

Sam Williams: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk podcast. Coming to you from the new academic multi-media studio on the University of Portland campus. Produced by Academic Technology Services. With your hosts Maria Urb and Sam Williams.

Welcome to UP Tech Talk. Today we have with us Jeffery White who is an instructor with international languages and cultures here at the University of Portland. Thank you for joining us.

Jeffery White: Thank you for having me.

Maria Urb: Thanks for coming over today. We know you've got a couple of blogging projects currently going on. Can you tell us about those?

Jeffery White: Sure, sure. I teach German 301, 302 that's the third year German in which we actually do a lot more work in reading longer text and also writing. As part of my course I have a blog on myself as a developing language learner. The purpose of that is really for the students to be able to post their writing, and also over time, to be able to see how they are actually developing. That project is ongoing for the whole year.

Secondly, I teach a course on Maximizing Study Abroad, that's the title of it. It's a brand new course. It just started this spring. I have about nine students in that course, and we are keeping a blog called Maximizing Study Abroad, it's a WordPress blog, in which they are posting information about themselves, their initial wishes, and purposes for studying abroad, and also reflections on the process of cultural adjustment, cultural learning, cultural learning strategies, language learning strategies. My goal with that really, is for them again to see themselves as developing learners, developing individuals who are getting ready to study abroad. Now the interesting thing with this blog is that it will continue going on beyond the course so while they're abroad they can continue adding to the blog. I'll be monitoring the blog, and my hope is that we will have a cohort community, and that we're able to in a sense support each other, and that I'm able to help coach them as they are going through the amazing process, the transformative process, of study abroad.

Sam Williams: You teach German and is there any other languages you teach, or ...

Jeffery White: I teach German, but I also teach in the area of applied linguistics, so the course I teach is on language learning strategies. We do actually do some research on language learners in that course, and this Maximizing Study Abroad course could perhaps fall under some of that applied linguistics category as well.

Sam Williams: The blogs themselves, are they both German focused, or are they like studies abroad, Maximizing Studies Abroad, is that for any student doing study abroad, or ...

Jeffery White: That's correct. It's any student doing study abroad, and it's certainly open for other students doing work with the Morrow Center or going through say China with the entrepreneurship program if they want to, actually explore how they can really take full advantage of being abroad. Being a sojourner abroad. That's what the course is for. It also really supports the Sysco Learning Outcomes for intercultural development and learning, so I see this really as a course that is hopefully taking our students in new directions in that regard.

Maria Urb: What are some of the strategies that you focus on in the course?

Jeffery White: With the 191, the Maximizing Study Abroad course?

Maria Urb: Yeah.

Jeffery White: I really want students to be able to see cultural learning and its complexity, but to do that we need to break it down. We look at five dimensions of cultural learning, myself as a cultural being, elements of culture, culture specific learning, culture general learning, and really strategic learning. Learning about learning in terms of being in a different culture.

Basically by doing this they are able to anticipate what will be happening with the cultural adjustment process. That typically is a U-curve where you start off with euphoria being in a new place. After a while things aren't going so well, you're in conflict, you have culture shock, then you have to gradually get out of it, adjust, and adapt if you're there long enough. By engaging them in conversations about what culture is, it's different facets. It's not about national culture, it's really about culture in a complex framework of various definitions. This can include cultures as beliefs, cultures as identity, culture as contested, and culture dealing with power and discourse groups and how they interact and one may dominate the other. Also culture as fragmentary, culture as also relative, not absolute.

I know I would succeed to say with a Salzburg student who would come back and understand for example, why certain behaviors in Salzburg occur like when you go to a restaurant why the waiters are different than here. I have seen people who have gone to Germany or Austria, been there for a while and they still say those darn waiters, they're so rude. No, they not rude, they're actually professional.

Maria Urb: How rude are they?

Jeffery White: They aren't.

Maria Urb: I mean how professional are they?

Jeffery White: I think many, many waiters and wait staff see themselves as having a profession, and there are also cultural practices that are quite different than what we are

used to here. That would include, for example, you typically would need to call the waiter to come over. The waiter is not going to come by and say, "Well hi, my name is Doug, I'll be your server today, and I'm going to be overly polite." That's just not how it's done.

Sam Williams: A little bit more succinct and like you said, professional.

Jeffery White: Yes, yes. Right.

