Sam: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk 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 Erg and Sam Williams.

Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Today we have with us, Dr. Tanya Crenshaw, who is the associate professor of Computer Science with the Shiley School of Engineering. Thank you, Dr. Crenshaw, for joining us.

Dr. Crenshaw: Oh no problem, hi.

Maria: Tanya thanks for coming over today. And we’ve been having such great discussions with faculty around their use of technology in the classroom. And we know that you’re doing lots of things, and different things, and can you tell us about some of them?

Dr. Crenshaw: So, there’s ways that I do not use technology that seem like, well why not? And then there’s ways that I do use technology. So, I don’t use the clickers, I don’t care. I just learn their names and I have cards with their names on them, and whenever I want to call on someone, I randomly draw a card from the stack. So, there’s these sort of Luddite moves that I do in the classroom because I assume the clickers will break, and I don’t want to spend anytime debugging the clickers. I don’t know if that’s true, but…

Maria: Does that surprise your students when you pull out cards and things like that?

Dr. Crenshaw: I think they’ve been inundated with cards from their previous CS faculty. I think we all sort of used the card system because we’re a band of people that professionally we have to debug technology all the time and we don’t want to do it more if it doesn’t serve a purpose that something like piece of paper also serves. The way that I do use technology in the classroom, is I think it’s, it might be outside of the classroom. I am super excited, I am super excited about online classroom technology, like, because there are certain topics that I just don’t want to talk about anymore, and if a student can go watch an 8 minute video introducing the thing that I’ve introduced 500 million thousand times, then that’s going to, that’s frees up like 8 minutes of our lecture to do an in class activity or talk to each other, and look at each others faces and get to know each other better, and learn about the human component in the classroom. So I think to me, technology isn’t about, or technology in the classroom isn’t about like how do I put more computers in there, it’s how do I leverage the technology around me so that I can talk to people more.

Sam: Nice.

Maria: That’s really interesting, especially coming from CS faculty.

Dr. Crenshaw: I know.

Maria: I think that most people don’t have that perspective. And it’s really interesting that you do.

Sam: And do you use a combination, so you talk about finding stuff. Is it a combination of found things on the Internet like videos and other things and stuff that you create as well?

Dr. Crenshaw: So it’s a mixture. So for one of my courses, I will like, I will make the online video, and I will say go watch this video, and I know, I put exactly what I need in that video because I really need that 8 minutes to really serve a full 8 minutes, because it’s for like the sophomores, and I really want to get like everything out of those 8 minutes. With my upper division courses like software engineering right now, we’re learning 17 things. So like JavaScript and Git and CSS and HTML, and like all of these things and I, half of them did that last summer for their job internship and the other half have never seen it in their lives. And so, I use things like Code School, which is a really nice online learning website, to say alright go watch this 11 minute video on Git, do the tutorial, and now let’s all try to get the same starting line. So that I know that you know like, this base thing that I can trust that you all know.

Maria: Yeah that’s great that there’s so many resources out there for you to point to and fill in some of the gaps with.

Dr. Crenshaw: I love, I feel like the Internet got really cool in the last year, like I, or I wasn’t paying attention, or suddenly I’m like looking up from the ground, but there’s Code School, and I can type while they tell me what to type and I can try it out and it works on my computer and I don’t have to install anything, and I don’t have to set anything up it just works? This is amazing! And then sometimes I’ll be on Code School and this is the stupidest video that I’ve ever watched and I’m not going to make them watch it. So the quality depends, and you have to be careful about what you tell them to watch because you want to make sure the quality is good, but this is exciting, I don’t have to talk about Git for 8 minutes.

Sam: Well I love the idea that you’re trying to open up more in the classroom for the conversation. Because you know, some of the readings that I’ve come across at times, it’s like they say, you know, when the students come to class, and they hear something that’s the first time they’re hearing it, they don’t start making meaning of that content before they go home at the end of the day or the next day you know. So by giving them that content ahead of time, then they’re ready to come to the class and like engage in a conversation, like make meaning of that content.

Maria: Well let me ask you this. Do you have the same problem with assigning your videos to your students that like a literature professor would have assigning readings to students? I mean are you worried that they’re not watching the videos?

Dr. Crenshaw: They’re not watching them. I had this really grouchy moment, it was yesterday. I’m one of those people that I don’t realize I’m grouchy when I am, like I have to do something that’s mean and I’m like, oh I’m really grouchy right now. So I say ok, you guys go watch a video, and at the start of class next time, I’m just going to ask these 10 questions, and I’m going to call you randomly from my stack of luddite paper cards, and if I call your name you answer the question. And so, I call somebody’s name, they say ah I don’t know. Ok, you don’t know, thank you for being brave. Then I called on the next guy, he’s like nah I don’t know. And I said, all you’ve got to do is watch a video! Like that wasn’t a very University of Portland moment on my half, I didn’t, I don’t know. That wasn’t a safe space, that wasn’t a room of unconditional love and no judgment in that moment, but they don’t always watch the video. It’s just an 8 minute video, no they don’t always watch the video.

