

Welcome to the UP TechTalk Podcast. Coming to you from the new Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland campus. Produced by: Academic Technology Services. With your hosts, Maria Erb and Sam Williams.

Sam: Thank you for joining us for UP TechTalk. This is Episode 4, and we have with us Dr. Alice Gates, Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Portland. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Gates: Thanks so much for having me.

Maria: Alice we're so glad you're here today, and we wanted to ask you about your Academic Technology Round Table Project from last year, which was introducing technology into a technology free zone. What led you to want to do that?

Dr. Gates: Well, the title of my project, I think, reveals a lot. So when I first started teaching 3 years ago at UP, I was actually kind of excited about the fact that students didn't automatically bring their laptops out and they were taking notes by hand, and that I could see a lot of benefits to that. I felt like their attention was on the front of the classroom, I appreciated that, you know, as a new professor. But, I also was starting to get curious about what was happening in other people's classrooms, what was happening in classrooms across the country, and I started to feel like my position was, my position of no technology was not very well informed. So, in conversations with Sam we talked about some different approaches and I decided I needed to kind of stoke that curiosity and so we came up with a project, a couple of projects, but one of the central ones was to use video in my Social Welfare Policy class. So, yeah the impetuous was really, you know I was curious. I had a sense that there were creative ways to use technology to actually enhance my teaching, that it wasn't just going to be a distraction, which I think was my initial fear.

Sam: Now we mentioned recently that you went from 0 to 100 in like, 2 seconds. You went from no technology to implementing several, an trying out several things. Was there something that you found really worked well for you in the classroom? I know you tried Near Pod briefly, and then the video. Was there something that really stood out as something that you're going to replicate moving forward?

Dr. Gates: Well, I think a few things, a few things helped at the beginning. When I started using Near Pod, which is a web based presentation program, I was really clear with the students that it was an experiment, and they were really open to trying something new, and they appreciated my being transparent with them about, you know, what was going on. And I got their feedback, so I think you know maintaining that interactive approach, really thinking of it as a, you know it's a relationship in the classroom between instructors and students, and so I tried Near Pod for a while. It didn't work for me, so well and I think you know, again it was based on if students had loved it and I was struggling, I would have figured out a way to make it work, but I think there was a pretty big learning curve on both of our

parts, and so I decided to go back to what I had been using before. So I think not being afraid to try new things, make mistakes, experiment a little bit, and yeah.

Sam: Yeah there's definitely that fear of failure when trying out technology, but I think the way that you approached it was very healthy, in that, you know, especially communicating to your students, that there's potential for problems and we're just going to get through it together. So it's an example of you know of a fun project that we've seen on campus in terms of the faculty coming back and not being traumatized by the experience.

Dr. Gates: Right, right.

Maria: So you implemented a really huge storytelling project for your class, can you tell us something about that?

Dr. Gates: Sure. The idea for the storytelling, the digital story project, came out of discussions with Sam about how is media being used, and how is video being used in my field, and it seemed like a natural connection with my policy class, because part of what I'm teaching them is how do you analyze policies, and then how do you advocate for them. So there's a political component and if you open your eyes and look around, and video is everywhere in politics and in lawmaking. So it was really, sort of a natural next step, and the project, I wanted to you know maintain the academic rigor of the assignments in the course, but then also, I knew I didn't want to evaluate them on their technical skills, and a lot of these are skills I myself didn't have, so I felt ill-equipped to make that a huge part of their grade. So the way that I designed the project was to keep the portion of the course where they were learning the skills. They were learning how to analyze policies and develop a position, write a persuasive policy brief or policy analysis. What I did was have them compress that assignment into, probably you know, two thirds of the time that it would take normally in the class, which left us, I think within the first week they had to make a decision about the policy that they would analyze, form groups, since I didn't want to have 20 individual video projects. So, they developed their ideas, did the research, wrote the analysis, and then by week 5 I think they were starting to design the kind of video they were going to produce, started filming by week 6 I think. So it was, you know it involved a lot of reorganizing of the assignments, but again, with an eye to keeping the heart to the assignment, which was really understanding an issue and learning ways to communicate it to a public.

Maria: Well that sounds like such a jam-packed schedule you had for them. How did they handle that?

Dr. Gates: They were very excited about the project. I think you know one of the ways that I started was to, ask them to think about what is the role of video in their lives. They watch a lot of video, whether it's YouTube, or you know their making their own videos on their phones and sharing them with friends, family through social media. And, so I think I didn't have to sell them on the importance of you

know, channeling video into a new domain, into policy analysis, and it was really easy for me to look at examples, bring examples into the class, of how advocacy organizations were using video. So they were just a good group of students and very amenable. I guess you know, it was challenging for them to jump right in, cause students tend to ruminate about things, and so I pushed them. I was also pretty flexible in terms of changing deadlines when I saw the whole class was not able to make those deadlines initially. I also got a lot of support from Academic Technology Services and instructional technology in the Digital Lab. That made it a lot more manageable. I watched student's anxiety levels diminish the more skills that they got and the more that they realized they were going to be supported through the whole process. I think it would have been different if I just sent them out there and said make a video. So I tried to provide, again even though a lot of these skills are really new to me, a supportive environment for them to complete the project.

