

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 and Innovation. I record this podcast in Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within the unseeded traditional lands of Secwepemcú'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you, and it's May. We're thinking about spring programming and spring, honestly, just spring, thankfully. Let's get into it.

Today, I have the LT&I team here to talk to you about our new inclusive digital design course that we're really excited about. It's an opportunity to really take a deep dive into how to make your course materials as accessible and usable to as many learners as possible. I'm really proud of this mini course. We've spent a lot of time and energy developing it, and we're really hoping to have created something that will be truly useful. It's nice to have my team here to chat. We have some other programming opportunities in the offering, but I think the thing I want to focus on the most today is a little bit of a conversation about generative AI. CELT and LTI have been tasked by APPC, that's academic planning... It's a committee of Senate, friends, and we've been asked to look at what kinds of recommendations might be most appropriate when it comes to using AI.

Now, if you're a regular listener to the podcast, you'll know that artificial intelligence is something that we've talked about before and something that we're thinking about a lot on our team, and I'm going to have some great links to some upcoming programming, including a CELT talk that I'm going to be giving, and also, kind of a question and listening session that our team is going to be running to get some feedback on how things are looking, for those of you who are concerned or wondering about policies, procedures, what do we do about all this AI stuff? I'll include links to that in the chat, but I think in general, if this is on your mind, there's not much about AI, in my opinion, that changes good practice. What do I mean by that?

I think that AI is most challenging in situations where students don't have a lot of touchpoints on an assignment. If you get your assignment at the beginning of the term and you hand it in at the end, and in between, there's not really a lot of development that gets the instructor's eyes on it, which means that there's not a lot of motivation for particularly first and second year students to get engaged with that assignment, I think those assignments are pretty susceptible to generative AI. I wonder if this will mark a sea change where we spend some time as an institution really focusing on process, whether it's the value of the process of writing or the value of the process of creation, whatever the assessment is. I think so often, because of all the pressures that we're under, we end up in this system that is very product focused. Get it in, hand it in, and get it done, and we don't, unfortunately, have a lot of time to engage in the process, but we all know that the process is where the learning is happening.

Maybe AI is the kind of revolution that forces us to move things around in the way we approach teaching and learning. That's more optimistic sounding than I feel most days, I have to say, but CELT and LTI have been working together on a document. We're calling it the artificial intelligence guidance document. It's a really catchy title I know, and it's still mostly in draft form at the moment, but the general gist of it is exactly this. We have to learn to live with this technology, and that's not to say I think it's ethically neutral, because I don't. I think there are real problems with generative AI for all kinds of reasons, environmental, ethical, labor, but in spite of all of that, I'm not sure we can ban generative AI, and I'm not sure it would be useful if we did.

We are supposed to be teaching students how to engage in their disciplines in the world, and many of their disciplines will be requiring some kind of engagement with AI, so I think the thing we need to be thinking about right now is how do we do it responsibly? I think that, that starts and probably, frankly

ends, with open conversations with students about our expectations. I think if you're not teaching this summer, and you can take the time to attend some of the sessions that we're going to give and really start to think about what AI looks like in your discipline and what appropriate and inappropriate uses might be, and start to think about that as a conversation to frame the term, less about if you use AI you're cheating, and more, where might people who do the jobs we want to do use AI and where might they not and what might an employer think, and what might a researcher in this discipline think and how might we approach these questions openly and honestly?

There's not going to be anything so easy as a ban, and unfortunately, well, I'm not sure I think it's unfortunate, but there's also not going to be anything so easy as an AI detector. The technology is not there and we just end up in an arms race, so I think that this is one of those things where unfortunately, we just have to have some big difficult conversations. How about a big not difficult conversation though first? As I said, my LT&I team is here to chat with you about our inclusive digital design course. I'm going to let them take it from here.

I am here today with the whole learning technology team, which is very exciting because normally, this podcast is just a lonely project that I do by myself, so it's great to have everybody here with me. I'm going to invite y'all to introduce yourselves and say kind of generally what you do, and then we'll jump in and talk about the reason you're all here, which is to talk about our inclusive digital design course. Brad, do you want to start us off by introducing yourself?