Sam: So I mean, so I mean you are putting some accountability back on them by doing the random…

Dr. Crenshaw: I need them to watch the video, because if they aren’t, just like you said, I want to prime the pump, like I want them to see it before I talk about it because so they aren’t like what is happening? But instead they’re like oh pointer I’ve heard that before. Oh Git, I’ve heard that before. My first car, was a 19, what was it 1990, 1989 Toyota Starlet. And this was the kind of car, that before you start it, you had to pull the, there was a little pull thing, like for the carburetor, and it was the choke, like it had a manual choke and it was labeled choke. And you had to pull the choke before you started the car, and they don’t make cars like that really anymore, but I feel like that’s, I don’t want to choke students. But what I’m saying is, I want to like give the engine a little bit of lubrication, a little bit of oxygen, a little bit of gasoline before they come into the room so that that 85 minutes that they’ve paid $130 for is more meaningful and they get more out of it, instead of just sitting and wondering when it’s going to be over.

Sam: Yeah, not it’s a great approach. I mean, we see quite a few people trying the approach. It’s good to hear you being very honest about, you know what’s happening in the classroom.

Dr. Crenshaw: If, that’s one of my strengths, is honesty.

Sam: Well and it’s good to see that you are creating your own content too, and I believe you have your own website that you host a lot of your own course curriculum through as well. How’s it going for you hosting your own site versus using like a learning management system?

Dr. Crenshaw: So part of the reason that I started hosting my own site is because when I graduated, there was a cohort of my friends who also graduated from grad school with their PhD’s and they were becoming professors at the same time. And, we were all freaked out, and we were like I have to teach like security and I’ve never taken it, and so we wanted to like help each other, and share our materials with each other. And the problems with things like Moodle is, my friend Erin in Saint Louis can’t log in, and so to me I feel like the work that I do for education really needs to be public, it really needs to be out there, and so one of the really motivating reasons why I do all this goofy work of hosting my own website and putting my videos on the web so people can like them on Facebook or whatever, is because I want to get my stuff out there so that other educators can leverage them as well.

Maria: That’s great to hear. And typically, what do you make videos about most of the time?

Dr. Crenshaw: I think, let’s see. The last video I made was about the merge-sort algorithm.

Sam: So I need to go watch the video? I don’t know what the heck that is.

Dr. Crenshaw: Yeah you need to sort something on a computer…

Sam: We’ll add something on this post…

Maria: Are you doing a screen cast or are you out there filming all kinds of things? What are you doing?

Dr. Crenshaw: So I’m, my lifestyle with the three and a half year old, demands that everything I do serve like 10 purposes. Like, I can’t just do one thing and it serves one thing, everything I do must serve 10 things. So, when I’m making videos for my students, I also I’m doing something to level up my own production abilities, so I met with Jose Velazco last summer, and I said my audio is terrible, I need help with audio. And then I, I’m not good at filming things. Like I’ll do animations or I’ll talk through slides, or I’ll show like a quick time, real time capture of what I’m typing. But I hadn’t ever done film, and he was like you should just try it. I don’t know. So the last video I made, merge-sort algorithm, I was like alright I’m going to film it. So I just like let’s throw a bunch of letters on the table and I just sort all the letters explaining the algorithm as I go, but I don’t feel bold enough to narrate as I’m doing it. So I film it perfectly and then I narrate, and then I put that into Garage Band, and I get the audio just right, because I learned one more thing from last summer that I really upped my audio, so I feel like every time I make a new video, I get like a little bit better at this gig. Because, I’m excited about all this online learning, because that means like, all the educators in the world are telling all of these stories and capturing them, and we can use each others stuff instead of, ugh I have to introduce Git again.

Sam: Right. Well I love that your philosophy on, like this open philosophy on education, and definitely we see that with the books and stuff, but I love, I just what you and your colleagues, you said you and your colleagues are doing as well, is putting this content out to the world. Especially you know when we see our president talking about free community college, and a lot of these movements around getting this knowledge out. You know and we come to school to be led through that knowledge. So you know it’s not like people worry about if you put out too much to the world, that you’re going to get rid of teachers and all this other stuff. But really, it’s a lot of stuff that sill needs that facilitation.

Maria: Yeah in K-12 communities, you guys have this going on for a long time, right. I mean teachers are always sharing lesson plans, and curriculum and stuff like that, and it’s about time that it arrived in higher-ed.

