

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 this week, I'm thinking about the return to campus. I've decided I believe in it this week. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So we've all probably all heard rumblings around campus of the quote-unquote return to campus plan. I'm thinking about it a bunch this week, because well, I'm sort of deciding to be optimistic. Although I look at the vaccine rollout and my more cynical self wonders if fall is realistic, but these are not my decisions to make. I just roll with the punches. But I've noticed there's been a renewed interest in hybrid teaching and learning as part of a return to campus plan, not just at TRU -- all over the world. Campuses are looking at ways to allow students some face-to-face engagement. We know our students miss being on campus and we miss being on campus, but also to keep them safe, keep class sizes down, keep the population on campus to a minimum and all that good stuff. Hybrid seems like a great solution, right? Half the class time, typically in a hybrid course with the other half being online. I like hybrid teaching and learning. My very first online teaching experiences were in hybrid and blended learning and I've always had really positive experiences. I think that giving students focused time to do the kinds of preparatory work that we're asking of them when we do more asynchronous learning is really important and allowing students to still have face-to-face connection and time to collaborate and time to clarify. It's great. I like it a lot.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

A few weeks, oh, maybe months ago now, Carolyn Ives from CELT and I did a session for the folks over in SOBE about hybrid teaching. And one of the things that it really brought home to me is the fact that much like a fully online pivot, there's a fair amount of prep required. And I think a lot about, you know, how we resource prep time who has appropriate access to it and what that will look like for the university community going forward. A properly structured hybrid course can be a win-win for everyone. Faculty get to focus their time with students, not on content delivery, but on engagement and working through sticky problems together and really deeply collaborating with students instead of a one-way lecture, students gain a certain amount of flexibility in their schedule. They get the benefits of asynchronous learning, which we know can have really deep learning outcomes when it's structured properly, without losing what it is they went to university for. Right. Which is a certain amount of real world engagement with peers and faculty.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

My worry sometimes though, when I hear how hybrid gets deployed in an operational sense in lots of contexts, is this idea of capturing lecture materials and making them available to students, both in class and out of class, which is great. I'm all about accessible learning opportunities. And I think that, you know, giving students options to make safety plans for themselves and making it easy to stay home, if for example, you don't feel a hundred percent well is probably a critically important component of move back to campus if we want to do it safely and healthfully. But that model doesn't really take into account the why of the teaching and learning and the structural choices that we might make. And it doesn't

really take into account the kind of learning that might be critical in order for faculty to be able to do that work well.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm raising this because I think more and more of us are going to be entering into conversations about hybrid teaching and learning. And I think a good way to start thinking about that conversation is to think about what you've liked about your fully online teaching experience so far. And you know, if it's been a rough time for you, as it has been for so many, you can start really small. Is there one assignment that students did better on when you moved to fully online than they used to do in face-to-face? Was there one discussion prompt that really seemed to take off and maybe you're not even sure why, you're just glad that it did. Was there a time when you needed the flexibility of online teaching to accommodate something in your schedule, and were grateful that the move had happened -- it can be really little, but I think it's useful right now as we sort of simultaneously balance what feels like a really tense and maybe in some ways, tenuous winter semester with a desire to look ahead, very few of us are going to be going fully back into the classroom 100% in the fall term. On my cynical days, I don't think any of us are going to be doing it, but even if there is a mass move back to campus, we're not going to be going a hundred percent. Right. And so I think it's important in two ways: first to not let oneself get so focused on the future that we lose track of the importance of what we're doing right now. You know, it's really easy to get frustrated with Moodle and say, well, to heck with this, we're going back to campus in the fall. I don't need to worry about this. So I caution you away from that. But also I think it can be helpful right now to start thinking about which components of your course might be particularly persistent, which pieces will work regardless of the delivery method you choose. That question is important. And it's one that I think can help us stay motivated and engaged. It's been a hard period, but you've learned a lot.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think that returning to campus is going to be amazing. For one thing, I am really excited to go and get those French fries from Culinary Arts. What are they doing to their potatoes over there? They are addictive. So I mean that and a cup of coffee at Common Ground. Those are on the top of my to-do list for when I returned to campus. I'm looking forward to it as much as anyone. But I worry that as we start to look forward, we might lose track of the fact that it's not going to be seamless and it's not going to be tech free. Hybrid teaching and learning will require a new set of learning opportunities for all of us. And we will be able to transition some of the skills that we've learned so far, but we're still going to have to keep up this lifelong process of integrating our technology with our pedagogy. It's part of keeping up with what teaching and learning looks like now and into the future, but it's also how we provide the best possible experience for our students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I've been thinking a lot about the benefits of asynchronous teaching and learning and how good it can be when it's done well. And so to that end, I invited my pal Shannon Smyrl to talk to you today. I'll let Shannon introduce herself to you in a second. But I know her from our shared history as part of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English, where I first met her. And also Shannon was part of the leadership on a project, one of the first open education projects I was ever a part of -- the CanLit Guides project. I'll link you to my CanLit Guide on comic books in the show notes. It was a project that really helped me see the possibilities of open education resources. And I'm always grateful to Shannon for her involvement in that project and for her guidance to me throughout. So I'll let Shannon tell you all about the other stuff, but I just think she's a delight. Anyway, here's our chat.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, I am here today with Shannon Smyrl, who I have known for a million years in a million different contexts, but I'm going to let Shannon introduce herself. So Shannon what is your title and your role on campus and where might people have bumped into you in what I lovingly refer to as the before times?

