

Hi and welcome to You Got This!, a podcast about teaching and learning and pivoting to digital for the whole TRU community. I'm your host, Brenna Clarke Gray, Coordinator of Educational Technologies, and this podcast is a project of your friends at Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed over in Open Learning, but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast in Tk'emplups te Secwepemc within the unceded traditional lands of Secwepemcúl'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you.

Hi, friends. We're really doing this, hey? We're really doing this fully online semester. I hope you're feeling ready. It's Labour Day when this episode comes out. And because it's Labour Day, I actually really want to talk to you about rest. It's something many of us are notoriously bad at. How many of you are working today? It's OK. You don't have to admit it. I'm recording this episode on the Thursday night before Labour Day. It's after 9:30. That's the only time my house is quiet. I have a three-year-old. And I'm mindful that this is time that I should be resting. And I'm not. So I'm coming to you from a place of love, if not a place of hypocrisy. But I think a conversation about rest is actually kind of urgent, especially right now. So let's get into it.

Teaching expands to fill time, hey? It's probably not a controversial statement. We all know that, you know, you get that course release. And where did it go? Doesn't really seem any different. And I think for most of us who work in the university, regardless of our role, our work expands to fill time because so many of us really love what we do. And it's easy when you love what you do to convince yourself you don't need rest, you don't need breaks. You got this.

(You do got this, by the way. I don't know if you noticed the name of the podcast.)

But for those of you who are moving into teaching fully online, it's worth remembering that online teaching does often take more time. Communicating with students is often a more laborious process. And the courses themselves can be overstuffed. If you've come to Summer Camp this summer, you won't be surprised by a study recently of nursing courses that found that when we transition a class from face-to-face to fully online, that fully online version can take six to twenty-four hours more per week for students to accomplish than the face-to-face iteration. Wow, right? That's bad for students. For obvious reasons. But it's also bad for you as the instructor. That's a tremendous additional load you're taking on: more marking, more communicating, more engaging. It's not easy. But it's also not easy to resist the pull to add more. We worry that our students aren't getting the content, and they're not with us, and we can't see them engaging. We're not sure they understand. The temptation to pile more content on top just to make sure we've covered our bases is there all the time. I'm going to share in the show notes for today some tools, a workload calculator that you can take a look at to see if maybe in these last few hours before classes start, there may be something you can strip back, something you can pull away for the benefit of students so they can focus on what really matters. And also for the benefit of you.

We don't talk about that part enough in teaching and learning circles. But your workload matters. And not from a nuts and bolts perspective. But because especially now, you need to be in a place where you can extend grace to your students. You're going to be asked for

extensions. You're going to have students who are sick and who need help and who need you to understand. And you have to be in a place where that's possible. And I really think that sometimes the rigidity of the academy, the difficulty we have in extending grace, the temptation that our profession has to mock students who ask for extensions on Twitter, to push against the idea of accommodating this moment. I think that often comes from an inability to extend grace to ourselves.

We're hard on ourselves, hey? I know I am. I didn't write as much as I wanted to this summer. And even with all the programming we put on, there's a million ideas on the shelf that we didn't get to do. And I feel that. I feel that acutely. It's hard for me to rest when I recognize that there's so much else to be doing. But I'm also learning as I get older -- and wiser, I hope -- that that rest is critical to my ability to serve. And being of service is really important to me. So I want you to think, as you prepare in these last few hours before everything goes live. How can you build in space for rest and rejuvenation for yourself? And what does that look like? It's different for everyone. You know. I've recently come to realize that planning out my week isn't just about being a little bit of a control freak -- guilty as charged -- but much, much more importantly, it's an act of self-care for me to see my whole week at a glance, to have a plan and to be ready to enact it. In the weeks that I don't do that because I don't think I have the time to take for myself to do that are weeks where I get less done and I feel frazzled.

And I don't even really like that language about rest. That makes it so transactional. You don't need to rest because you owe something to someone else. You need to rest because you need rest. You've worked hard this summer. So many of you have worked so hard. And we've just gotten word that winter semester is going to be online too. You're going to be working hard for awhile.