Dr. Crenshaw: Well and the goofy thing is when like radio came out, like when we had radios with the big cathode ray tube inside of them, people were like, oh no radio is going to get rid of teachers. This fear already happened, we already were did this. But teachers are still around, because we need those, it’s not enough to just have the book or have the video or have the thing that has the knowledge in it, the information in it, you need a person to help translate that so that it gets burned into you. You know like, it’s this sort of physical thing we’re talking, we’re working on a project, I create a project for you, I hold you accountable to the project. It’s like these people to people relationships to like transfer that information that’s in the video to knowledge in your body.

Sam: And if you have an entertaining professor like yourself

Dr. Crenshaw: It helps.

Maria: Yeah I was going to say that goes a long way.

Dr. Crenshaw: I might have fenced with the chalkboard this morning that might have happened. But I will not admit to it.

Sam: I just remember helping you record video at one point.

Dr. Crenshaw: Oh yes. Oh yeah you’ve

Sam: You just picking up a big box of toys and just throwing them down onto the table. It was fun.

Dr. Crenshaw: It was, I, yes. That was another moment where I had to get, I needed to do something and I couldn’t, and I didn’t know how to do it so I’m leveraging University of Portland people to like help me get better at this. You were also instrumental in that video because I had this idea that I was going to have like an actual ax chop the table or something, and you were like that might not be the right approach.

Sam: Right, exactly.

Dr. Crenshaw: I am every thankful to you for helping me not have ax violence.

Maria: What class was this?

Dr. Crenshaw: This was for a Green Dot video. So this is one of the other things that I make videos for, is the Green Dot show.

Sam: And you’ve been one of the, you know key supporters here on the University of Portland campus. Do you want to just bring up a little bit about that at the end of this podcast?

Maria: Yeah.

Dr. Crenshaw: Sure. Now? Is that now?

Maria: Yeah it is now.

Sam: Yeah let’s talk about Green Dot.

Dr. Crenshaw: Green Dot is, it started as this sort of army of 20 people who are friends with Christina and Martin Monto, Christina Houck and Martin Monto who had written a grant to get money for this Green Dot program. And the Green Dot program, it’s not a credit card that’s the other Google hit for that. It’s, it’s so simple and so stupid, it’s just I’m going to give you permission to make it your business to intervene when you something bad happen. That’s all it is. So you’re walking across a parking lot, and two people are arguing and it doesn’t look good, something flicks you in the gut. Green Dot just says it is your business to get in there and try to, make that not happen. So that’s all it is, and we want to try to convey that message, in as many ways as we can, and I am the nerd of the army of twenty, there’s a lot of, there’s a lot of history professors in there and Christina’s in there, and she’s good about talking about feelings, and I’m not really good with the humans, but I can make videos. So I’ve been working on making videos for Green Dot. We’re working on one right now, it’s really exciting. But you, I’ve worked with you in the past to make one, that’s the one with the toys falling all over the table with Karen Eifler telling a story about how she did a Green Dot once. And it’s been a lot of fun because again, everything I do has to serve 10 purposes. And so, I want to get the message of Green Dot out there, but I also want to have better audio.

Sam: Yeah. Well and it’s definitely showing, you’re bringing this skill set to many places on campus. And it’s definitely appreciated I’m sure by many people on campus, and if people want to find out more about Green Dot they can go to up.edu/greendot to find out more and see your fun videos.

Dr. Crenshaw: That’s me. If you Google my name, you can see all kinds of stuff there’s all kinds of stuff.

Sam: Is it tanyacrenshaw.com?

Dr. Crenshaw: It’s just Tanya. You can just Google my name.

Sam: Just Tanya Crenshaw.

Dr. Crenshaw: Yeah I’m the first hit. There are only 9 Tanya Crenshaw’s in the US, so I have one of those really nice Googleable names. It’s not like Sam Williams.

Sam: Oh I know. It’s awful. Everybody’s talking about like you should create your brand online, and I was like ok.

Dr. Crenshaw: Me and 5,000 other guys.

Sam: You know Bob Smith and Sam Williams, and all these fun people with great last names. Right? Exactly. So, we just wanted to thank you for dropping in and kind of giving your perspective on the classroom.

Dr. Crenshaw: It was a lot of fun.

Sam: It was fun, and we will add, we will Google Tanya Crenshaw and we will add some videos to where this podcast is posted.

Dr. Crenshaw: Google my name, do it. Pick your favorites I’m interested to know what your favorites are.

Sam: So if people want to see that, because this is also going to be on iTunes, but if you visit techtalk.up.edu and look for the blog post for Tanya Crenshaw you’ll be able to see some of her work, or just Google Tanya Crenshaw. So Dr. Crenshaw thank you so much for coming here today.

Dr. Crenshaw: It was fun, TLC out.

Maria: Thanks Tanya.

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