Shannon Smyrl:

Thanks, Brenna. Yeah, right now my role actually is to be the chair of the Department of Journalism Communication, New Media. And so, but I've been around here for, for awhile. First I was a sessional for like, I dunno, forever. And then I've been, you know, obviously faculty teaching communication courses in the Old Main building. So people would mostly find me, I guess, at the Culinary buying coffee, to be honest.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Nice. No, that's important. I was talking to Erin May last week and she said, people would know her from Common Grounds. Okay. So I invited you on the show today because I think that you had a really successful first semester of primarily asynchronous teaching. One of the things that I have noticed as we've transitioned into the winter is I will say there has been an uptick in the amount of live lecture recording, and maybe a bit of a drop in the amount of kind of prepared asynchronous content that we're seeing in people's courses. I think this has a lot to do with tight turnarounds and new preps. Like if you had to develop a whole course over Christmas break, that was only two weeks. Might've been tight for folks, but I guess I wanted to, I wanted to invite someone who I knew had had a really positive asynchronous experience in the fall term and who could maybe talk to what was good about the teaching experience in the fall. So no pressure, but I wonder if you might start by just talking about maybe how you structured your courses and how you thought about the use of asynchronous versus synchronous in your teaching last term.

Shannon Smyrl:

Sure. Yeah. I mean, I think that they were successful. I did have quite a lot of positive student feedback, so I'm happy to share. I would like to kind of say first though, because everybody is teaching a lot of different things that my experiences were with upper level classes. And I think that probably helped quite a bit. I don't know. I mean, that's something we could maybe talk about.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

But yeah, it's worth talking about, but I think you've already got an engaged student population. That's the way they interact.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. There's a certain amount of trust there too. I think so basically what I did with my classes is I thought about using the Moodle site as more like a space rather than a timeline. So I put a lot of effort at the front end in designing the site so that it was literally like a virtual classroom with a lot of different tabs for all the different functions that we'd be doing including the week to week. But it was, I tried to make it like a place where they could go to find everything. And I guess my kind of primary thing was that each week I wrote for my students and posted first thing Monday morning, every week, what I call the "read, think, and engage" package and, you know, full disclaimer. I learned all of this from working with the instructional designers in OL but so I, it was great to have a chance to try these things out.

Shannon Smyrl:

So I, I would make these "read, think, and engage" packages and they were basically a set of instructions for my students that outlined what they had to do for that week. So it was kind of like, welcome. This is the goals for the week. First you're going to like read this, listen to my podcast, fill in this engagement activity while you do it, and then post your journal assignment by Sunday at four. Right. So they just basically had to get up on Mondays and follow the list of, of tasks and then all the readings and things are on Moodle. And I had quite a lot of feedback from students that they like this, that they had it all in hand for the week and they, it was all just kind of very clear. And so I think it was like the organization and just giving them, you know, that, that control over the material that they really liked and what it involved.