So what are some strategies for establishing space for rest? One thing that I find instructors who are new to the fully online space feel is quite overwhelmed by the component of communicating with students. The 24/7 nature of asynchronous learning can make it feel like you need to be available 24/7. I don't think that's true. Sometimes your students will inundate you with emails. But I find in my experience that that happens less because students really expect you to answer that email at 4:00 AM and more because they're not sure when to expect you to answer that email. So setting up a really clear communication policy with students -- this is when I answer my emails, this is when you can expect a response, and this is when you can't -- can be really helpful in establishing some boundaries so that you don't feel like you need to be checking Moodle at three in the morning... Not that I know what that's like at all. I think you should be conservative when you lay out that policy. It's better to overshoot the mark than to have students expecting a response within 24 hours and you not making it. And I think that you should post it really clearly in your course so that students know when to expect that you'll be available. The same is true for responses to forum posts, for example. Or if you're planning to post a weekly blog. Giving students a heads-up about when that material is going to come. On the one hand, it's part of building community, being predictable and reliable and present. On the other hand, it's about protecting space and time for yourself. And making clear when you

are on the clock also makes it clear when you're off the clock. So if you haven't done that yet, I really encourage you to take the time to do so.

The other thing you might want to think about is whether or not you have any course policies or practices in your classroom that are actually creating work for you without a lot of benefit. For me, an example of this was having a really strict attendance policy, which I sort of inherited when I started teaching without really thinking about why I wanted to have an attendance policy in my classroom. And one day, a few years into teaching, I was collating attendance and realizing how much I hate collating attendance. I hate it so, so much. I'm even bad at taking attendance at workshops. I don't know if you've noticed. And so I stopped because I couldn't really figure out why I was doing it in the first place. I couldn't have articulated to you what I gained from it. And so I got rid of it and it took a burden off me. Think about things like the late penalties that you set in class or the number of assignments, your expectations of yourself for feedback. Think about where you're investing that energy; it's much better to give students feedback early in the term and save that marathon session you normally do on the final paper because no one's reading those comments anyway, let's be real. Of course, there are tools in the learning management system that can help you with this. Those of you who like rubrics may like to check out that functionality in the learning management system and I'll link some resources for that in the show notes.

I come back to this idea that we can only extend grace to others when we extend grace to ourselves. And sometimes I feel quite trapped in a profession that doesn't extend grace readily. If there's one thing, I hope the academy as a whole learns from this pandemic, it's grace. And let's try to start with ourselves.

Okay. This week's conversation is with Jamie Drozda, my friend and colleague at Learning Technology and Innovation. A year ago, I arrived at TRU having never logged into Moodle before. And Jamie turned me into a Moodle guru. Well, I hope. I'm not of her caliber, but I sort of know my way around a Moodle shell. Here's our chat.

[Brenna] Okay, so today I am chatting with Jamie Drozda. Jamie, would you introduce yourself, your title, and how people like most likely interact with you on campus.

[Jamie] Well, my name is Jamie Drozda, and I'm a Learning Technologist at TRU for Open Learning. But I work primarily with face-to-face campus faculty. Generally, right now, either online through Big Blue Button or over the phone or email support is how people get in touch with me.

[Brenna] Yes, so. If they've sent a message to moodlesupport@tru.ca in like the last five years? You would have answered pretty much?

[Jamie] I would have answered yes.

[Brenna] Yeah. And Jamie taught me basically everything I understand about Moodle, so I'm very grateful, slash, deeply resentful of Jamie for that reason. So Jamie, the theme of this week's episode, because it's going to launch on or release on Labour Day is rest and workload. And I wanted to ask you, because you're probably one of the busiest people on campus just in terms of the amount of workload you carry, and you've seen a lot of Moodle shells over the years. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how people maybe overthink or overdo their shells or create more work for themselves that they don't have to. Like, are there things that you see people do that you think may be a waste of energy or something they could, they could cut back on and still have a really great course?

[Jamie] Based on my experience and what I've seen, the way people cause themselves the most work is by under-utilizing what Moodle has to offer, if that makes sense?

[Brenna] It does, yeah. Can you say that a bit more?