Brad Forsyth:

Sure. Hey, I'm Brad Forsyth. I'm our learning technologist, so I do a lot of the front facing support for the team.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thanks, Brad, and Jon?

Jon Fulton:

Hey, I'm Jon Fulton. I'm the video producer. I mostly do video production work, audio work to supplement any of the courses.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Nice, and Jamie?

Jamie Drozda:

Hi, I'm Jamie. I'm a Coordinator of Educational Technologies here at TRU.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thanks, Jamie. And then finally, Melanie.

Melanie Latham:

I'm Melanie Latham, and I'm also a Coordinator of Educational Technologies, and my role kind of focuses on supporting faculty with learning technologies through office hours, answering tickets, one-on-one meetings, and some program design and development work.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Speaking of program design and development work, Melanie, I'm going to start with you because you've arrived on our team and you've really whipped us into shape from an organizational perspective, so I was hoping you could talk a little bit about the Inclusive Digital Design course, what it is, and maybe the overarching structure of it.

Melanie Latham:

Sure, yeah. Definitely program design is one of my passions, so I'm glad to be here and kind of lead this team through it, and with everyone's support and guidance for sure, but the Inclusive Digital Design course, essentially we wanted to create a course that provides faculty, staff, anyone who takes this course with some strategies and techniques to integrate more inclusivity and learner centeredness into their digital worlds, and digital worlds meaning Moodle, PowerPoint documents, video media, and those sorts of things. It's just kind of the beginning to get some strategies that can help remove some barriers to learning, integrating strategies that give them multiple ways to engage with the content.

Our goal for this program was to embed some flexibility as well. We are designing six modules, but it doesn't mean that you need to take every single one of them. We're designing one of them to be an optional bonus module if you're interested in it, and then we've got five core modules. From that, if you complete four of the core modules, then you'll receive a certificate of completion. The goal for this program is just to integrate also, some flexibility for those who take it, the participants' professional development, whether they want to take one module, two, three, four, just depends on how much they want to engage with a program.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I really like this because I like that we've given folks an element of choice and control because there might be some aspects of design, you already feel like you get, but that's okay because there's space for you to sort of choose... I was going to say, choose you're an adventure, and then I decided that was too cheesy, and then I said it anyway. I thought we might go through and talk about what's in the individual modules, and I think, Brad, I think your module is the first one. Can you tell us a little bit about what it is?

Brad Forsyth:

Sure. Module one is called Formatting Course Content So It's Accessible. Because it's the first module, and I assume most people are going to start here. It kind of starts with some big broad questions. What is accessibility? Why does this matter? We do try to emphasize focusing on the diverse needs of learners to try and anticipate barriers that they might encounter. We also introduce the UDL framework, so Universal Design for Learning, just really briefly. That would be a whole course on its own. After that, we get into assistive technologies, so just looking at some of the common tools that students might be using, not to say that you have to learn how to use these technologies, but just to keep them in mind while we're designing our course content just to make sure that our content is compatible with these tools, and then after that, we get into the really specific design practices, and we're hoping that people can really take away some skills that they can start introducing into their course content right away.

Those are things like organizing your course content, using headings properly, using color effectively, so for people that might not be able to interpret different colors, different tones, how to properly format your images and your tables and your lists, so that things like screen readers can interpret them, and then finally, we'll take all of those practices and look at how to actually do them in some of the more common digital formats that we all use, so Moodle Words, PowerPoint and WordPress, and then also,

how to check for accessibility in those formats. Fortunately, a lot of those tools automatically include built-in accessibility checkers when that can come in handy because we're not just authoring our content, but a lot of the time we're curating content as well, so if you're bringing in content from elsewhere, and I think that covers the basics of it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, perfect. Thanks, Brad. I do like it as a place to start, because if you're brand new to the idea of design as kind of an access principle, I think you get a really good overview of that from your module. And then, Melanie, your module takes the idea that design itself can be an access principle in terms of layout and organization. Is that right? That's module two, I think.