Sam Williams: One thing that I noticed because I just got back from Salzburg, and the ... I didn't really notice anything with the wait staff so much, but it's going to be such a goofy American thing to notice, but the McDonald's in Salzburg was very nice compared to anything you would find in the US. I don't know why this just struck me as odd, but it was like a café environment, like they recreated a café environment. You get higher end pastries, you get different ... It was just an interesting thing I had to stop for a second. I told Renee, Dr. Horsica, that you would not find this in the US.

Jeffery White: I think they serve beer, too, right?

Sam Williams: I believe so, yeah.

Jeffery White: Right, right. I've never gone into one there, but yeah.

Sam Williams: I hadn't wanted to, but we ended up going by one day, and it was one of those moments I was like, this is not what I was expecting.

Jeffery White: It's localized in a way.

Sam Williams: Yeah. They definitely localized it. It was very odd when you left the building because they had yodeling, which I thought was an interesting, weird just as an American leaving, other people weren't noticing it, but it kind of struck me as very odd, like in my face, to have that as you were exiting the building. When I was there, though, I found it very, just a kind community. I didn't really notice anything glaring for myself, but it would be interesting to hear from the student like within the blog, what are those things that they notice. Is that kind of some of the stuff you're asking them to blog about, like their experiences, observations, or ...

Jeffery White: Ideally that's what I am hoping for. Now, of course, after the course is done, there's no obligation that they blog, but hopefully we've built such a close community that that will continue, and of course I will reach out to them while they are abroad to encourage continued contributions. Before they go, however, they will be blogging, and they are right now, about their conceptions of what they're expecting, what they think their target culture is like.

Today we were talking about certain values and behaviors that they have here in the United States that may not work in their target culture, or in another culture. They'll be blogging about that, and it will be nice if they could continue, and we could see this progression over time of human development of really college student human development, from being here at UP and immersing in a different culture. Then, Ideally also, is re-entry, because that's another story.

Sam Williams: Definitely.

Maria Urb: Do you cover that in the course, too?

Jeffery White: Yes, we will be, we will be. I won't be having the course when they come back, but we will be talking about it, because they need to know that that can, and often is, an issue for anybody who's coming back from being abroad after an extended stay.

Maria Urb: I was curious, too. Have you put the expectation on your students that they write a blog piece every week, or are they required to weigh in on several different topics, or how do you want them to kind of move through that whole stream of all the topics that you mentioned with the complexity of culture.

Jeffery White: Well with the Maximizing Study Abroad it will be, it is a weekly contribution based on our conversation, so at the end of every session I give them an assignment for blogging. It deals with what we just talked about, or it may be putting up on the blog something they've prepared for that day.

Maria Urb: Do the students comment on each other's pieces?

Jeffery White: This is brand new, so I will be encouraging that. I have in the past had students do that, but many don't. Just I think, like in the general public you have people looking, and you have people actually engaging.

Maria Urb: How comfortable are they in general with blogging?

Jeffery White: I find that increasingly they're more comfortable with it, and as long as it doesn't get too complex, and I keep it fairly simple. The most they're doing is text and perhaps still photos. I haven't had video or anything in the blog. I do a project in the 300 level German class where we work with the digital lab to create a journalistic personal profile that is based on a sample from Profuse magazine from Austria and there they actually do photo shoots in the digital lab. They're doing it actually today and tomorrow, and they write in that genre, and then we will be posting that in the blog. It's the first year I've done it where we actually putting it in the blog as well as having it essentially like a magazine slick that will be posting hopefully in public if not, maybe we'll do it in the class, but yes.

Sam Williams: As a professor, compared to how you may have taught in the past, does the blog bring something extra to the teaching and learning, or do you find that it's a little bit extra just busy work. What kind of value have you found with the blog?

Jeffery White: The value's really in a learning community. That's what I want every class to be. We're not solo learners, we're learning as a community. Especially with language. It's a very social cultural process of learning, or can be, it can be made that way. With a blog you have a sense of community, you have a sense of something that has presence, that can be lasting, that can be returned to. MOODLE, for me, sometimes is kind of stagnant and boring, frankly, and it doesn't have the pleasant interface and appearance that a WordPress blog can have. Then of course compared to years ago, just doing papers seems to be too much of a private affair, and this is much more within the classroom community at least, public.

Sam Williams: Do the students, when they're blogging, do you ask them to blog both in German and in English or is it just more of the English with the reflection on the cultural aspects?

