Hello 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 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 a little bit different than usual. For the next two episodes before we take a couple of weeks off for the holidays, I've actually very much not wanting to bother people with interviews. And also I wanted to produce much shorter episodes right now because I know how swamped you are as you Mark and manage exams and plan for January. So this week we're going to dig in a little bit to the student survey of virtual delivery. And next week we're going to foreground the January. Well, the whole winter term programming, actually. So a little bit different this week and next, and then a little bit of time off and we'll jump back into our feature interviews. Soon January is going to be here, like before you even know it. So this week we're taking a deep dive into the student experience of virtual delivery survey. So, well, let's get into it.

My job is kinda to help guide you and hopefully give you good advice about how you engage with your students in the fully online environment. And I can't do that without data so much. Like we did back in the spring. We put together a student experience of virtual delivery survey and we've had phenomenal results in terms of just having students respond. Huge, thanks to the good folks in student life for helping me get the word out and also to the student union. So we have 570 responses, which I am delighted with -- just absolutely delighted with -- and of those responses about 450 or so are returning students. And the remaining a hundred and some odd are first-year students. So it's a really good sampling of campus. I think just judging by sheer numbers, percentage of student body. I'm really pleased with it overall.

I don't think the results are wildly surprising and over the course of the next two weeks, I'm going to put this in more kind of formal terms and send it out to the various stakeholder groups. But for now I just wanted to take this opportunity because I know so many of you are planning for winter right now. I think there's some useful information in what the students disclosed in the survey. And I wanted to take the opportunity to talk about it with you by all means if you've got questions or if it would be helpful for me to come and chat with anyone on campus about this data, I'm really more than happy to. I really just want to make sure it helps us guide good decisions and get pedagogy.

So the first question that we asked was if you're a returning student would you describe the workload in your courses as more than previous semesters, about the same as previous semesters or less than previous semesters and 64% of students reported the workload in their courses this semester, as more than they have experienced in previous semesters at TRU about 30% said that it's around the same and about 5% said that it's lower this tracks with what I'm hearing anecdotally from students when I talkedtalk to them, which is that they're feeling really, really overwhelmed. This idea that sort of 64% of students are experiencing more workload, might be surprising to instructors who feel like they have scaled back. But I think there's a few things going on here. First of all, we know that flipped delivery and many asynchronous modes of delivery, which many of you are using right now, are actually more work for students, right? It's really easy to sit and passively, listen to a lecture. That's just about the easiest thing you can do. If you can get your butt into the chair, you're good to go, right? So if most of your classes use that modality before, and now you're finding yourself in classes where it's a lot of managing your content, delivery yourself, whether it's doing readings or small group projects or discussion forums, that's going to take time, way more time than you might have previously expected.

So I think it's worth thinking about what we're asking students to do versus what their expectations of a classroom would have been before. And most importantly, I think it's really critical that we spend some time thinking about whether or not the volume of work we're asking students to do is roughly equivalent to our typical lecturing time as in the schedule or not. Back in the spring, I shared some resources around sort of how to estimate what the time load is in your courses. I'm going to share those resources here again, as you're planning for winter term. So if you take a look in the show notes, you'll find a link to like a course load calculator. It gives you a way to estimate, you know, between your readings and your discussion forums and your assignments, what exactly you're expecting of students. I think the other thing that's going on is that everything feels harder now.

Particularly as we roll into December, I don't know about you guys, but if I look at my email inbox, which I usually try not to do while I'm recording, because it's always horrifying. So I have 73 unanswered email messages in my inbox that is not atypical. I find that the basic functions of my day take me a lot longer and I struggle to get through them. Our brains are under a lot of stress, the latent anxiety in the air -- it's intense. And so I think some of that is explaining why our students are feeling under siege. So on the one hand, I think in many cases we are actually asking them to do more than we used to, even if we don't realize it just by virtue of the fact that a lecture is passive and most asynchronous learning is active. That's a good thing.

It's why these kinds of modalities tend to have better outcomes for students in terms of like learning objectives. We know that lectures are a really crappy delivery method. But that doesn't change the affective experience of students who are encountering it for the first time. Yeah. And then the other thing is I just think everything is hard. Like literally everything is hard and we need to take that into account as we structure our courses and plan for winter. So given that 65% of our students are feeling this way, it really encourage you if you haven't yet scaled back your courses. Or if you think you have maybe take a look again and see if there's more scaling back to be done. We want our students to have humane learning experiences in the winter term. And I'm not sure their experiences are super humane right now.