Shannon Smyrl:

The last thing I'll say kind of about this is that it involved me having to kind of rethink what my role would be. So I did make short -- sometimes they were short, they should have been shorter -- podcasts for my students to go along with some slides, but also they had readings. Sometimes I wrote them little notes and tips and things, you know, it was just an assortment of materials. But my role actively was more of a backend cleanup than like the front end of the course. So the course was there on Moodle, it was progressing, students and content, reading their packages. And then I was there each week in these kind of optional seminars. So we did do some online engagement. But I didn't, you know, the students really, the attendance was very poor. They didn't seem to need it. But they could drop in. I had about five hours a week of seminars and office hours where students could just drop in and, and get the highlights or ask questions. Right. So it involved me kind of almost removing myself from the content after I had produced it on Monday, which was weird actually.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I want to interject here because it's something I've been thinking a lot about the difference between sort of a fully asynchronous modality like you're describing and when it works for students and what the experience is like for the instructor. I think sometimes, and I say this as someone who like hosts several podcasts and really likes being listened to, I think that there's like, there's an ego component to teaching, right? Like you're in the room, like you're in your flow. I love that feeling. Everybody listening to you, they're focused on what you have to say. And it's, it's like we know from all the research, all of it that that's not the best way to communicate content to students and yet, and it persists even in like pandemic contexts. I mean, so much of education was just like, okay, well, let's get a zoom subscription and run, you know, and I think you have to, you have to temper critiques of that with prep, who's get, who gets paid to prep, who has time to prep, like all that kind of stuff. But I'm wondering about like the affective experience for you as a teacher, as someone who I imagine defines yourself, at least in part as a teacher, like that's gotta be a core component of your identity at this point, Shannon. Yeah. So what's that like?

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. I, you know, for me personally, I mean, I think it is a very personal way in which you identify it as a teacher. I find this to be somewhat of a relief, like a permission to shift my role kind of more completely. So I have never been comfortable with the kind of I don't even know what the right word would be authority or maybe ego, in some cases that's involved in, you know, you're going to sit there in front of me and I'm going to talk continuously at you for 75 minutes. And everything I say is going to be of value. I, you know, I don't, I've -- maybe it's my subject matter. Maybe it's my age. I have no idea, but I've

never sort of embraced that component of teaching. And I'm much more interested in, and always have been in, in a kind of facilitated experience. Like we've all read this stuff and I have a little bit more experience than you in critical thinking and with the material. So you ask me questions and then I'll illuminate it for you and help you pick up apart. And that's always been my sort of method of teaching and so -- for better, for worse. And so I think it lends itself well to this and I find a certain relief that I can almost force my students into the kind of project-based or, you know flipped or whatever kind of, I mean, I don't want to get into the models, but, you know, get them to, to go and read the material and then come to me and let's not waste my -- let's not waste our togetherness time with me explaining something that you were supposed to have read. Right. And I mean, there's a million reasons for that, but yeah,

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, for me, that was the real freedom. The first time I ever taught hybrid, it was a drama course. And you know, so many of my classes, I was really big into like the literature of the eighties and nineties for awhile. And so that required a lot of historical context for my students, which always shocked me. I still remember the first student who asked me who Kurt Cobain was. And, and it was such a relief to teach my first hybrid course. And every student came to class having -- we were doing Angels in America and they'd already watched a documentary on the AIDS crisis and they came to class and they they'd read a historical timeline, like an interactive historical timeline. And I didn't have to like block out all the history while they sort of half listened to me. We could just jump into the text and they had all the contexts they needed. And for me, that was a really liberating experience because it felt like I was doing -- I always felt kind of like a phony doing the historical context. I'm like, everybody in this room knows I'm not a historian, I'm a literature scholar and there's lots of history there, but you know, this isn't my jam. This isn't what I got into this to do. And so for me, hybrid teaching was the first real liberation from that model that didn't work for me. So, yeah. Interesting to hear you describe a kind of similar affective experience.