Melanie Latham:

Module two is optimizing the organization of a Moodle course, and it's kind of focusing on four main areas of a Moodle course, with being the course menu, the homepage, kind of the landing page, course content, and assessment. It's just thinking about moving into a space where we might use Moodle more frequently, and what are some good practices and strategies to go about that, that help students with navigation that kind of looking at these four elements of the course, some of these practices may seem a bit on the simplistic side, but these are just these foundational principles that make such a big impact, and they can easily be overlooked. So hopefully, by reintroducing or kind of reinforcing their importance, people can begin to see how they do impact the overall student experience because this kind of gathered over years of designing in online spaces, talking with students, talking with faculty, these are some of the strategies that, when they aren't considered, create a problem.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Folks would've had a little bit of a preview of this idea from your TPC talk, right, Melanie, if they saw that?

Melanie Latham:

Yeah, absolutely. That was kind of a general mirroring to some degree of the module, so if they did attend that, it's a great preview as to what this module offers, but this module does go into more depth and just provides opportunities to explore the concept and the topics a little bit deeper.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Perfect. Awesome. Okay, and then, Jamie and Jon, you guys are looking at accessible media, right, how to make the media in your courses more accessible?

Jamie Drozda:

We're module three, and our module is titled Formatting Course Media So It's Accessible, and I think the reason why I'm excited about this module is because everybody uses media to learn new things. I know I'm on YouTube, I can learn how to make macarons, I can learn some yoga. So many things that you can learn through media and specifically, video, but we're going to talk about video and audio, specifically in this module, and in it we describe strategies for enhancing the accessibility of video and audio. We explain how accessible video and audio enhances learning experience for all students, and we cover how to create inclusive media. Jon, is there anything you want to add?

Jon Fulton:

Well, in terms of how we deal with video in that light is making sure that there is an actual transcript and/or close captioning, and what are the tools that you can use to get those accomplished? There's so many different ways of doing it, but even with all the improvement in AI, getting an accurate transcript is still something you have to kind of hand touch. You still have to go in and edit because certain words will just never be acknowledged by the AI as an actual word, or they'll mishear you and stuff, so just making sure that all those pieces of the close caption or the transcript are accurate to what you're actually saying in the video.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I really like this because media enhances courses so much, but it's also a major place where accessibility can really fail, so I like that you guys are identifying it, celebrating the idea that yes, interactive, multimedia courses are great, but here's how we make sure that we're not leaving any learners behind in the process. Melanie, you also looked specifically at PowerPoint and making PowerPoint more accessible. Can you tell me a little bit about why you thought we should include a module on PowerPoint specifically, and some of what users can expect from it?

Melanie Latham:

Module four is called Designing PowerPoint Presentations For All, and I think the thought behind this one is people use PowerPoint presentation, Google slide presentations in their day-to-day work quite often, whether it's for instruction, whether it's for giving presentation, and with that, there is a lot of consideration for the design principles that are integrated because they can make or break an experience essentially, that we want to consider certain design principles to really enhance the learning experience, direct the eye on the slide to make sure that the learner is taking away the message that we're trying to deliver.

So this module starts with a little bit of brain science and just kind of how the brain processes verbal and visual information from one perspective, and then we dive into some of the design principles, I would say some of the foundational ones that just to start considering, to start seeing in slide designs, whether from your own slide designs or slides that you've seen out there in the world, and then thinking about how these design strategies can then impact learning and how kind of, thinking about design and text and images and how the combination of them can promote and enhance learning. Hopefully, it just provides that different view that when one is going to now make a presentation from here on out, they see some of these design principles being implemented, whether they're using a template or designing from scratch, but just to understand how these principles kind of form and experience that you may not often think about.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think it's really important because so many people use PowerPoint. I need to make more accessible slides because I can get really distracted by the fun animations and things, and so I think bringing people back to principles of what actually is the slide deck for? It's not actually just to look pretty. It's trying to communicate something. It's a reminder that I often need.