[Jamie] Yes. I think a lot of people still manage part of their course through their email, through Outlook. So, accepting assignment submissions, communicating with students via email, and that generates a lot of noise. So just thinking, what the last person I spoke to, it was a class of 28 students that she has currently enrolled right now. And she's planning on accepting all of the assignments via email. And there was four assignments in the course overall. Well, that right there is 120 emails that she has to break into her Outlook and then download the submissions, mark them up and another 120 replies. Whereas when I talk to her through using the assignment drop box four times and how you could download all those submissions in one shot and then read them. They get saved to the folder by student's name and then upload them to Moodle. And never once having to touch Outlook. So just one example of how you could lower some of your course administrative time by using some of the tools in Moodle.

[Brenna] That's a really good example because I think it's one that comes from a place of maybe anxiety about learning the tool right? Like it on the surface, if you're comfortable with your Outlook and not at all comfortable in Moodle, it might feel like this is easier, right? Like, I know how to get an email, I know how to save a file. But yeah, in the case you're describing that person has to keep track of all those emails. They may come in, you know, two weeks early. What happens to that essay? Does it get lost? They're all going to be named something different. So finding them again on your computer once you have saved them can be tricky. And you're just doing it all by hand. So you might set it up that way thinking like, I'm saving myself heartache, I don't want to have to learn how to use this tool or I'm quite intimidated by learning the tool. But when someone walks you through the tool, you can see – because I'm guessing this instructor realized as soon as you described the mechanism by which the assignment tool works, it was a much better option for what they wanted to do.

[Jamie] Right. And, you know, previously, all assignments were printed and handed in hard copy. And then you can write on them, you can mark them up, you can read them, you can physically touch them. Outlook was never involved before. So there really was no knowledge of the assignment drop box in the first place. No, really, realistically they were thinking, well, this

is how I'm going to have to do it. Coming to talk to us about how you facilitated your face-to-face course – we can really, you included, myself and you can really walk people through some of the tools that Moodle has to offer in place of the face-to-face classroom that can minimize some of your workload.

[Brenna] And one thing I really respect about the way you approach those questions from faculty is you're very honest about what you think Moodle does well and what you think it doesn't do well, right? Like I've often heard you steer faculty away from tools that maybe aren't ideal for what that faculty member is trying to accomplish or just are kind of a pain. But I think – like, there's a great, there's this conceptually great thing in learning management system called the workshop tool that lets you set up peer reviews for students. And it sounds really good on paper. And even when you read the documentation, it's like, yeah, I'm into this, it's, it's peer, it's collaborative. It's, it's super engaging. And I don't think, I mean, maybe you have Jamie, but I've never dealt with one that wasn't a complete nightmare from the backend.

[Jamie] It's a hard tool to set up, and it's also a hard tool to – it works in phases so you have to keep moving it to the next phase. And there's always a little bit of setup on the next phase, even though you think you've done the whole set up up front – when you move it along, there's a little bit more. So I have seen people use it successfully, but it's onerous and time-consuming. So for those reasons, I don't recommend that if you're really not wanting to [phone rings] I thought I had that muted. I guess I can't.

[Brenna] This this how busy Jamie is all the time!

[Jamie] Okay. Anyways, the workshop tool, yes. It's very onerous and time-consuming. It's a lot of work up front and a lot of work the whole way through. And the, the faculty who I know that have had successful runs with it, we've been in constant contact the whole way through the assignment and we've worked through the issues together. Because I'm not going to say that I could exactly guide them on the issues because there are so many that we literally work through them together.

[Brenna] And I really like that approach that you take with helping folks set up their courses where you really like, you can use this tool. But here are the problems we've had with it. Here's the kind of maintenance, and always, Jamie, you give them another option. Like maybe you could do this peer review exercise actually as a forum exercise instead. And here's how we would set that up. And I've learned a lot from you and your approach that way because I think, I think my tendency would be to like, bulldoze through and try to like, hamfistedly, make it work. And you know, that's great sometimes, but it's also a big waste of everybody's time a lot of the times and time is what we don't have enough I've right now

[Jamie] And it sure can be a waste of time using some of these tools. One thing and you've heard me say it so many times is that Moodle is built for kindergarten straight through to higher ed. So there's some of these tools that they look great. They seem great there, they're

well marketed on the Moodle documentation site, but they're really not meant in a higher ed situation. They're really – they're gonna cause you grief and work.