For example, if I look ahead to the second question I asked, which was to rate a series of statements on a scale. And they were things like I have been well supported in my learning. I know where to go to access technical support. I knew where to go to access, learning resources and support. And, you know, for the most part, students were answering on a, on a scale that goes to basically to five students were answering three or more on most of those items. Where I saw students really, well, where are the, where the rating takes a real dive? You see two areas. One is with the question I have been able to make or maintain social connections this semester: over half of students agree, disagree, strongly disagree with that statement. And the other one that students are struggling with is I am managing my current workload successfully; in this case, just over 40% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

So when I talk about a humane learning experience, you know, our students are struggling to make connections, which as we know from that model of learning, I keep cramming down your throat. The social experience of learning is a third of the experience of learning and our students don't have access to it right now. So that's an important piece, but also I think the fact that students are struggling, not just with the volume of work, but with their ability to manage it is something that we need to be keeping an eye on. It's not a good sign. If more than half of the student population feels isolated and nearly half feel like they can't manage the work they're being asked to do, it's hard to imagine how you establish a metric of success in any capacity when those are the numbers that we're looking at.

I will say, I don't think it's all doom and gloom. Students do seem to report having a perfectly decent time of finding the resources that they need, accessing the learning supports and the technological

supports and the financial supports and the emotional supports that they need. They rate pretty decently on all of those factors. So I don't think it's like the campus community experience has collapsed, but I do think our students are underwater and I think their access to the kinds of social supports that might typically help them in those situations is really limited.

We also then asked to what extent did the following negatively impact your transition to learning online? So I wanted to get a sense of what the barriers were for students for the most part. I was, I was actually pretty satisfied with a lot of the responses here or at least unsurprised. So we asked students if they could access technology for the most part, students were okay with that. We asked them if they were doing okay with the platforms with Moodle, with Big Blue Button, you know, predictably folks had some complaints about Big Blue Button, although not nearly as severely as I thought. The vast majority of students, the vast majority of students said that Big Blue Button had either no negative impact or only a minor negative impact. So considering the crash at the beginning of term, I'll take that. And students seem to be quite pleased with Moodle. So no negative impact on my learning, 55% only minor negative impact, 33%. So that makes me happy too. They were also able to rate major or severe negative impact and where we see those numbers are on things like issues communicating with instructors and issues understanding course, or program expectations. Those -- really students are struggling in those two areas in particular. So I think we need to really think about how accessible we are for students, but more importantly, communicating clear expectations around our accessibility. So I've said this before. I really think that students, as long as they know, when they can expect a response from you, they're not going to inundate you. It's when they don't know how they're going to hear back from you, that they start mail bombing you you know, every hour looking for a response folded into their though are definitely timezone issues. We've got a lot of students reporting frustration with their time zone issues, not being taken into account by their instructors, particularly in courses with a lot of live synchronous content. I'm going to link an article in the show notes today that Sarah Goldrick-Rab and Jesse Stommel wrote some time ago now called teaching the students we have, and it's about meeting student barriers, even those that frustrate us where they are rather than trying to pretend they don't exist. I know that managing time zone issues is like not ideal at all. In fact, probably a giant frustration. I have no doubt. I also know that our institution made the decision to allow students to register, right? And that as their instructors, we have a responsibility to meet them where they're at. And this is where offering asynchronous learning opportunities for students can be really useful. Not requiring everybody to be synchronously present means that the student who's in a 12 hour time zone difference, isn't negatively impacted by the simple fact of where they live. So it's something to keep in mind in there.

We also see a fair number of complaints. There's sort of an other section to here where I get some long form comments from the students, see a lot of complaints about lack of structure or lack of certainty or clarity around expectations. So what we see or in the survey where we asked students to share, like, the one thing that an instructor did that really helped your learning this semester, what I see over and over and over and over again in that section is the instructor gave us a weekly schedule or a weekly checklist or a weekly check-in where we knew exactly what we had to do each week. And I'm also seeing a huge amount of praise for classes that have a predictable weekly structure. So students know exactly what's going to happen every week. There's no guesswork assignments are always due at the same time. Office hours were always held at the same time. Everything is really predictable for students. The other thing that comes up in the long form comments here is a certain amount of frustration around either course expectations taking longer than the scheduled amount of time.

So whether it's synchronous or asynchronous you know, more than say three hours, of course, content every week, students are struggling to keep up with. And some frustration when things are due in general, I think it would be wise to make sure that all of your assignments are due during class time. I mean, I really encourage you to offer a larger window if that's something that's reasonable in your

subject matter. But like, I think that do or die time really does need to be in class time. Particularly if you're doing something like a quiz where students are going to have to find time to sit down and write it. If you were administering a quiz during face-to-face, you would do that in class, right? That wouldn't be extra to the lesson delivery time. That would be part of it. I think we need to keep that in mind because our students are clearly really struggling with timelines, schedules and expectation. But the good news is they're asking for something really explicit that we can all do, which is make our schedules really, really clear, have a predictably structured week and use tools like activity completion in Moodle, or even just a weekly check-in where you say, Hey, don't forget, what's due this week, to keep students on track. They are reporting being greatly appreciative of that.