Sam: So did you have the library come into your class, or did you have people from the ATS department, or did you have people come in your class to assist as well or was it just in the student's own time?

Dr. Gates: We actually went to the Digital Lab. So I had 20 students in the class, which made it more manageable to take the whole class at once. So starting, I think week 3 we got an orientation to the equipment and Jose in the Digital Lab went over some techniques for interviewing, for you know how to get high quality video, audio, and then for every, I think we spent 6 or 7 Friday classes, which is 55 minutes times 6 in the Digital Lab working. So it was a way for them to have dedicated time, since putting students in groups can also mean that they're struggling to find time outside of class to meet. So I said let's just do this as a part of our 3 hours a week as a class. It also gave me a chance to observe what was going on, both in terms of the products they were making, but also the process, making sure that people were participating equitably to the extent that I could.

Maria: And the results that you got were you very impressed, more than you thought you would be?

Dr. Gates: Yeah, there were pieces of the, I mean the students produced 4 I think excellent videos, and they covered a range of different policies. Some students picked policies issues that were much harder to even research at the beginning, so there was a group that was looking at a policy that was affecting transgender individuals. There aren't very many policies, and so the issue is actually what are the policies that we need, where do we see policies making a difference in the lives of trans folks. And so, I mean they came at the project a different, different sets of challenges. In each video, I saw just a ton of work going into it. They learned a lot. They learned about production, and the challenges. There was one group that did interviews with three people and had to throw out two of the interviews because the audio was so, it was such poor quality, and they were heartbroken. But, that's part of the, I mean I emphasize you know this is a process oriented approach and so that's part of learning how to do this. And, you know they brought that lesson to the

whole class so everyone benefited from it even though it wasn't reflected in the final video. So, the videos are these great artifacts of a process that really represented a lot more learning than you can capture in the 4 or 5 minutes that they produced.

Sam: So was there a difference in the amount of information the students were able to cover? Was there just a, did they go into more depth into the subject than they normally would have?

Dr. Gates: I would say that, they were forced to actually pick a focus of their, so the policy brief is a more general analysis, this is the product that they had to write prior to doing the video. So they had to cover disadvantages of a particular policy, advantages, what are the intended and unintended consequences of policies like this. So for the video, they really had to figure out how can we communicate this so in, I would say in almost every single case that they figured a way to sort of, to hone in on a particular perspective. So in, I was mentioning a video about policy affecting trans individuals, they used an interview as sort of a focal point for that video. So it was someone's story and it was told through an interview question and answer. But that, you know I think made it much more effective. In other cases, the students in the Dream Act video students engaged a lot of people on campus just in asking and answering a question, do I look illegal to you? And I have thought a lot about how just in the process of engaging people you're engaged in policy practice. You have to explain to this is what we're doing and why. Do you know what the Dream Act is? So there's activism also built into the process of creating these projects.

Maria: And how will this experience affect the way that you teach the course in the future?

Dr. Gates: Well I think you know if the name of my ATR proposal was Introducing Technology into a Technology Free Zone, now I really welcome it and how I do this project in the future I'm not totally sure. Some of it for me I think still depends on the class size because it is intimidating to think about doing this with a group of 30 or more. But I'm very open to it. And I think that one of the benefits that you know that we've discussed, is that students became much more critical consumers of media, and so whether or not they create their own project, I want them to understand that everyone has a point of view and that you're seeing, whether it's reading or watching a video, or listening to a news story, that people are bringing that perspective and that subject position. So that's the thing that I'm most excited about is I think it really taught them critical thinking skills and something, video is ubiquitous but I don't think we watch it with the same critical eye that we might read a text.

Sam: Well it's really great to see that you were able to, we always talk about imbedding different things inside our curriculum, so you were able to imbed technology in your curriculum, you were able to imbed media literacy in your curriculum on top policy and everything. So I definitely applaud you for taking on

that challenge, like I said 0 to 100 in 2 seconds. But it's definitely been a fun project to watch during this time.

Dr. Gates: Well thank you for all of your support, I never would have even dared to try this without the great support I've gotten from ATS.

Maria: Well it was a terrific project and it was great to hear about it again.

Dr. Gates: Great, thanks so much.

Sam: Yeah, so we'll look forward to additional projects in the future and fun things coming out of your department.

Dr. Gates: Absolutely.

Sam: Thank you.

Dr. Gates: Thanks.

Maria: Thanks Alice.

Sam: Thank you for joining us for another episode of the UP TechTalk Podcast. Just a reminder that we post a new podcast every Friday morning, and you can find us at techtalk.up.edu.