

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello and welcome to You Got This!, a podcast about teaching and learning and sustaining community for everyone at Thompson Rivers University. I'm your host Brenna Clarke Gray, Coordinator of Educational Technologies. And this podcast is a project of your friends over at Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed within Open Learning, but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast into 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.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Welcome back. What a week it's been. What a week it's been. What a week of clear messaging and straightforward expectations. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

How are you? Are you good? I hope you're good. I'm not sure how I am. It's been a very strange week. I'm still working at home, part-time and on campus, part-time and trying to do a couple of days, both places. Some weeks, it works out. Some weeks, it doesn't. I find the atmosphere on campus really complicated. I'm happy to see people. I'm holding my breath for reservoir to reopen. I'm excited for campus to feel alive again. It's felt so strange to be on campus without students. And yet, at the same time, it's still a pandemic. It still feels so, so strange to be around people. Everything feels like it's happening too fast and not quickly enough. Everything feels like we're trying our best and also like we're flailing in the dark. Maybe that one's just me, but I feel it pretty acutely.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm trying to maintain a level of excitement and positivity about this semester for lots of reasons. The people who come into office hours need security and reassurance and reinforcement that they're doing the right thing, not my anxiety. That's nobody else's problem, but my own. But also because I think that I am hopeful that things will go well and just not always confident in my own hopes. I'm finding that a really strange dynamic to manage, I guess. I want to feel unambiguously happy or else I want to be at home. It turns out that neither of those are options right now.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, I guess day-to-day, I'm doing okay. I'm hoping that you are, too. I'm hoping that the energy and enthusiasm of your students is giving you the boost that you need when you walk into that classroom. And I'm hoping that you feel safe, that you've been able to take choices and make decisions that allow you to feel safe in what is ultimately a really complicated and difficult situation for everyone to manage. And I guess that's it for my opening essay this week. I'm feeling quite all over the place, hope that they'll return. I hope you're feeling more settled or if you're not that knowing that you're not the only one feeling all over the place helps in some way.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm excited because our first interview of the season is one of my favourite people, Brian Lamb, my boss. The Director of Learning Technology and Innovation here at TRU is on the line today to talk about last year and the year to come. And hopefully, a good conversation about our programming. I hope you enjoy it. I always like having Brian here to talk. And I always like remembering that I'm part of a team that really, really cares, even when sometimes everything feels so up in the air. So, without further ado, here's Brian.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, as is tradition on You Got This!, we are here with our first interview of the new season and it's Brian Lamb from Learning Technology and Innovation. Hi, Brian.

Brian Lamb:

Hello.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

How's it going? It's-

Brian Lamb:

I'm doing okay.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I was going to say it's the day after Labour Day or two days after Labour Day. Classes are starting today. How are we feeling?

Brian Lamb:

Yes. Wow. I mean, there's the overall thing. I can honestly say I am 1000% better than I was at this exact moment in the academic calendar a year ago.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, my gosh.

Brian Lamb:

I couldn't believe it when I looked at my calendar and saw we had booked this for this morning. I guess, is this like her being just extremely confident or strangely oblivious?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Why not both? Why not both?

Brian Lamb:

Yeah, well, fair enough, fair enough. Yeah. No, I mean, one year ago, I woke up bright and early and ready to take on the new day. And if anyone who listens to the first episode of You Got This!, you and I were quite chipper.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah.

Brian Lamb:

Going into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

We were.

Brian Lamb:

I mean, we knew it's going to be a tough year, but we were proud of what we'd done and we really thought we'd done everything we could do to prepare.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. We were idiots.

Brian Lamb:

So we were. And I mean, these things, there's no point in finger pointing. I honestly don't think what went wrong was our fault, exactly. I mean, but these things are systemic. So and then since, I mean, the fact is, we're part of that system. And yeah, we had a major video conferencing failure on the first day of class, and it landed on us. Whatever, whatever was the cause.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The thing I will always remember is that we answered 250 tickets that day, which is, I mean, generally, at this time of year, there's 100 open tickets that are in the process of being resolved. So, in one day, we sort of more than doubled that. It was absolutely wild. And of course, the problem persisted for about a week and a half to two weeks, so it was a busy time.