Shannon Smyrl:

I'm always thinking about how to add value for the students. So what is the best value and, you know, providing, you know, standing up there and explaining something that they've already read not. And I don't mean like if they have questions or the hard sticky bits, but like just the basic information, you know, it's not valuable to the students that spent the time engaging it. It's probably not that valuable to the students that need a little more support to get more engaged. And so, yeah, I'm just, I'm trying to think about how to incorporate this asynchronous approach that I've had in a way that allows, you know, it makes me think about the synchronous moments that we have with our students -- they are certainly a lot more precious, right? Like you have three hours a week with all these students, so how can you make the most, I mean, that's why they pay us the big bucks, right. To help them learn. So what's the best way to use that together time. And I think, you know, this has been an opportunity to really push that a little bit.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I, it's something that I'm thinking about a lot as we start to hear these rumblings about a return to campus plan that involves a certain amount of hybridity or blending, because I'm a little bit worried that we're missing a piece of that conversation, right. Because if, if hybrid to you really means that like you lecture capture the live session and some students watch it from their home, that's a bit of a missed opportunity, right. For me. But the flip side of that is that it does require support and prep time and resources to make a transition like that properly. And I'm, I'm just not sure I'm hearing the right

rumblings. That's my politically correct way of saying, but I'm concerned I'm not hearing the right rumblings. Right. Like if all we're worried about is how do we get the right kind of camera into our classrooms so that the lecture capture works. Yeah. So I'm just worried that we're not thinking about where the resources need to go, because like you spent a lot of time doing the front end prep for that class. Right.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. I, that is, that is absolutely true. Although to be honest yes, I have experience, you know, doing a tiny bit of design for Open Learning. And so I'd seen, you know, the idea of doing these "read, think, and engage" learning packages and things like that before, but the week to week prep for that seemed to me to be certainly no more onerous. I mean, I was making up brand new material for one of my courses. It wasn't something that I had worked with before you know, working out okay. What they're going to read and hear here are some reading questions. And I did do, you know, some abbreviated slideshows where I could really focus on kind of the details to go along with my podcasts. I did not find that to be more onerous than prepping and then going into the classroom for three hours a week and lecturing. I, you know, I know everybody's having a different experience with that. I found it to be, you know, about the same amount of work. One of the things that I, you know, what really struck me about what you were saying though, is this idea of lecture capture. Like, I can honestly say that with, with my podcasts and they're not real, not like yours, they were just sort of attempts, but, you know you know, there's nothing like they're not lectures. They were, Hey, I think you guys might have a little trouble with this idea, so let's unpack it or here are the key things I want you to know. And so I think it was so important to let go of the idea of a lecture or, or even anything about the way the classroom dynamic worked in this new model and really rethink that in an ideal world. I would keep what I've done, have the students do most of it and then meet with them in smaller groups for an hour a week in the classroom. Right. To really get even more value into the conversations with them. Again, I think it's subject specific too, right?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No, I definitely think so. And I think the amount of, you know, quote-unquote, content that you're delivering in say like a first year history survey is going to change the dynamic for sure. But, you know, I'm, I'm heartened to hear you say that. Because I, I think when I think about something like a package of material for students to go ahead and, and, and take from and learn that has so much value in terms of a lifelong skill, right? To be presented with information and to work through with guidance, the process of making it make meaning like, to me, that's a really useful lifelong skill. But when I talk about sort of resources and training, if we do decide to move to a more hybrid modality, we also -- there's training to do for our students right. In what the expectations are. Like. One thing I noticed in the survey that I did at the end of last term about the student experience is that there's a tremendous amount -- for the most part, most students prefer to have a blend of asynchronous and synchronous. They like to get their, their content asynchronously, and then they like a chance to catch up or