[Brenna] Speaking of work, Jamie. It's – we're recording this a week out, but this episode is going to come out as I say on Labour Day. And I think that you and I are spending a lot of time – in the back of our minds anyway – being a little bit anxious or nervous about the workload that's coming. Not just for ourselves but for campus as a whole. Just like everyone. There's this onslaught. We're in the middle of it right now and we don't really know when it's going to let up. I wonder, if you were gonna tell somebody what the best workflow is for them to get help with an issue that they're struggling with in Moodle – If you could give someone the ideal process to follow to get their problem resolved, as quickly as possible under the circumstances, where would you send them first?

[Jamie] It would it depends on the problem. It always depends.

[Brenna] Yeah. That's fair.

[Jamie] If it's -- if you're wanting to help with the learning management system, I would definitely start with moodlesupport@tru.ca. And I always like to recommend that if this is kind of a crisis mode situation, give us a telephone number we can reach you at and the best time of day to call because in September that's our busiest month of the year every year without a pandemic. So this month, this September, I'm assuming, is going to be two or three times as busy as usual. But if you give us a phone number and the time of day we can call, usually we can resolve issues or get you set up if you're brand new to Moodle really quickly, I think you'd be quite surprised, if we can do it over the phone. There's things we just can't relay, little nuances, over e-mail and text. And so that would be my first, my first recommendation. If you are wanting to discuss something outside of the learning management system, but it still learning technologies, send an email to learningtech@tru.ca and it's still us, but it gives us a way to filter and maybe assign the ticket to the best person on the team. And then if you're looking for help with TRUEmployee or Banner or class lists or anything like that, Outlook issues: contact the IT Service Desk. They're wonderful.

[Brenna] And it's not that we don't want to help you. We don't have permissions on any of those systems.

[Jamie] Administrator permissions, nor do we have the expertise. So I will definitely – and even do the same thing. IT Services is great. Send them an email and say, can you please call me at, I need help with this, this and this? And they'll assign it to their right people. And someone, people, we are happy to give you a call back.

[Brenna] Mmm, yeah, we absolutely are. And I think you've pointed out two useful things there for folks, one is try to be as specific as possible in articulating your problem. We do have to triage the tickets as they come through. And if you just write, I need help. Even if you do give us your phone number, A, it's hard to know who the best person is to send in your direction. And

B, we'd like to prep our answer before we call you. We'd like to sort of know what we're coming into, so try to be as specific as possible, it's helpful. And also, you notice Jamie gave the Moodle Support and the Learning Tech email addresses and I'll include those in the show notes. So people have them there as well. You might think it's faster to contact someone directly. Like I know we all really like to speak to like a real person and contacting someone directly seems like it'll be faster. But I think Jamie and I are in the same boat where we often don't get to our own email inboxes until fairly late in the day because we do the tickets first. We prioritize the tickets first, right?

[Jamie] Yeah, the Learning Tech and the Moodle Support tickets are our first – my first priority. And then I go to my inbox. So it could be a day or two before you get a reply from the inbox. And then even at that it could be longer because if it's, you know, if you're emailing something for video help or whatever, I'm going to send your email to Learning Tech. And then I'm going to update the ticket and send that off to a person who's better suited to help you. So it would take longer, and in some cases, significantly longer.

[Brenna] Yeah. So using what you might think of as being like the generic email address, it isn't really, you've got a whole team of people answering those tickets instead of just, just the one person you're addressing the email to. So it is faster.

[Jamie] And it is largely you and I so you are reaching the same people you want.

[Brenna] Yeah. We're hoping that we will have some support through the fall and they'll be able to access those tickets, but not our inboxes. So it makes a lot of sense to use the general address. Jamie, if you could give someone who's brand new to teaching in Moodle a tip just in terms of how they interact with the tool or how they negotiate with it. What would you – like if you only tell them one thing and then they had to go and teach their class. What do you think you'd tell them?

[Jamie] That's a really hard question.

[Brenna] It's hard-hitting interview, Jamie.