Brian Lamb:

And it completely, I think, as much as I need to, I think just blew whatever chill we had or whatever. It really threw us out of our rhythm. And I think it was a shot to our confidence and it-

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hugely. I think we felt like we had-

Brian Lamb:

And it impacted us-

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Sorry, I keep cutting you off. I just I think we felt like we had built this really positive relationship with the community. And we were terrified that we had just trashed it all with one system failure.

Brian Lamb:

Yeah, exactly. So, but I haven't checked all the channels incoming. There's a few weird things going on out there, so I'm not going to be relaxed for the next little while, if ever. But it's certainly looking better than a year ago from that point of view.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. And I think there's definitely a different vibe on campus. Last year, I think we felt prepared and faculty felt unsure of what was about to come. And this year, I think faculty feel relatively prepared

walking back into their classrooms, whatever, anxieties around that time may exist. And we are feeling really uncertain about what this term is going to bring to us.

Brian Lamb:

That's fair. I think that's a really good way of looking at it. And I think when people have asked how we're doing what I have been telling people is volume is much more manageable, although we're still busy. I mean, yesterday, that help desk was cooking.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yes. Yes, it was.

Brian Lamb:

And we all tried to help our colleague, Jamie Drozda, who drew the short straw and had that day. And I did one of her, even by Jamie's standards, epic performances. And it-

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yes.

Brian Lamb:

So, that's, it was cool to watch in a way, but it was. I mean, it's not like I don't think. I certainly hope the University understands. I don't think we're ever going back to a place where the system is a completely complimentary piece, even for face-to-face campuses. This is now an integral part of how people teach and learn and not just Moodle. We've had a lot of projects on the go, I certainly do. And I've got a few lingering and things I want to get over the hump this week.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Sorry. I just was going to say, which is great, because that's what I hoped would be the outcome of the hell that was last year, which is that people feel comfortable enough in this world to explore a little bit. So, we've got folks building WordPress sites and doing podcasts who, maybe a year ago, didn't think that there was a space for digital tools in their practice. And now, they're doing really interesting things with them. I'm not going to be like, "The pandemic was great, because now we have WordPress sites." But I do think that that is one possible positive outcome, at least from the pivot portion of what we've been through in the last year.

Brian Lamb:

I think we said this when we closed off Season 1 of your podcast. But in many ways, I mean, when we look at where we were hoping to get with the community in terms of our profile and the number of relationships and who we were working with and how they were prepared to look at digital technologies as part of their practice. I think two years ago, we might have thought, for just sheer level of participation, I think, this jump start us about three years in the path. And it wasn't easy and it wasn't under the conditions I would have wanted to do it or ever want to do anything like again. But all that said, that part is good and yeah. And the number of instructors are never going to go back to the way I used to teach is really gratifying.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, and I think that hopefully what folks get out of this year, fingers crossed, is the opportunity to explore the best of both worlds, right? And to develop a practice that they will be able to sustain into the future. I'm still feeling, I don't know, anxious, unsettled, about whether the term is going to roll out the way we all hope. I'm choosing my words carefully because I think we want, I know I don't want to worry folks unnecessarily. But you just have to watch the news to know that we're in this moment of profound uncertainty around how the rest of the fall, in particular, I think is going to go.

Brian Lamb:

I think anyone who's been sentient over the last two years, you just don't, I don't know how you can feel like everything's just settled when where things are going. And so, yeah, it's hard. I think you have, and I think, the thing I've always felt about learning technology, even before these times is things like resiliency, flexibility. The ability to don't get too bogged down with certain strategies, because you may have to turn on a dime. I think those essential principles. I think we don't talk a lot about that internally, but I think that's how we practice. And I think that approach has, and I hope, will serve us moving forward, whatever it is.

Brian Lamb:

I fully expect something is going to change, whether it's because of happy accidents or disturbing developments. I mean, things are going to change this semester. And I think as people get their feet under them, they're going to think, "Okay, this is under control. Now, I want to do this. I'm expecting some of that to happen, too. I think some people are holding back because they're not quite sure what to expect, so they're going in, relatively light, which I think is intelligent.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I agree.