connect with instructors. And that was pretty much across the board, but there was a subset of students who are very rigidly attached to a particular model of education where somebody tells them what's important and they write it down. And that is something we trained them for, right, for like 12 years, we trained them that that's the way to take in information. And so I think for some students who had a difficult time with the transition to fully online teaching in courses that didn't do a lot of live lecture and that did a lot of asynchronous work. I think there, there was a piece there missing where we talked about what our expectations were and what students needed and what was the best use of their time and why we knew that. Do you know what I mean? Like it's a different way for students to approach education.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. I felt this and I've, I've talked to you about this. I've talked to, you know, a few people about this. The, one of the things I learned very, very quickly from my students who, and I'm fairly approachable in my, my tone with them. So they were not shy to tell me is that, you know, three hours of class time does not translate to three hours of independent study time for a student. And so I very carefully just calculated like three hours of class time and three hours of home time: that's six hours a week, here you go, here's your package. I'm always available. We've got the seminar, good to go. And of course at the beginning I gave them way too much work. And I didn't really believe them until I fully appreciated that, you know, there's a lot of things going on the stress, the newness there's a lot. But one of the most interesting things was about this idea of student expectation and responsibility. And, and like you said, how they've been trained. So three hours of class time is a fairly passive experience for students. I mean, of course they do activities and we engage them. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, but let's be honest. So yeah. You know, they're on their phone -- we're asking them to immediately, you know replace that three hours of passive sort of learning. And I'm not saying that's, you know, I mean, I'm being a bit facetious, but with three hours of like, read this answer, these questions respond to it, you know, is not the same. And so I didn't fully account for that in my course design. And then I had to kind of moderate that, but I also pushed back on my students a bit on, you know, look, you know, you can't come to class, not having done the readings and then expect me to feed it to you on my ginormous spoon and call that a class. Like I've, I've always been frustrated by that. And I think those days are over. I'm going to be more, I'm going to ask them to meet me more halfway, you know, and maybe I've been a pushover, like maybe this is something most people already know, but I've learned that lesson that way.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No, I don't think, I don't think you're a pushover. Well, maybe you are. I don't know, but I don't think that you're the only person to learn that this term. And it is something that came up when Carolyn Ives and I went and talked about blended learning with SOBE. One of the things that came up is, well, they don't do the reading. And the question that Carolyn very carefully asked back was what are the consequences for them not doing the reading, right? If the consequence for them not doing the reading is you explaining the reading -- because then I also would not do the reading. Right. And, and I think that all the time, like we see it in department culture, if your department gets into a culture where nobody reads the documents that get sent out ahead of time, then that sticks, right. Whereas if not reading the document ahead of time means you don't know how to vote on this issue and you feel a little bit trapped and uncomfortable, you probably do the reading next time. Yeah. In many ways, it's, I don't want it to be me saying, "You should make your students feel trapped and uncomfortable." But I do think that we train a set of expectations into students and we shouldn't be surprised that that transition is difficult for them. I think there are all kinds of institutional level issues around sort of student satisfaction and student, student evaluations of teaching and things that need to be rethought given the kind of transition we all went through. But there's also tremendous amount, more accountability for students for their readings in this kind of content.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. And I, I would add too, I think more accountability in how we set the students up for those readings, because then the flip side of that is, you know, I do get, I will admit I got lazy when I was teaching face-to-face in terms of my course prep and development. So, you know, I'm focusing on making three hours of class time, but I didn't always or consistently provide them with any supporting frameworks for doing their readings. And I know there are faculty who do that in varying ways, you know, so telling the students go and read those 40 pages and show up prepared to discuss them on