And then, I did module five, which is sort of a really brief overview of how to use WordPress and how to do so accessibly and some of the principles that you need to think about if you're letting students loose on the open web in terms of making sure that everybody has a positive experience with that.

And then, I also worked on the bonus module, which is a very TRU specific module that deals with the services available on our campus, goes over a little bit of the early alert system and when you should use

that and how to connect students with services and resources, and why it's a really important thing to do to make those really visible in your course, so that it's a really normal part of the experience of working through your course material for students. That's the modules in a nutshell. As Melanie said off the top, you do four of them to get our wee certificate, but you can also do all of them and many of them invite opportunities for deeper thinking or more engagement with the ideas if you want to go further.

I'm going to open this question up to everybody, which means I'm inviting a chunk of awkward silence while we decide who's going to answer, but I know that accessibility is, it's a passion of everybody on the team. I think it's something that we think about a lot and have been really trying to infuse in our practice overall. I'm curious about what everybody is feeling most excited or hopeful or encouraged by in developing this course and what we're hoping the community gets out of it. Anybody can come and jump in on it, and I'll pause while we decide who's going to do that.

Jon Fulton:

In my day-to-day job, we deal with accessibility, specifically with videos constantly, and trying to figure out ways to get these transcripts and close captionings on the material that we are putting into the Moodle shells, but we've been doing it ever since I had, we were sending out DVDs, and I would actually have to create close captioning onto the DVD files. Initially, we would do paper edits, and so we would actually have the script already as a text file. Nowadays, it's more having to use machine learning or AI to take the audio and transcribe it itself like Microsoft does in the 365 suite, but there's a lot of these tools that do it, so hopefully, the accuracy is going to get better to make it faster because it is a big barrier. It takes so much time. We have 80 videos in one course. Who's going to go through all those videos and have to re-listen to them and make sure that the closed captions are accurate? Hopefully, there's some tools that'll help make that process faster.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Brad and I were just doing a session for the OL students yesterday, so I was doing a little sample video for them in that session to just show them the captioning function in Kaltura, and it has gotten better, insofar as it has finally learned its name. When you say Kaltura, it doesn't change it to culture anymore, so I thought that was pretty exciting.

Jon Fulton:

That's a good one.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Anybody else want to talk about accessibility, what it means to you, and why you're excited about our little course?

Jamie Drozda:

I think the biggest thing that brings me excitement about our course is that it's accessibility and inclusivity, and I really hope people take away how to make their courses more inclusive for everyone. I think Moodle especially... It's a software. It's built off of a series of zeros and ones. It's not a really warm and inviting space for students to be sometimes, so I think if anyone can take away anything, I'm really hoping it's just how to make the space more inviting and inclusive.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, I really like that word inclusivity because we are talking about accessibility principles, but it's not always... We tend to think, I think in the university, of accessibility equals accommodations, but that's the opposite of what we're talking about here. We're talking about creating a learning environment that includes as many learners as possible, and invites as many learners into the learning space to have success as possible, and it's a really different way of thinking about accessibility than something like accommodation, which is really, you send the student away over there to go and deal with what they need dealt with. This is about the classroom space itself, or at least the virtual classroom space.

Melanie Latham:

Just the idea that we work with these technologies day to day, and it's just going back to some of the foundational principles of what we can do to make those spaces make everyone feel like they belong, and sometimes I consider, it's things that you wouldn't even think about or you think that aren't very important, but actually have a pretty significant impact, and I think with the continued evolution of technology and how things continue to evolve, that just going back to sometimes the foundations to understand how certain design principles impact the larger picture, can always keep us grounded in this sea of ever-changing technologies that keep getting kind of, enhanced, but there's always that foundational principle to go back to guide practice.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I really like that, and it's a place where, I don't know, I'm constantly struck by my own ignorance in this space for sure, but for me, when I started on our team, it was learning something really as simple as, that headings matter. Using the actual heading function matters instead of just making the text big and bold, which was my preferred way of dealing with headings previously, because I actually didn't really understand on the backend what's happening when you tell the word processor that this is a heading versus this is body text. I think that those principles, you're right, Melanie, they expand to working in WordPress. The header thing still matters. It matters in Moodle, it matters in Word, obviously. That's such a simple way you can change your practice to be more accessible. Brad, you talked about some of those really baseline level principles in your module. I wonder if you can think of any other examples beyond my very dopey example of the headers where people can change their practice with something that's relatively small and straightforward to do?