Brian Lamb:

But if yeah, if things turn out, well, I could see them getting a little more ambitious and starting to think ahead to other semesters and things like that. So, yeah, no, I mean, we're going to, I don't know what's going to take over our lives in the next few weeks, but something will, I mean, I know that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. It's true. I'm thinking today, we've got so many new instructors on the Help Desk. This episode isn't going to come out till Monday once everybody is fully seasoned and expert. But I'm really sort of seeing just how many people we added to our community this year, which I knew. But also wasn't really expecting in this climate to have so many new faces and so much instructor changeover around courses and things.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And I just think, I ever think everybody's capacity for flexibility and resiliency has been tested for the last 18 months. And that doesn't seem to be slowing down at all. So, I hope that as a community, we can also maintain those other good practices from the last year of looking out for each other and being generous and kind. Because I can just see how much anxiety there still is in the air.

Brian Lamb:

And from an admin perspective, similar levels of turnover over the last 18 months to two years in the operational units, in the support groups, and there's a whole bunch of people who have become quite important parts of how we do what we do that I've yet to meet. And I assume I will be meeting in the coming weeks, but so, that's something to keep in mind, too. And there's definitely some bumpy areas happening, and I would expect that.

Brian Lamb:

I mean, when you have people going through what they're going through now, and this is their first fall at the institution and some of the institutional knowledge that it's retired or moved on to other things over the last couple of years, it was quite significant. And there's definitely people that are finding their way outside the classroom as well and doing what a university does.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Well, the reason I wanted you to come on is not just to talk about sort of last year and everything. I'm trying to, I don't know, be cautiously, but not toxically optimistic about what's to come. And I'm thinking a lot about sort of like hopes for this year. So, we've sort of already reflected on one, which is just getting to see the growth in the community in terms of awareness of technological tools, what they can do in their classroom. Why a podcast? Why a website? That part is cool. I'm wondering if you have other sort of forward thinking hopes for what this year is going to look like? Sitting here on this the most sort of pins and needles day of the year for our team.

Brian Lamb:

Well, to build on that, what we were saying about the jump starting and profile and digital literacy, and then hopefully, using that as a foundation to build on, I think that's my kind of core. Hope for this coming year that we can continue to grow the types of skills and attributes we've seen growing in the community. That some of the people who've been not only developing their skills, but a broader sense of how technology works. All the people you interviewed in Season 1, that those people continue to grow and that we start and we see them continue to see them as partners.

Brian Lamb:

And then yeah, that hopefully, we have room to breathe and think about the things we put in front of our community and some of them may be quite niche. I'm thinking about some of our workshop offerings, but to me, that's, I mean, those are the things that really is where the real action is and where the real fun is. And why I think we entered this field was to do the kinds. So, in some ways I'm really looking forward to getting back to our jobs.

Brian Lamb:

And I'm really excited about our fall programming and not only the topics, but I've really enjoyed the conversations we had, starting in the spring. And it wasn't just because we expected challenges with having people in the rooms together, but we really wanted to get away from that paradigm that a workshop is about a thing where you book a room and you get some, not necessarily awesome coffee and some wraps. And you sit in a room for an hour, and then people clap politely at the end, and shuffle out. And then maybe you get a project out of it a few weeks later.

Brian Lamb:

That we started to think about how we set up our offerings in a way that if people can't make that one hour session or if they happen to be at Williams Lake or an open learning participant or whatever that we have on ramps for them even though we may well have face-to-face components as well. So, just the one that jumps to mind is one of the ones we've already done some of the sessions for them. Our Moodle orientation materials that that was theoretically a set of workshops, but now, we have just really enhanced onboarding materials, particularly for new Moodle users. And I've sent links to parts of that website to, I feel like, hundreds of people already.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yes. Yep. Definitely.