Monday is not the same as giving them a "read, think, and engage" package with when you read this, think about this, reflect on these questions and then they're supported in that part of their learning as well. So, you know, I think if, if we want to change the expectations for for what the students, what value they'll get out of the classroom and ask them to do more outside the classroom, we need to support them in that too, in, in how we design our courses.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, absolutely. And that comes back to time as well. So something that we're seeing when we look at the logs for Kaltura is like for instructors who have decided to offer video content and they've done it in sort of snippets, like one of the things we recommended is sort of unpack a single concept in a single video, so that they're under 10 minutes. What we see is students going back and rewatching and rewatching those component pieces. Whereas when we see a three hour lecture, we don't, I don't have any way of tracking to see if students even get to the end of it, but we certainly don't see students going back to it. So it's also thinking about how that support is most useful to students and what they're looking for when they go to the instructor for support. Right. Are they just hoping that you will pour the content in or do they want help unpacking the concepts? Those are very different delivery methods.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's, that's really true. This kind of, and I wonder too, if students are, you know, trained already to take information in those small packets you know, I was talking to a first year student who does not go to TRU -- this is a family friend and, and you know, he's experiencing at a different university first online and, and you know, all the material because he's in, in, in the sciences, the material exists in little chunks all over YouTube. Like you want to learn this math concept or this stats concept or this physics concept. And, you know, we were talking about like, well, you're missing the joy of sitting in a lecture hall of 250 students having these concepts explained to you. And probably most of those students are, have already watched them explained on YouTube, like, you know, as, as faculty across all different disciplines. And I don't want to presume, I mean, you know how, when you have all these different media on these different pieces and ways of accessing information, to me, the challenge is like filtering it all out and spreading it all out to find like that idea of good value for the students so that you're not wasting energy or time or, or maximizing again, like that moment that you have face-to-face with that student, what's the best way to use that brief moment, you know? And I mean, obviously it varies, but --

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, you know, my best online learning experiences have not been where I've signed up for a three-hour webinar. Although I, I do a lot of those. I spend a lot of time sitting in three-hour webinars, but my best learning experiences online are when a skilled, informed individual becomes like my curator of the open web. Right. And they point me in the direction of all the things I need and then we come back and we sort of synthesize together. And I th-- I, something I do come back to in my workshops when people are stressing out about content is like, you don't have to reinvent the wheel necessarily, you know, do you need to explain postmodernism or is it okay if John Green does it on his Crash Course video? Cause he's pretty good at it. He's really engaging. It's only 12 minutes. Right? And I think that that is also a hard thing to let go of, right. To being sort of the master of the discipline that the, that the instructor is kind of meant to be.

Shannon Smyrl:



I wonder if that comes back to, you know, you said at the beginning, that idea of the ego, like we, we are trained as instructors to be that expert and to be the provider of knowledge. And I know that over the years I've had different mentors sort of teach me, you know, you don't have to, it's okay to rely on and draw together resources from different people. Like, you're not shirking your job, if you use someone else's, you know, short talk or a set of slides to, to get a concept across. What counts is, then you can use -- if you use that, then you can use your time to develop something new or to, to develop an activity for the students to help them really get it and expand that. But there is a sort of stress that you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing. If you, if, if you go that way.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And again, that can come back to student expectation, right? Like, do they see, are you communicating that to them? The value, the way you're approaching? I think we ought to often don't talk openly enough with students about what we're doing and why I think they're much more amenable. Even at the first year to having conversations, they have questions about why they're taught the way they're taught and they often are happy to have, I have always had the experience, I should say that they're often very happy to have those conversations. They're, they're curious about why we make the choices that we do. And and I, I often think we should trust them with more of that discourse.

Shannon Smyrl:

I agree -- that made me really realize something I've learned from my first-year students. Well, all of my students really is that you know, they, they want to know why they're doing something and they want to have perceived value. So if I'm asking them to do in class activities or weekly journal postings and you know, this, this year there better be some significant grades attached to that. And you know, I, I was always, again, like a sort of, you know, I'm not giving you grades just for reading the course material or just for participating in class. But, you know, I'm really coming around to the idea that again, a value, like if you want them to see value in that incremental week to week engagement and learning, then make it valuable by reflecting that in the course design. And so I've, you know, again, like I will definitely carry some of that back into my practice in the classroom where much more sort of integrated between the reading, the class discussion and then some kind of journaling or whatever, small assignment. But again, all that marking all that extra --

