

**DISTANCED, NOT ISOLATED:
BUILDING COMMUNITY IN PANDEMIC TIMES**

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I join you today from my home near the Kamloops campus of Thompson Rivers University, which is located on the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc territory within the unceded traditional lands of Secwepemcúl'ecw (Secwepemc Nation). Learning has taken place on these lands since time immemorial.

I invite you to share the territory from which you join our conversation today in the public chat.

ABOUT ME

- I was an English instructor at Douglas College for nine years before transitioning to work as an educational technologist at TRU.
- I was an educational technologist for seven months before the pandemic hit (I have terrible timing).
- My research interests are in open tenure processes, scholarly podcasting, and educational technologies as care work, and it's the latter interest that has driven my work throughout Covid-19 to help faculty make good choices for students – and for themselves.

HOW ARE YOU?

If you feel willing to share in the public chat, I'm interested to hear about how the semester is going for you.

Do you feel connected to your community?

Are you able to access meaningful professional development?

COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

- Careful use of synchronous tools not for content delivery but for interaction and engagement (eg. podcast lecture + live discussion session).
- Intentionally building out space for happenstance (eg. chat forum, space to share pet pictures, open conferencing spaces, etc.).
- Weekly check-ins (eg. video blogs).
- Regular safe opportunities for check-ins from students (eg. surveys).
- Care-centered approach to workload.

HOW DO WE EXTEND THIS COMMUNITY TO STAFF/FACULTY SPACES?

Consider the question of academic identity: we develop our sense of ourselves as academics, teachers, and practitioners in relation to the norms of our community.

What happens when those norms dramatically change, and access to norm modelling becomes more complicated?



CONSIDER...

- “The conceptions academics have regarding their teaching role are formed through their prior education. Upon entering academia as a workplace, new faculty is moreover socialised into disciplinary and departmental teaching through a process of enculturation or academic induction.”
- The context of the post-pivot classroom was, for most faculty, wildly different from the context in which they were enculturated as learners or socialized as academics. How do you redefine academic identity – especially as teachers – in such scary and precarious times?

CONTEXT

- TRU (campus-side) has a faculty complement of about 500 people.
- Of those, at least 1/3 (perhaps closer to half) had no significant engagement with any learning technologies, including the LMS, prior to March 2020.
- Choices made at TRU (largely open-source and self-hosted tools, no remote proctoring for campus courses) and the make-up of our student body (remote users and lack of off-campus access to devices, internet) meant we strongly encouraged asynchronous delivery and limited use of high-bandwidth options.
- This meant we needed to offer opportunities to help faculty develop digital pedagogy skills quickly and efficiently.
- Like everyone, we were also operating in a bit of a policy vacuum.

TRU'S LTI DIGITAL TEACHING SUMMER CAMP

- 21 one-hour workshops delivered over 6 weeks (live + recording).
- Content ranged from conceptual to practical, with focus on **establishing norms supported by our best understanding of the research.**
- “Certificate of Digital Competency” awarded to participants who completed any eight sessions.
- Badges awarded via LMS to track skills development and report out to managers and / or for APAR and PRC.



UPTAKE

- Averaged just over 100 attendees per session for the live version, with 148 earning the Certificate of Digital Competency (and 17 more earning a special “perfect attendance” award for coming to all but one of the 21 sessions).
- 331 people attended at least one session; we awarded over 2000 badges.
- Recordings have been watched 100s of times, many with users re-watching segments repeatedly.
- These resources have also been adapted into an OER, Teaching Without Walls, by Melissa Jakubec and Michelle Harrison from our Instructional Design team.

FEEDBACK

- I don't take credit for the demand! But...
- Attendees reported that they were grateful for a space to collect and communicate about issues that mattered deeply to them.
- Meeting three times a week reinforced as sense of community for participants, who referred to themselves and each other as "Campers."
- Attendees reported that the badges and certificate, though silly!, helped them to recognize and quantify their own learning over the summer.
- Attendees also reported a strong preference for the "gamification" of the badges and faux-credential as a way to stay motivated.
- Attendees reported increased feelings of confidence and preparedness.

CARRY-FORWARD TO FALL 2020

- We wanted to continue the community-building but require less commitment, knowing how stressed out and overtaxed the community is right now.
- In addition to minimal programming this term (~8 workshops), we've developed a podcast for just-in-time teaching and learning advice.
- The show features interviews with staff and faculty from a variety of roles across the university, with a focus on care, workload management, and community.
- The website (where we post episodes, transcripts, and detailed show notes) receives about 150-200 unique visitors daily from TRU and beyond.

YOU GOT THIS!
YOUGOTTHIS.TRUBOX.CA

The content is tailored for TRU,
but we welcome listeners
anywhere who are interested in
care-centered teaching and
learning talk, with a focus on digital
tools. (Sounds a lot like ETUG.)



LESSONS LEARNED

- We do (and should) prioritize building space for students. Learning online requires intentional development of community.
- **But learning to teach online requires this community, too.**
- Academic identity formation typically happens within the context of the liminal work/social dynamic of the department, under leadership of experienced scholars in the discipline.
- Replicating that virtually – and with a sense of humour! – allowed faculty at TRU to develop confidence in new models of teaching, to take risks, and to feel supported in a deeply trying time.

QUESTIONS?

Connect with me on Twitter: [@brennacgray](https://twitter.com/brennacgray)