Brian Lamb:

And it's so on-point, but the thing that's great about that is that was actually a component of programming. And so, I think that's a bit more extreme than what I expect we'll do for other things, but maybe not. And I just love that approach and I really got to give Jamie and Amanda Smith a lot of credit.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, absolutely. They took on that project. And first of all, it looks fabulous. It looks really, really good. It puts me to shame for some of my projects. It's amazing. But also, Amanda went through and she watched the existing Moodle orientation recordings which, God love her, that can't have been a fun way to spend her days. And she pulled out all the details, so it's like everything you would have gotten from sitting through, a week long, we used to do one or two hours a day for a week, Moodle orientation. And instead, it's all broken down into the component parts, so you don't have to sit through the whole workshop or watch those recordings. You can just go in and find the pieces that you need.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's a really thoughtful resource, because it's built directly out of the programming and the way we deliver the content live. I just thought it was really, it was a really clever approach that Jamie and Amanda took and it works really well as a result. It feels very chatty and conversational when you go into engage with any of the resources. It's really nicely done.

Brian Lamb:

Yeah. It doesn't feel like technical documentation.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No.

Brian Lamb:

It really does feel like you'd be in a workshop with some people. And yeah, I can't say enough about that. And I think it sets a tone. And I'm looking at some of our other programming and I think, I don't know, if we'll have anything quite as resourced-rich coming out of this, maybe one or two. I could see it being quite rich by the time it's done. But again, I think that approach where we hope they'll be a bit of a multimodal dimension that people can come. And if we have something face-to-face that hopefully, they will want to come and hang out with us or if it's a virtual event, and we're planning on doing plenty

of virtual events that will work for them. And again, if the schedules don't work, that there's things that they can dip into at their convenience, so I'm just really pleased with that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think it's interesting because as a discipline, I think Ed Tech and Learning Technologies has sort of always followed along the general faculty development model, which is that you monitor your success by attendance at sessions, right? And that seems strange now that we're starting to step away from it as a way to measure success within trying to teach people digital technologies. Because surely the success is primarily in people actually using resources that you've developed to do their own work.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Not that there isn't a place for workshops and face-to-face conversations, I think there really is. And I look forward to things book clubs and discussion series where we get to dig into the bigger issues. But it seems odd that I used to think that the goal was to get 12 people out to a podcast day workshop, and not to build a resource that people take and go and make podcasts with. It's just odd that I had to go through the last year to come to that place.

Brian Lamb:

Although, I mean, the example you chose, you did do a pretty great podcasting resource out of that. I know you intend to extend that this year. And maybe that could be one of the things we transition into shortly, not trying to take over your interview. But I mean, I'll just say before that, but maybe before we dig in, I do really like the mix, we have, too. I think there's some pretty pragmatic hands on things, including, like said, the Moodle stuff and things with building out WordPress or fairly hands on things, the meme stuff, all that. But also, the more reflective step back thing, so we have community of practice and book club, your series on build back better.

Brian Lamb:

And then some stuff that falls in the middle of that that you're doing, like the managing your marking load stuff, which I think is obviously quite pragmatic. But I know how you approach it. And I mean, you seem to, I think a lot of the things you do, they're not necessarily tricks with Excel or something like that. It's really about how you approach assessment and my experience, how can you do that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. Well, I think I drive people a bit crazy, because my first piece of advice to manage your marking load is have fewer assessments. I think that's always my first suggestion, like "Can you drop an assessment?" That would really lower your marking load a lot and lower student load as well. Yeah, I think, I guess, I'm thinking about what the term looks like and I look at our programming calendar. And the thing I'm most excited about, to be perfectly honest, is there's a real sense of fun about the programming this term. And we've had a year of people using technology, not because they wanted to, but because circumstances required it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And it's really nice to see a programming calendar that is about, we have a whole series on play this year. Jason's got a whole series on the visual, again. Really engaging people's ideas about how to represent content and how to deal with the visual in the classroom. So, there's a real sense of getting back to the idea of technology, not as something that's being imposed upon you by a global pandemic,

but about something that offers opportunity and fun and joy, I hope. That's been nice. That's been a nice transition in our calendar, I think.

Brian Lamb:

And a lot of these technologies are fun to work with, I mean, even before you get to your result. And I've come to a certain grudging respect for the utility of Moodle. It does come in handy, especially if you're trying to serve thousands of people with two people. But at the same time, there's not a lot that I do with Moodle that I think of is fun, particularly when I'm just setting it up or sometimes, it becomes to be one.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

This does not spark joy.