So that takes me to the final three questions of the survey, which were long form. And I'm not going to try to capture everything that students say in these sections, in this podcast. We asked students what's one strategy and instructor is using to really support your learning this semester. And that section, we get a lot of that celebration of scheduling and students are really grateful for it. Office hours come up a lot as being super, hugely important to students. And just responsiveness being able to contact instructors quickly. Something I found very funny, both here and in the final question, which is what are your suggestions for winter term delivery is it's pretty much equal parts. I want more synchronous live sessions with my instructor and I want more asynchronous content that I can do on my own time. It's like every time you see a student saying, I like a live lecture, you get a follow-up saying I'm in, it's impossible for me to attend a live lecture like them. The one that made me laugh the hardest was back to back comments. And the first one said, please force all students to have cameras on and be chatty during lectures because I miss my classmates and immediately the next, the next comment was, please ask people to stop talking during classes. I can't focus. So, you know, one can never please everyone.

But I think what we get from that is the importance of a blend of the synchronous and the asynchronous. I think, you know, we should be using our synchronous time with our students for discussion and engagement -- for talking to them. And we should focus on asynchronous in terms of sheer content delivery, the things that students need to know. And we think if we can get those two things in balance, we can serve both those student populations, you know, or maybe we can make nobody happy. That's also a possibility, I suppose. The comments here in, in both of these sections, and then the other long form question we asked was if you could communicate one thing to your instructors right now, what would it be? These are not surprising comments. Again, a real appreciation for accessible instructors for scheduling. One thing I'm seeing a lot are instructors who checked in with students are getting a great deal of gratitude in these comments, particularly instructors who showed some flexibility around assignments, who maybe scaled things back towards the end of term, who gave students maybe a week off to study in prep. Those kinds of things are all coming up as really necessary and helpful. So checking in with students is huge. Scaling back the workload is huge. Students are really feeling that pinch and, you know, I really think the the overarching message seems to be that students notice that we are trying really hard and they're grateful, but they also want us to know that they are struggling and you know, something we've come back to time and time again in these conversations is, are we checking in with our students? And what I'm hearing from our students here is that those check-ins are really, really valuable and that students need them in order to feel like they are in our reciprocal learning relationship with their instructors.

I mean, I'll leave it there. That's like 20 minutes of me walking through data with you, but there will be a written report that you'll have access to soon. I promise as soon as I finish parsing out all the data. I'm grateful that so many students took the time to give us this feedback. And even though I'm not surprised by most of it, I am grateful for the reinforcement that the kinds of strategies that we've been encouraging really do seem to be what students need and want. You know, for the most part, I think ultimately if there's one take-home from the survey, it's that what students want is structure, clarity and

contact. They want to know that they can reach you when they need you. They want to know what's expected of them. We can tweak and they want what's expected of them week to week to be consistent. And they want us to ask them to stop doing so much work.

So that is it for episode 13 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. Of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there.

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. You've heard a lot about how students are struggling and trust me, I know it's a lot. Parsing out these surveys is actually really difficult work for me. I struggle. I struggle to read over and over again about how our students are struggling, but I do it because I know that once you have the information, you will do the right thing. So what I'm asking you is to reflect on what we've talked about today. And of course there will be a much more detailed report, and I encourage you to read it when it comes out. And hopefully that will be soon so that you can enjoy it over your peppermint mocha during winter break. But based on what I've told you so far, I'd like you to think about one thing you want to change in your practice for winter term that you think will ameliorate some of the issues that students are talking about. So they're talking about overwork, they're talking about us, not having a realistic sense of how long the tasks we're asking them to take, take to complete. They're talking about having difficulty reaching us when they need us. They're talking about a lack of structure, and they're talking about struggling with the expectations being so different in every class and not always clearly explicit. What's something, one thing that you can do as you plan winter term to alleviate one of these stresses, it could be something as small as being more explicit about your communication policy with students. It could be as large as dropping that second term paper, whatever it is I'd love to hear about it. And if you're struggling to think of something, I'd love to talk it through with you, and you always know where to find me, I am ubiquitous getting touch when you have a chance. And in the meantime, keep thinking about how we can help students manage this difficult time. And remember that a lot of the things that students are asking for would really help us manage this difficult time, too. It would be good for all of us to lighten up on our expectations and to be really understanding of the fact that we are in a pandemic. Have we mentioned that lately, looking forward to never having to say that word again, as long as I live.

Take care of yourselves, take care of each other, and take a big deep breath, if you haven't taken one today, I'm not taking very many of those. And I think it's showing. Until next time. We'll talk soon. Bye-Bye.