[Jamie] That's a really, really hard question. I would tell them two things. I would teach them how to get that Moodle course shell into edit mode. And I would also walk them through how to make an announcement. Because announcements are one-way communication between yourself and your students. They can't reply and they can't reply in Moodle to the announcement. But you can get content out to them very quickly or, you know, it's something you need to know. I used to use the example – prior to March. If you were sick and couldn't make class, that's a way you could tell your students that class was cancelled really quickly. Now, it might be, I'm going to have office hours from ten until 12 today. Join me if you can. It could be an impromptu set of office hours you want to relay to them.

[Brenna] So totally. Or maybe you've had a bunch of requests for extensions and you're pushing the essay back a week. The announcements are great way to let everybody know that that change is happening.

[Jamie] Yeah.

[Brenna]] And turning editing on because that is the number one thing that I still screw up. When I'm swearing at Moodle, it's usually because I forgot to turn editing on – even after a year, Jamie!

[Jamie] It gets everyone, but the nice thing is, is it's going to become very obvious and anyone who's been using Moodle for any length of time will be so excited to know that the turn editing on button is coming back. I can't say when. It was going to be this weekend but it's not this weekend. Maybe next weekend. We don't know for sure but at some point, the turn editing on button's coming back. So it's going to be wonderful. I'm excited about that.

[Brenna] I am too, I'm also excited about that new arrow that's going to return you to the top of the screen. I'm very excited about that too. This is the kind of thing that we get jazzed about over in Learning Tech.

[Jamie] Yeah. I think the upgrades are going to be subtle. And what you do notice that you'll be excited about, you'll go, why didn't they think of this sooner? And it will be more intuitive for everyone. I think.

[Brenna] I think so too. I'm actually really excited because I think it's not going to be so many changes that folks are going to feel overwhelmed. It's just going to be some nice quality of life issues. That's my hope. Yeah. Ok. Jamie, I guess last thing sort of an open question to end with, is there anything you would like for faculty and staff and community at TRU – assuming every single person listens to this very good podcast that we make – is there anything you'd want the community to know that you think they don't know right now about the work we do or about supporting learning online?

[Jamie] There's a lot. You know, that again, it's really hard to narrow down to one thing. I think, really just getting the word out that we're here and we're here to answer really any question you can think of whether it's just on how to use a specific type of technology or, or questions about what technology's available. Questions about best practices. We're here for you, basically. Don't hesitate to reach out because I quite frankly really enjoy what I do and I know you do as well. So we get really excited, especially about the different questions. Yeah, the ones that are a little bit less technical. It's very exciting to shift gears and jump in and help and share expertise and knowledge.

[Brenna] I totally agree with that. And it some yeah, it is it is our job is over here for and it is fun. Most days. Infinite gradebook questions are sometimes my hard days because as you know, Jamie, I can't do math.

[Jamie] You can, you just don't enjoy it as much as I do, but you can.

[Brenna] Jamie gets all the gradebook questions, she's good at math. Thanks so much for taking the time to chat, Jamie.

[Jamie] Yeah, you're welcome.

So that is it for episode two of You Got This! on this beautiful Labour Day. I hope you're resting. Maybe you're not even listening to this on Labour Day. Maybe it's two weeks after. That is the nature of podcasting and asynchronous learning, which as you know, I'm a fan of. You can find show notes and transcripts of every episode of You Got This! at youtgotthis.trubox.ca. Feel free to send email, feedback, ideas, thoughts about guests to bgray@tru.ca, or you can find me on Twitter [@brennacgray](https://twitter.com/brennacgray). And in both cases that's Gray with an A.

Speaking of people writing in, I just wanted to thank Marie for her helpful comment on the interstitial music being a little loud. We've dampened that down this week, Marie. Let me know if it helps.

I'm going to leave you today with Tiny Teaching Tip: Generosity. Is there a space in your course where you could introduce some generosity where there hasn't been generosity before? Can you extend a deadline, drop an assignment, relieve some grades, relieve some pressure? Can you think about a way to extend generosity to yourself as well as to your students? Can you find a way to do that before classes start?

That's my little challenge for you this week. And until next time. I'll see you next week. Thanks so much for listening. Buh-bye.