Brian Lamb:

But a tool like Twine when you start thinking about like branch and certain things. I'm really looking forward to playing around with that and I do enjoy it. I mean, well, this is the one that does interact with Moodle. I mean, I think H5P tools are very fun. I think messing around with an animated GIF maker is really fun. I'm really looking forward to digging more into that. And then, we kept doing a little that over the last year. I was just like maybe only for our own sanity, but it's nice to be able to really dig into that and build some resources out of.

Brian Lamb:

I'm fascinated by what you're planning to do with your podcasting series, because you already did develop a pretty good resource there. But just to maybe draw or talking about there, could you share a bit about what you want to do with your podcasting series?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, so the plan is to build out the existing podcasting resource into more of like, I guess, self-directed masterclass. It has four units to it that walks you through the process of both planning a podcast, and also gives you a chance to play a little bit, so you can actually test out, what's it like to create a little bit of audio? What's it like to have to edit that audio? How do you find music to put into your podcast? The nuts and bolts stuff, but giving people less just links out and more like, "Here's a task to complete."

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, Jason and Jon and I are collaborating on this one and the goal really is to have a four-week program that you can go through at your own pace, although we will have some live sessions in October, so people can check in and get help and ask questions. But at the end of it, you'll have established a little toolkit for yourself in terms of you'll know basically how to structure and shape a podcast, how to do a little bit of minor audio editing, and then how to actually create it, upload it, distribute it, all that stuff. So, that's the plan anyway.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's nascent. It will be ready for October 1st is the goal right now. But I'm excited about it because I feel like we've gotten to a plateau on campus about awareness of podcasts and what they can do. We've had

that conversation several times now, but we have yet to offer folks that interim step between like, "Here's what a podcast is. And then, here are a bunch of tutorials, go at it by yourself."

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And this is designed to be that middle step in between, "Is a podcast right for your project?" is one of the key questions we ask in the resource. And then, "Here's how you get the first steps done to feel like this is something, well, do you feel like you know whether or not this is something you want to proceed with?" if that makes sense.

Brian Lamb:

Listening to you, you're talking about that, too, you're really reminded me of some of the interesting things that may happen with podcasts to TRU wider. I'm aware of three really interesting student podcasting projects that are either getting off the ground or have been going for a while. There's an undergraduate research network out of the research office where they're doing video podcasting. I know there's this new one, it's still very early, but it's an anti-racism podcast, called I on ABI, that's starting to develop. And Peers on Careers, a student-led podcast on career planning.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

They also have a website I'm really jealous of. I'm going to steal some.

Brian Lamb:

It's so good. Yes, we will be stealing that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yes.

Brian Lamb:

And because I also told them that they did a great job, so that's all really we got to do to cover ourselves on that, but great job, I'm taking it. And that gets me really thinking. I'm really hoping we're going to be able to reach students with a lot of this program, too and it's not necessarily "faculty development." So hopefully, faculty, even if they may not do a podcast, if they know that their students have an interest that they know that they can to direct their students to some of this stuff, too. Whether spending the sessions or again, we're hoping there'll be really useful resources that they'll be at least helped to grow what they do.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, my hope is that the self-directed course will be appealing to students, who might not want to sit in a room with a bunch of faculty members, which is okay. And also, my plan is to let the Maker Space folks at the library know about it as a way to sort of orient people into podcasting in that space, too. So, I'm hoping that it will be a useful resource for a bunch of different applications. And just to help support the neat work that's happening with podcasts, it's cool. I feel like we hit some critical mass.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And the pandemic had a lot to do with it actually. A lot of people started podcasts during the pandemic. I think, we've talked before about the intimacy and the connected nature of podcasting and how

appealing that can be, I think that's clearly been part of a big resurgence in interest. But yeah, it's exciting to see.

Brian Lamb:

Let's face it. You're a big part of that, Brenna. I mean, this podcast you're doing, I think, is really cool. And I just really love the whole prism of people in the community whose voices we get to hear. And by the way, just we're talking about our attitudes, I'll come back to campus, but positive side. I was doing a little griping on Twitter and then one of your alarms on You Got This!, Stephanie Tate, popped in and went, just like, "But our students are stoked. The students I'm talking to are stoked." And I was like, "Thank you." That's exactly what I needed to hear at that exact moment and anyway.