Jeffery White: It depends. Of course with the Maximizing Study Abroad, English is the language we're using so that's all in English, however, it just brings up a good point. I could actually have them do some blogging in the target language. Why not? Especially when we get to language learning strategies, so thank you for that tip.

For German 302 it's been in German thus far, and for this semester what we'll be doing is continuing to post in German then, however, writing commentary about it in English sort of as a meta language as much as about their writing. Another thing that I am doing is what I call cultural reflections or structured reflections actually. Actually I don't call it, it's called this by some other researchers in the area, but structured reflections for transformational learning. That's where we, in English actually, write about some aspect of cultural difference, cultural learning, what they're actually learning or how they're developing inter-culturally from their experience of language learning and dealing with different cultural artifacts in German.

There we would, for example, we'll be writing about stereotypes of panhandlers that we have in the United States and in Salzburg. What do we notice about differences. That will be one topic that we approach and another one would be how power seems to reveal itself in stories about migration in Austria and the media. Those are a couple of topics they'll be writing about in English, and then I have a rubric that I use to evaluate those, actually every posting for the German class.

Sam Williams: This is a new project? The maximizing is the new project, right?

Jeffery White: Correct.

Sam Williams: The other one, how long has that been running?

Jeffery White: I've been doing this one, the 301,302 this year. I've done other course blogs, for other courses.

Sam Williams: I remember some in the past so that's why I was curious.

Jeffery White: This is the first time I've done it two semester blog for 301, 302.

Sam Williams: That's awesome. I'm really happy that you're taking advantage of the blogging. We're big fans of blogging. I can see podcasting and other ways of getting information out, and communicating, and I love the idea of creating a community, a learning community. I think it's very important and really, for the students to know they have the support of a community when they're studying abroad as well.

Jeffery White: Right.

Sam Williams: I say thanks for all the wonderful things you are doing around that, and we're glad we can partner with projects that you're working on.

Jeffery White: I should add, it's not just me, it's really the Sysco conversation has been going on that Kate Reagan started years ago, then also I've been in conversations with Eddie Contreras and study abroad, and of course Father Wheeler before that. The Maximizing Study Abroad handbook which is the actual book the course is based on, we've had Dr. Andrew Cohen here a couple times in the past few years to talk about language and cultural learning strategies. This has all been a collaborative effort over time.

Sam Williams: Not only are you doing all those wonderful things, but you also have a role with our learning commons. I just kind of wanted to put this at the end of our podcast, just kind of do a plug for the work you're doing over there. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're doing with the learning commons?

Jeffery White: Maybe more importantly, what we're doing with the learning commons. The learning commons is under the Shepherd's Center which is directed by Brenda Griner, as you probably know. We're part of a whole body of student academic support, the Shepherd Academic Resource Center, the learning commons encompasses the peer academic support, the peer academic learning assistance or tutoring. We have the math resource center, the writing center, that operate within that space. We have chemistry, biology, tutoring, speech and presentation support, group work support, languages of course, which is how I got involved with it, and we're actually just starting ...

We started economics and business law last semester and nursing this semester. We're having a couple courses there of physio pathology and, I hope I got that right, and pharmacology, so it's growing. Again, with the support of

faculty colleagues who act as discipline specific coordinators like Kara Hearch in the writing center and Carolyn James from math resource center, and others, and as well the support of the whole Shepherd Academic Resource Center. We've been involved in a wonderful strategic planning process for ourselves. We have a lot of synergy with accessible education services and learning assistance counseling with Brother Thomas, and Kelly Carter and Matt Daily working with a variety of students, and of course under the direction of Brenda Griner.

The learning commons moved to the new space in Buckley in August, and saw over 2600 appointments for the fall, and is really becoming, I think, a greater space in part because we are focusing more on training our academic assistance with tutor general training. They bring a lot of content knowledge, but they also need to be able to help students with a lot of general learning strategies so that they can really access that content more effectively.

We really see this as an opportunity to support the student more than ever before. Not necessarily that we're just supporting more students, but more deeply and with a really general approach to learning and the specific content.

Sam Williams: That's some wonderful work that you're all doing.

Jeffery White: Thank you.

Sam Williams: Just thank you. I wanted to be sure we got a plug in for that work.

Maria Urb: Right.

Sam Williams: Just thank you so much for stopping by today, and letting us to know a little bit more about your projects.

Jeffery White: Thank you for the invitation.

Maria Urb: Thanks Jeffery.

Sam Williams: 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.