Brad Forsyth:

I think changing the headers is an important one, and it's not just for students that are using assistive technologies, too. Visually, it's going to look a lot more appealing and easier to navigate, but if you look at things like images, just something as simple as making sure you have alt texts included in your images, so if they don't load on a webpage more, if students are using a screen reader, then it doesn't just skip over that image. It actually gives them some context of what it is. Simple things like how you word your hyperlinks as well. Sometimes, we might just want to pop in a URL link without thinking that if a student's using a screen reader, then it's going to read out that entire URL to them. Just simple strategies like putting some context in what you're linking, telling students where it's going, if it's going to a PDF file or opening in a new window or something like that. Just really small changes can make a big difference as well.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That link one is huge. I was definitely somebody who was guilty of click here, and just click here would be hyperlinked, and even if you just hyperlink the whole sentence instead of just the part that says, click here, then suddenly you've got some context. If a student is just reading through the links on a page on a screen reader, they don't just get a sea of click here, click here, click here, which again, you don't know about until you think about.

Brad Forsyth:

Yeah, it can be very disorienting for students. A lot of these simple practices that we hope people adopt, they might seem like they're going to be more time-consuming upfront, and they can be, but you're also going to have to be less reactive to a lot of those accommodation requests as well, because you're anticipating those barriers that students might encounter.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

This was great, guys. I'm very excited about this programming for summer. It's the first time we've sort of all collaborated on a single course, which I think is super fun. Just as we're leaving this conversation today, I was just thinking, Melanie, from a program design perspective, is there anything you want people to know when they're registering as they come to the course, like ideal mindset or how long we think it's going to take them, or any of those kind of details?

Melanie Latham:

Our goal here is that you'll be spending about one to two hours per module here. Again, our idea is just flexibility. Maybe you're coming just to take one specific topic because that's what interests you. Maybe you want to complete the full certificate and complete four modules. Maybe you want to go beyond that and complete all six modules. We're just trying to keep it open-ended and keep it accessible to you as well, so hopefully, you'll kind of get some of those notions of inclusivity, flexibility, student-centered, even in just the program design by offering choice and different ways to go about things.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I really like that the course itself has forced us all to brush up our own accessibility practices in terms of making sure that we're walking the walk in the course, and I think that, that was a really good exercise just from a professional development standpoint for all of us just to make sure that we're all on the same page of those values. I think that piece has been really important, too. All right, gang, thank you so much for your time today. I know everybody is super busy, and I'm really grateful to you for taking this time to chat with me and looking forward to digging into this course with you guys and the community. It's going to be a lot of fun.

Brad Forsyth:

Thanks.

Jamie Drozda:

Thanks Brenna.

Melanie Latham:

Thanks, Brenna.

Jon Fulton:

Thanks, Brenna.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That is it for season 3, episode 21 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, 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. I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip or maybe just a tiny AI exercise. This is for those of you who have never dabbled before. It's an activity that I actually find really powerful in terms of exploring the limitations of AI. I would not do this with students.

There's no AI tool that we have access to that's been through a privacy impact assessment, and I wouldn't put student data through one, but as an instructor who can give informed consent, I encourage you to try, ask ChatGPT to generate a bio for you, a professional one, and then ask it to give you five citations from your work. If you're anything like me, it will make it all up and those findings will be funny, but they'll also be instructive about what the generative in generative AI means. These aren't genius machines. They're bullshit machines. Don't normally swear on the show, but I think the censors will let me get that one passed. Go play. See what you come up with and let me know. I'd love to talk about it. Hopefully, I'll see you at some of the AI sessions and hopefully, I will see you in our inclusive digital design course. Until next time, take care of yourselves and each other and we'll talk really soon. Bye-bye.