Brian Lamb:

So, I'm really looking forward to that, but I want to circle back a bit. We do have a pretty decent podcast infrastructure. I don't know if you'd be willing to just say really quickly, how you put this together, and some of the tools that we have available to people in TRU.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Sorry. It's funny because I was in a meeting yesterday, and I was saying to the person I was talking to that actually, the thing that you think is the hardest part about podcasting, like how do I make it go into the world, is actually the easiest part. We've got a pretty streamlined process for that here now. You just need a TRU box site, which we can set up for you, learningtech@tru.ca, any time. And the plugin I recommend people use is called Seriously Simple Podcasting, because it's really easy. The name is true.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And it's great because once you have those two pieces in place, we can host your podcast right on the server. You go ahead and submit your information to whatever pod catcher apps appeal to you and the plugin just does it all for you. Every time you upload an episode, it pushes it out to all those distribution networks. So, I think that people get really intimidated by that piece of it, when really, as I always say, the hard part is audio editing. That's the time consuming, difficult part that you need practice to get good at.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The actual getting the darn thing out into the world, we've actually got that down to a science around here. It's pretty good. So, I think that that helped people, too, because it's good to always be honest about the trouble spots like learning how to edit audio is a bit of a learning curve. It takes a little bit of time. But the piece that you might be most worried about, I think, we've got the edges standard off of that pretty good at this point.

Brian Lamb:

Yeah. And if I can actually can continue to interrogate you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Whose show is this by the way?

Brian Lamb:

I don't know. Well, this is a Part 2. I mean, this is me putting my director hat. I am just so proud that I have a faculty member on my team with a SSHRC. And I would just, I don't know. I mean, I just, I don't know if you've talked about it really on your own podcast. And given that it's a SSHRC that has some, I don't know. Well, maybe you should talk about what it's about. I think there might be reasons you only talk about it on the podcast.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, so we've been really lucky. We are partners on SSHRC development grant to build out the infrastructure for a podcasting network, a scholarly podcasting network here in Canada. The idea is if you've ever used the OJS to submit a journal, it's going to be that, but for podcasts. So, the idea is that there's the infrastructure in place for podcast to go through a peer review process. But also with accessibility in mind. So things like transcripts will be ready to go right out of the box, the whole nine yards, sort of a well-oiled little machine.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And part of that development grant is the creation of three new podcasts that will pilot this peer-review system as it gets established. And so, we are one of those podcasts. It will be a teaching and learning podcast called Community of Practice, and then there's two others. One from two library science students at University of Manitoba, I believe, which is all about borders and then Daniel Heath Justice is doing one about animals. And so, it's exciting because this is the first time I've done a project where I don't know how to word it, except that I'm not 100% sure it's all going to work.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

One of the things I really struggle with is the challenge of maintaining the spontaneity and intimacy and responsiveness that I think makes podcast special. And having that survive a year-long peer review process, like, "Can it?" I don't know yet. I'm still interviewing and I'm still editing audio. But it's exciting, because one of the things that we don't talk about enough, we're all pushed all the time to make our scholarship more accessible. Do podcast, write blogs, get out in the world and talk about your research. Except that because we don't have any institutional mechanism for that to sort of like, "count" at most institutions, what ends up happening is the people who are interested in engaging with the wider world just end up doing double the work, right?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, they have to write the research article that gets counted for tenure promotion. And they also, because they feel it's important, they go and they create a podcast or a blog about their research to try to get it into the world. And so, what if we could start to think about ways to have the peer review process adapt to more accessible forms of scholarship without killing what makes those accessible forms of scholarship special. Right? And maybe it can't, but I'm hoping it can. And that's the goal of the project, generally speaking.

Brian Lamb:

Listening to you talk, it really sounds like an investigation about what does digital scholarship really look like, now that we're not just talking about putting stuff in digital form. What the parameters or what are the rhythms of digital scholarship?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. And that's, yeah, that's exactly what it is for me. I mean, there's larger goals for the project as a whole and it's a huge grant. And the vast majority of the money is going to the actual developing the technological piece, this system that will function for the distribution of podcasts. But I think it's really interesting to think about whether or not the system can adapt. Because it's tempting to just want to blow up the system and that is my general perspective on most systems that I encounter, like "What if we just exploded it?"

