great lives when they're with us.

James Sudhoff:

They really seem to. And as I alluded to, most of the animals are so... They just build such a bond with the students that a lot of the students, when they're in their second year and they're graduating, that's when they're going to adopt their dog that they get to leave the program with. And we get the word out. And people who have adopted dogs from this program that's been going for more than 30 years had such a good experience that oftentimes we get repeat adopters. So they'll adopt a dog, and then 10 or 15 years later, they're ready for another animal and they come back to the program because the animals are really well socialized.

Just like every person, you have different personalities of animals, and sometimes those personalities are pretty strong, and so they may still be a little bit nervous around the vet, et cetera, but we recognize that, educate the future guardian of that animal that, hey, if you do have to go to the vet, there are definitely some things that we can set up with, some pre-veterinary pharmaceuticals or PVPs, as they're noted, so just some anti-anxiety or calming medications that if they do have stress and they're going to the vet, they can really be comforted and have that anxiety brought down the night before and the morning of their vet visit, and just have a really, basically as fear free visit as we can facilitate for them. So it's really interesting. And every animal has such a unique different personality that some need a little more TLC than others, but we find that along the way.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I, the more I make this show, the more I realize how many people have really fascinating jobs that I know nothing about. So I was really grateful that you would come and talk to me today, James, because I just think it... Well, it's obviously such a unique program in the province and it may be this unique area of opportunity for growth for the university. So yeah, I'm really glad you made time to talk to me today on what is, I know, a very busy day for you.

James Sudhoff:

Oh yeah, absolutely, Brenna. Anytime. I am extremely passionate about animal care and about animal husbandry in the animal health world, but what becomes even more important and what becomes, just it makes me smile every single day, really is when you see the enthusiasm that the newer generation of healthcare providers has. And I swear that those students teach me more than I ever teach them in their

two years here. And when we get them educated, they're built up, they really find a strong support in each other, and they go off, a lot of them just feeling like they can take on anything in the world. And it's really... As an instructor, as a teacher, that just is what keeps us going, to see that enthusiasm and that love of what our graduates are doing. They're so invested in the program that the passion, it just is overriding everything. And I really enjoy that part about my job.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's so clearly such a care centred program, both in terms of looking after the animals, but also the students coming through. I don't know if you remember our first interaction, James, was right at the beginning of the campus closure period for the pandemic, and you came to Moodle Support office hours. And I was helping you with something in Moodle, but my cat was also having a really serious urinary crystals blockage issue and I had just picked him up from the vet, and you were very kind about also talking me through that. So it was really nice. But that sense of care and passion for the work that you do really... I think it infuses the whole program, and I just think it's such a beating heart here at TRU, this program.

James Sudhoff:

Absolutely. And I'm so proud of this program. All of us that are here and all of us that have been here before us that are here previously have put so much into making this program what it is, how strong it is. And when we go through things like our accreditations through the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, we get such positive feedback as to just... They can see how strong it is and they can see how dynamic the team works together, and it really shows through. I'm really proud of everybody involved. And I can't stress it enough, the team. In veterinary medicine and in animal health, you have to rely so strongly on a team to get through these days. It's tough, just like in any job where you're fully devoted to what you're doing and passionate about, what you're doing and the outcome is in bettering lives.

It's tough work, and that support that we all get from each other is what makes it beneficial at the end of the day. And so when we have not only the support that's here currently, but when we have great support from our administration and they really take to heart our concerns, when we have great support on technology, which is not our strong point... So we look to the Moodle Support and IT Services, and everyone there is so great in helping us to do the things we need to do behind the scenes to help others. So even within TRU community, as we reach out and look for help outside of our expertise, we feel that same love coming back from you guys too, Brenna. So I think it's just infectious with us here.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, it's fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today, James. I'm really grateful. And also, this was a fascinating conversation, and I learned a lot. So thank you.

James Sudhoff:

Well, hey, thanks for having me, Brenna. And anytime you want to know about the program, if I wasn't too stuttering today, then we can try this at any time.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Anytime. Thank you.

James Sudhoff:

Right on. Thanks.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for season three, episode 18 of You Got This!. As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me. I'm bgray@tru.ca, and I'm also on Twitter, @BrennaCGray. In both cases, that's gray with and 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.

I'm not going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. Many of us look to the next few months as our conferencing season. It's typically when many events take place. Something I've really been struck by this year is watching how many conferences have gone back to a fully in-person model. And I don't begrudge that. I know there are lots of folks who are really itching to get back to meeting with people face-to-face and engaging in that space, but I'm concerned with the speed with which it's happening and the alacrity with which many conferences that I would've thought had sort of progressive values at the core have really done away with any of the remote meeting options that we've been dabbling with for the last three years.

Those are things that are really important for some disabled scholars, some caregivers, some early career academics, folks who don't have funding or backing. There's lots of reasons why remote conferencing options are of great value. And the speed with which they're being tossed aside makes me wonder what the plan is. If you are on institutional tenure and promotion committee, you can tell this has been on my mind. But if that's a role that you serve, I wonder if you're thinking about how the general expectation of a move back to in. How are you going to maintain your values of equity and inclusion as fewer options for conferencing become available to certain segments of your colleagues? I've been particularly struck by how willing open education and ed tech movements are. I just get back face to face right away, as if we don't know how to use computers.

And it's not that I don't think that we should have those in-person gatherings, but I don't see a lot of discussion right now about the folks who get left behind when those decisions are made, and I wonder what the knock on effect of that is going to be when it comes to hiring, promotion, tenure, job security, performance reviews. There are knock-on effects if all conferences go back to face-to-face and a certain segment of the population doesn't participate, right? One of the rallying cries we hear a lot is that we learned about inequities during the pandemic. I think we always knew, but maybe for some of us, we couldn't look away from inequities at the beginning of the pandemic. And now, we are responsible for that knowledge. But of all the conferences that I regularly do, I think only one is providing a hybrid option.

I feel really fortunate that I'm at a stage in my career where I can kind of wait this out. I don't want to meet in person, I don't want to get sick, but there's lots of people who can't. They can't just take a pause. It's going to have real career implications for them to choose to do that. And what's the plan? I'm asking that honestly. I'm not asking that snarkily. So whether you are in a position of planning and organizing conferences, or you sit on a tenure and promotion committee, or you're just kind of looking at the landscape right now, I'm going to invite you to take a minute, as you plan your own schedule out, to also think about what the plan is for maintaining institutional values of equity and inclusion in the face of that changing landscape. And so you think about that. I will think about all the conference travel I'm not doing this summer, and we'll talk soon. Take care of yourselves and each other. Bye-bye.