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's the thing, you know, but it's true. I don't love the system of grading like conceptually, but we're in it. And in it we have -- we've circumscribed education in such a way that we've given ourselves pretty limited means to demonstrate or to signal value to students, right. To signal that something is important. And as a result, if you think something matters to students and you want them to do it, yeah. It needs to have marks attached to it. And I think one of the issues that came up a lot in the fall was not assigning significant enough marks to those discussion groups, not recognizing how much time they would take students every week and how much time they are taking instructors to mark. Like I think about the, the human hours put into marking discussion forums only to assign maybe 5% of the grade to it. It just doesn't seem right for anyone in that equation.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. I mean, I personally, in my classes, I went, well, I think quite high. I mean, I've put 30% of my course grade on weekly journals. So it amounted to, cause I cut off the beginnings and ends of term, I, I did 10 weeks. Right. so if it's 3% a week, but you know, it adds up 30%. Yeah. Once you've bailed on a

couple of weeks, you start to see, see the consequences of it. But again, so I would definitely continue that because I, I really learned that the learning they do in submitting those weekly journals and some of them were, you know, reflections and some of them were actually like, you know, mastering concepts and things like that. They varied. Was just as if not more valuable than yet one more assignment. So I dropped a major assignment and added those and I would definitely continue that. But I did learn like with the marking I got a little behind, and even though the marking was predominantly participatory, it did have a kind of scale, right. Like three you've really engaged two, you've just kind of finished it, you know, that kind of thing. I did find that I got so far behind in my marking that, you know, mostly everybody was getting three just for doing it just because I felt obligated to, you know, yeah. I got so behind. So again, it's like that, that shared responsibility for the learning environment. And you've got to hold up your side of it too, for those students. Right?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. Hugely important, hugely important to the students' feeling of satisfaction with the course too. We know it correlates at least as much with the sort of not frequency, but like the timeliness of feedback, as much as anything. Like for good reason -- it's hard to move forward in a course when you don't know where you stand. I remember that feeling. It's awful, right?

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. It really is. And I'm just thinking about, again, like that redistribution of time. So my time is maybe better spent offering that individual feedback than it is making like a lecture to something, you know, I mean, that's certainly true in writing classes. I mean, people might disagree, but for me, you know, standing there telling 30 people in general terms how to write something is not nearly as valuable as having them all working and then go around and spend five minutes with each of them solving a particular writing challenge that they're working on. But that is hard to accomplish depending on the conditions of the work in the class. Right. Yeah.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I know as always, we find that the university we've built for ourselves, it's not always the one that's best structured for learning and, and hopefully a hybrid model. If we choose to return to one, will offer folks a bit more flexibility because I think a lot of the lessons that you've articulated are common across campus. And I think that they make for better learning experiences across the board.

Shannon Smyrl:

Yeah. Hopefully I, you know, I can only speak from my own, my own experience.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thank you so much for your time Shannon today. I really, I it's been a while since I've actually gotten into like a, I real teachy conversation, so I'm grateful for it. It's always good for my brain.

Shannon Smyrl:

Well, I appreciated it, Brenna, and I learned something. Thanks.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for episode 18 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.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. I really encourage you to take a minute this week and go back and revisit your fall teaching and find one thing that you did in the fall that you're going to take back with you to face-to-face teaching when it comes back in whatever form it comes back. I think many of us have been living for the last almost a year. Gosh, in something of a liminal space. We're not quite committed to the kind of living we're doing right now, but we're not quite sure what's going to come next either. And maybe this is my half-baked meditation practice talking, but it's hard to be fully present in the world when you're living like that. I think that if we can work to embrace the learning that we've done in this moment, we'll be better suited for the challenges that are coming in the next one. So I want to encourage you this week to go back and look at what you've learned since last March, take a look at your teaching from fall, if that's applicable to you or even last summer, or perhaps just what you've done so far this term, and find one thing you're really proud of -- one thing you're going to take with you into the future, whatever that future entails. I'd love it if you'd share it with me, I won't make it public or anything. I'm just curious to know what folks are proud of. I see a lot in your Moodle shells that you should be proud of. I want you to get in the habit of celebrating it. Okay. That's it for me. And hybrid or face-to-face, I will see you next week and well into the future. Take care.