Brenna Clarke Gray:

But we know how resilient the systems are. And so, what if there's a way to reframe peer review to move from being what is ultimately a pretty oppressive practice that gatekeeps and often silences or rejects the most marginalized scholars among us. What if there's actually a way to reinvent that process to make it something better? And I'm excited to find out.

Brian Lamb:

I'm going to be excited to hear it whenever it does come out. It looks like it's going to be a little slower process than what I've gotten used to with You Got This!, but.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, next September, hopefully, hopefully, but it needs a year to go through peer review and to test all these new systems out. And that's super weird to think about. Because I'm not sure, I don't know. Will I still even feel the same way about the topics when I haven't touched them for a year when I hear them come out? I don't know. It's going to be a strange experience, that's for sure.

Brian Lamb:

So, since I got you here and we're talking workshops, I also want, would love to hear more about some of the other things you're doing. And we talked a little bit of the more hands on practical stuff. But I mean, you're going to continue your usual practice of engaging, I guess we could call them difficult conversation. I don't want to characterize it, so how would you characterize something I'd say Build Back Better?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I do think of it as a space for difficult conversations. I've been really struck and I'm going to wear my faculty hat, and you can just keep mouth shut for this next part. But I've been really struck about how little space there has been institutionally over the last few months for difficult conversations. I as a faculty member, I would have expected to have had some town halls, some open conversations about what the return to campus was going to look like. Some honest discussion about the anxieties that people have. Some practical tips on how do I teach in a mask, all of these things.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And it's felt to me like that space is not going to come from the administrative side of the house. And so over the summer, we had our pandemic pedagogies sessions, which was a place to start to talk about how we prep for a really uncertain fall. You'll remember that we spent most of May and June with no idea what the return to the classroom was going to look like at all. And now in September, running every two weeks starting on the 23rd, we're going to continue that conversation and give people a space to come and ask questions and to share the good and the bad of what's going on in their classrooms and give people a place to talk about what is going to be a tumultuous semester, right?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's like even if everything goes fine, and we make it to Christmas, and it's all great, we're going to have situations, how do you manage a student's two-week absence in a class where discussion and participation is a critical component of the grade? What do you do when you have to be away, but you're not actually sick and you want to continue delivering content to students, is there a way for that to happen? I just feel like there's all of these questions. No one's offering up any answers. So, at least what I can do with my little bit of space on campus is give people a place to at least have that conversation.

Brian Lamb:

And the summer conversations are pretty great, so hopefully, people will continue and hopefully, I mean, along the lines you just said, it will be an extension of that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's my hope. Yeah, that's my hope, is just, and as long as we need the space, I want to keep providing it to people, because it has been a really, I think it's been a fruitful space. I think people have helped each other a lot. It's nice to set up a space where peers can come together to share experience and wisdom. It's been helpful, I think, for some of the people who are maybe newer to teaching to have some sense that people who have been doing it a long time are also experiencing anxiety and questions about all the tumult in the air. So, yeah, I really love those sessions. I get a lot out of them, just being in them and I learn a lot.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And I've also found them to be a really useful place to be totally mercenary. They're really a useful place to mine for programming ideas because it's a good place to find out what people are feeling limited by. "I'm trying to do this in my class and I can't because of X, Y, Z-ed," right? And well, we can try to help find solutions around that. So from that perspective, from the perspective of growing the offerings of the department, those sessions have been really valuable as well. It's just always nice to hear what's actually happening in classrooms.

Brian Lamb:

I love it when sometimes if we're both a little bit free, you often already debrief after those chats and those are always fascinating, too, just to kind of. But the idea is that they provoke and all that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I just really love being with our community, particularly, the folks who have stuck with us and our offerings, even when they've been a little ramshackle over the last year. I think that we've developed those discussions. I think there's a core of maybe 25 or 30 people who I know will reliably sign up and come out for those conversations. And so, it's not a massive sample of the university. But they are the people I think who are maybe most, they're at least the people who are most willing to talk to me about problems and concerns. And that gives us a space to grow from as a unit.

