

Brenna Clarke Gray:

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 -- Happy New Year! Is it, is it even a new year? Does 2021 not feel distressingly like 2020? It's a strange world out there. I want to talk today a little bit about new year's resolutions for teaching and a little bit about how to make this semester sing, or at least survive it. No, no Brenna it's the new year -- be super optimistic. I'm working on it. It's just me today. So let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No interview today. As I sort of ease back into my own working schedule, now that the new year is here. And it's a shorter episode. I just wanted to take the opportunity to welcome you to Winter 2021. It's hit me like a ton of bricks. I don't know about you. I worked a shortened week last week and still, I couldn't believe the volume of, you know, tickets concerns, issues, help requests. And if I'm getting inundated that means you guys are working crazy hard. So I'm sure that it's the same for all of you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I am by nature. Someone who loves Januaries. I love Januaries and I love Septembers. I love fresh starts. I love the opportunity to bust open a brand new crisp, beautiful planner. I love the opportunity to map out a new calendar. Lucy Maud Montgomery wrote in Anne of Green Gables that the joy of a new day is that there's no mistakes in it yet. And I feel that way every September and every January. Usually. I'm not a big believer in the whole new year, new you kind of thing. I think it's probably pretty unhealthy, but I do like the idea of plotting out plans for myself and changes that I want to make. And there's something about January that feels like anything might be possible. Usually. I don't feel that way this year. Am I, am I cuckoo? Or is this not a year that feels full of promise and opportunity? I haven't done any new year's resolutions really this year. I want to try to continue my ongoing project that you've all been subjected to, of resting more, taking better care of myself. My only real resolution is I really want to get back into Coronation Street, like show rocks, really enjoying it. So I'm going to try to find the time to watch it again. Really commit to a soap, happy new year that's me.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

But I do. I think that resolutions can be useful for our teaching and learning practice. And so as much as I'm not feeling the personal resolutions this year, I am trying really hard to think about what I want out of this term on a professional level. The fall was so hard and I don't want to feel the kind of burnout at the end of this semester that I felt last semester. So I'm trying to put some things in place and trying to organize my thinking and writing time so that I have some things on the docket that feel a little bit more restorative as well. That's what New Years looks like for me in terms of resolutions. But I thought I might offer you some warm and friendly suggestions about teaching resolutions that you might want to make in this very strange upcoming term.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

A lot of these are going to be things we've talked about before, but I'm wondering if at the start of a brand new, fresh semester, you might think about ways to incorporate them from the start maybe

instead of waiting until you're really too far gone, which I think happened to a lot of us last semester. I think we had really great intentions and then the workload hit us like a ton of bricks. So my five new year's resolutions as an offering for those of you teaching this semester, here's what I got. Okay.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So resolution number one. Can you build in rest? Now this could take a lot of different forms and it's going to depend on your class and its structure and rhythm. What works for you? Some suggestions, could you take a break from content the week before a paper is due? So students can really focus. Can you, you know, give yourself the opportunity to declare bankruptcy one week and not have any new assignments come in or have any new assignments that are coming in just marked for good faith completion. It'll give you a chance to catch up on your marking and your students, a chance to breathe a little easier. This one's important. Think can we make sure that reading break really is a reading break for everyone? I'm thinking about it in particular for our students, because when I put together the survey last semester and I'll link to the full copy of the report in the show notes. So you can read it if you haven't had a chance. One thing that really upset me was a lot of students reported being asked to submit work on Remembrance Day and on Thanksgiving. So the university's closed those days. It's not appropriate even in the virtual space to expect students to treat those like normal working days. And I read through the commentary a lot of feedback from students that they're really anxious, that they're not really going to get a reading break. So I wonder if you look at your course calendar, you know, if everybody's got their essays due on, even the Monday we get back from reading week, had our students really had a break. Is there a way you can rejig your schedule to make sure that your students really can just turn off from your class for reading break? I know it's reading break, but we also know how burnt out our students were at the end of last semester. And if we could treat it as a resting break, I wonder if we might not have more overall success from our students in the long run. So new year's resolution, number one, build in rest. If you can. I know that's not new. I talk about it a lot and I'm probably going to talk about it again because it's important.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

My new year's teaching resolution number two for you might sound not very Brenna-like. I want to invite you to leave Fall 2020 in the past now. I encouraged you at the end of last semester to spend some time doing some reflection. And I had some great email exchanges with many of you just before the break, where you were really honest about the struggles that you had had in the fall semester and wondering what you were going to do differently in the winter semester and making some plans for it. I think now's the time, rather than letting reflection kind of turn into rumination. It's time to let everything that happened last semester, go -- not the lessons, know what you learned and know what you've prepped for the winter term that might speak to what you did in the fall, but any sense that, you know, you made a ton of mistakes or the course didn't unfold like you wanted it to, or you feel like students didn't get what they needed. It's time to just take a breath and let that go. The new semester is a new semester. The new students you have are new students. Let that experience be fresh for everyone.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

In your teaching and learning this semester, I'm going to offer as resolution number three, a way to rethink your priorities. Something that I read a lot in the feedback from students in the survey is that they are struggling to understand assignments and they don't feel like they have the same kind of face-to-face engagement with you to ask questions. They're also struggling with the organization of their courses and what to do when. I'm going to invite you as a third new year's resolution to consider

prioritizing clarity and organization over everything else. By that I mean, things like, if you're thinking about adding another component to the course, is there a way to do it that makes sense organically with the structure you've already laid out? If not, and if you can't think of a way to make that work, maybe you got to let that go. I know it's hard to do. And I know we struggle with making sure that students are getting the content that they need and learning the transferable skills that they need. But what I saw over and over again in the survey was a real sense of struggle around clarity and organization. So if we could all make that a priority this semester over and above everything else and kind of let the clarity of your assignments and the organization of your course guide the choices that you make going forward. I think everyone will be better off.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

My fourth teaching resolution, I, I hesitate on because what I want to tell you is to centre your presence in the course this semester. I don't mean that I want you to answer email until three in the morning every morning when I say that, but I do know that our students are struggling a bit with the social contact and the connection with their instructors. The feedback from the survey is pretty clear on this topic. So if we can think about ways in which we can connect with students and make that sort of a priority for your time. Like if it's between lengthy commentary or getting the paper back on time, go with getting the paper back on time. If it's between filming another lengthy video lecture and doing a couple of quick hit weekly check-ins go with the weekly check-ins our students are looking for your presence. They're looking to connect with you. And there's a lot of ways to do that, right. Office hours are great. Email is great. Forums are great. Weekly video blogs are great, but we got to pick something and really stick with it. It's that consistency. I think that's critical as we move forward this semester.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And then finally my very last teaching resolution for you in this January of 2021, trust yourself, you guys have worked so hard, it's inspiring and shocking. Actually some days how much you've put into building your courses and providing learning experiences for your students, trust yourself that you've done enough and that your instincts are good. And that you now have the experience to support building a positive learning environment for your students. If you can just trust yourself that the core pieces are there, then some of this other stuff, clarity, organization presence. They're going to be a lot easier if you're not second guessing yourself all the time. I have conversations with you folks daily. It's kind of my job. And I'm always struck by how much you already know. You already know how to establish a caring relationship with your students. You already know instinctively what they need from you. You know where their sticky points in your course material are, and you know how to get over them. I've said this before. I will probably say it many, many more times, but the medium has changed. The mode with which we interact with our students has changed. The technology has changed, but those core components, the things that make you a great teacher, they haven't changed. They're still there. Trust yourself. Your students do.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So. Those are my five resolutions. And of course watch more Coronation Street. Like really, I think we should all just pick a soap opera and commit to it because the Lord knows the real world has enough drama and maybe just committing to some good old fashioned TV soaps. Well, maybe that's what we all need. The world needs now is more Coronation Street. I kid, mostly. Overall it's a new year. And in this new year, I wish for you rest, fulfilling and exciting conversations, and how about just once a week, one fewer meeting that could have been an email just once a week, please. I'd settle for once a month.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for episode 16 of You Got This! As always if you want to write to us you can email me. I'm bgray@tru.ca. I'm also on Twitter [@brennacgray](https://twitter.com/brennacgray). And in both cases that's Gray with an A. All of our show notes and transcripts are posted at yougottthis.trubox.ca. Of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a tiny teaching tip, and it's a little bit more technological. You know, usually the teaching tips are real, real pedagogical, but today I'm just going to say like, you know, we got a whole new Moodle. Hey, Moodle, 3.9. Welcome. have you checked it out? We've got a new asynchronous resource. You can check it out from the support for virtual delivery show or I'm going to link to it in the show notes. It just walks you through the new features of Moodle 3.9. I'd recommend checking it out. There might be something there that will be a time-saver for you or help you achieve something you had wanted to achieve in classes before, but couldn't. Yeah, it's I think, worth your time and worth checking out. And actually, you know, while I'm here -- while I'm plugging things have you signed up for the digital detox? You can go to digitaldetox.trubox.ca. It's a series of essays that I write. I did one last January. This next one is starting on January 15th of this year. Last year. It was all about sort of looking at trends in education that worried me, like from a really hopeful perspective, like these are things that we can overcome when it comes to educational technologies. I'm a little bleaker this year, but the theme is called the post pandemic university. I want to have a conversation about what kinds of educational technological choices we've made during the pandemic that we're going to have to live with after. And I'm worried about some of them, in addition to the essays in your inbox, every Friday, there's going to be a series of discussions held on big blue button starting this Friday. So I hope you'll check it out.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And in the meantime, yeah, we'll talk soon. Back to interviews and stuff. The usual show stuff next week, but happy new year. Meet the new year. Feels a whole lot like the old year. I'll see you next week.