Brian Lamb:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. All right. Well, I've had you here for half an hour. Is there anything else you wanted to say about the fall term or what people are coming up to or? Don't ask me any more questions, because that's really cheeky. Anything else you want to talk about with regards to fall before we wrap it up?

Brian Lamb:

I think we captured what we're doing. I mean, we don't really need to talk. We're going to extend some things we're doing and I'm really looking forward to working with you and Jamie on hopefully some WordPress cohort projects over the summer. A couple of our projects. We experimented with the idea of structuring workshop programming around project development with faculty, which I think makes the project so much better. And it's just more efficient, and I think just provides, yeah, better structure. I was pleased with how it went over the summer. And I really hope that we'll be able to extend that and I'm looking forward to working with you and Jamie on that and everyone else who comes out.

Brian Lamb:

And yeah, I mean, I guess, too, I just since I have this opportunity, anyone in our community, I just want to say, I want to really thank them for being willing to roll with so much. And there have been tough times and there's certainly been moments where we've received frustrating things, but at the same time, we've received a lot of really encouraging things, and people have really gone out of their way to express their support to us. And I can tell you, it really means a lot. And I do feel privileged to work in this university with this community, these faculty, these students. And I really hope we're going to still be friends in a few months.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That is, that's just a perfect tone to end this conversation on. But I agree. It's you don't go into Ed Tech unless you kind of like serving people and helping people achieve their goals. It's sort of central to how we approach the work. And so, anytime we know that we're succeeding at that it's really rewarding. So, yeah, and it's just a great community to work with.

Brian Lamb:

It really is.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Unless we've just broken something of theirs. And then they're mad at us and that's fair. All right. Thanks for your time today, Brian. I always appreciate it.

Brian Lamb:

I always appreciate the chance to visit Thank you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Talk soon.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, that is it for Season 2, Episode 2 of You Got This! As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me I'm bgray@tru.ca and I'm also on Twitter @brennacgray, and in both cases, that's Gray with an A. All

of our show notes and transcripts are posted at yougotthis.trubox.ca. And of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip, and my Tiny Teaching Tip is, and pretty much the only thing I'm able to talk about, apparently, which is I want to generously and warmly extend to you an invitation to talk to your students about the uncertainty that you're feeling about the term and to do it now, before anything gets too chaotic. Sometimes I think as instructors, we feel like we have to be the voice of reason. Hopefully, we are most of the time or an influence of unending calm, but I think that in this moment, those impulses are actually the wrong ones. I think in this moment, when uncertainty is on everyone's sleeve, and when the kinds of messages that our students are receiving might feel contradictory, either contradictory to previous messaging they've received or contradictory to the experience of the semester as they are living it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think it can be helpful to let your students know that it feels this way to everyone, especially for those who are teaching first year classes and especially for those who spend a lot of time interacting with first generation students. There's a tendency to believe that everyone else has it figured out and you're the only one who's lost and I suspect that that sensation is even more acute right now. So, if you're feeling uncertain, talk about it with your students. And where you can provide some certainty to them, I really encourage you to do so.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So by that, I mean, let them know what the process is, if they're going to miss class. If they know it ahead of time, they'll feel more confident to stay home when they're sick, which is what we want, right? If they're not sure, they might risk it, which is what we don't want. And the more we can ease anxiety, the more we can ease uncertainty, the more we can normalize the fact that we don't quite know how this whole semester is going to spool out, so it's okay if that's how you're feeling right now, the better for everyone.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's never a bad thing for our students to know us as human beings, flawed human beings who are struggling, too. I'm not advocating you turn your class into a therapy session, but I do think some acknowledgement of this moment we're in is really necessary and that acknowledgement is probably only going to come from you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Do you like how politically neutral I was in the way I phrased that? Growing as a person, I'm really proud of me.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

All right, folks, in all of my uncertainty, I shall leave you. I look forward to hearing from you in the next few days and talking to you again next week. Take care. You got this. And I'll talk soon. Bye-bye.