

Maria Erb: Welcome to UP TechTalk. We're here in the studio today with Eric Anctil, one of our favorite guests, and my cohost Stephen Loutzenheiser is joining me today as well. Hi Stephen.

Stephen: Hi Maria. Hi Eric.

Maria Erb: Hi Eric.

Eric Anctil: Hi guys.

Maria Erb: Today we have Eric with us to talk about his upcoming UP Crossroads talk, which hopefully will join us for live on February 15th at 3:00 PM in the digital lab. Eric also has a surprise topic for us today, and so we'll be exploring that together. Eric, give our audience a teaser for what you'll be talking about in a few ... Oh, actually in a week for UP Crossroads.

Eric Anctil: Well, thanks for having me here. It's great to see you both. I really want to explore what I think could be the beginning of a cultural shift in how we think about our relationship to social media. The more and more we learn how insidious they are about exploiting our private lives, and what are college students' attitudes about that, and how our younger people thinking about their relationship to their own media, and surveillance, and privacy and a whole host of issues around what it means to be kind of living in a digital life? So, I'm going to bring some things to the talk that extend that conversation and help us begin to explore if there is really maybe going to be some kind of cultural shift around people and their relationship to these big companies.

Maria Erb: What do you feel are some of the leading indicators that have you suspicious that we're in the middle of some sort of shift?

Eric Anctil: It's just kind of a feeling, I guess. You know, I've been working with college students on and off since around 2000. I started teaching in higher education in 2000, and that was back in the Friendster day, and that was just shortly after Napster came out. We just didn't have social networking the way that we have it today. Over the last ... I started showing a film in one of my classes called Growing Up Online that was a PBS documentary that covered some students as they were graduating from high school, and was kind of a year in their life, and their relationships to social media. It tackled things like cyberbullying, but it also tackled things like parties that were broadcast online live, and kind of the fallout from some of those things. Really just exploring this kind of new way of living a digital life largely online, and that was back in 2008.

Eric Anctil: Then over about the last 10 or 11 years, I've seen students more and more use smartphones, and use social media, but lately I feel like there's been ... And, five or six years ago, people didn't really question it. Like it was just a given that you would use social media, and be on places like Facebook, or eventually migrate to Instagram or whatever. But I feel like there's been a shift lately. I can just feel

it in my classrooms, and in the conversations I'm having with students, that there's this unsettled feeling that things are mysterious and dark in places, and we don't really know what the companies are doing with us. I just feel this shift occurring, and I can feel it in the way that students talk about their relationship to their social media. There's this guardedness that didn't use to be there, and it's really interesting to me.

Maria Erb: Well, one thing I'm thinking of is I'm just wondering if we're just seeing a replay of kind of earlier forms of this, like in the Manchurian Candidate for example, or just the early films that would have the Coca Cola advertisements stuck in the middle of them really quickly. You know? I just feel like that's kind of playing out again, and people weren't aware of those things at the beginning when they happened and then they became aware of them, and so there was more public kind of outcry about it, and maybe a shift in what filmmakers were doing, or advertisers were doing and so forth. I kind of feel like maybe that's what's happening. A little bit more light's being shed on what's actually going on in, and maybe people aren't going to be comfortable with it, and maybe some things will change.

Eric Anctil: I think you could be right. I don't know if things are going to change or not, but I feel like there's just a different temperature of the water now. Last year, I remember I was teaching the same class I'm teaching now, which is a technology and education class, and some students, we were talking about surveillance, and some students were talking about things that had percolated into the news about were social media companies, largely Facebook, were they opening up your mic on your phone and eavesdropping on phone conversations you were having, because people reported that they were having these experiences where advertising would pop up that was relevant to their conversations they were having, but there was no evidence of anything in their social feeds to indicate that this ad should have popped up. People were really paranoid.

Eric Anctil: I was really dismissive last year. I just said, "I just don't think that's happening." Like, "That just doesn't sound ... I feel like ...," and maybe it was naive, but I gave the benefit of the doubt to Facebook more because I was thinking that's just such an intrusion. Like would you really violate you that trust relationship with your users by eavesdropping on them like that, you know? Something like an Amazon Echo, you know what you're consenting to in that, you know? It's going to be listening for those words. And companies like Apple assure you that they're only listening for the cue, the free to cue, like, "Hey Siri," for it to come on.

Eric Anctil: But I felt like Facebook, like really, what would be ... I just gave them the benefit of the doubt. And then when that news broke a few weeks ago, a couple weeks ago, about Facebook compensating people with \$20 gift cards to have full access to their phones, the conversation came up again in my class. I have many students saying, "No. I know my phone's listening to me." There was a level of

paranoia there that I just haven't experienced in any of my time working with students around these issues, and I wonder if that is somehow a symbol of it, or if it's a shift in some way. That's kind of what I was thinking about.

Maria Erb: Well, that happens to me all the time and I'm only using Google, and I see things show up. Ads, and search words, and things that I know I've only spoken and not typed in. Does that happen to you too?

Stephen: Yeah, it does happen to me, sometimes. I like to go into my Google Ad settings, or my Facebook Ad settings every now and then, and see what they've kind of picked up on me. I think it's really interesting that, as it becomes a more known quantity, that we are in some ways being, you know, in many ways being watched and calculated and gathered information on. They're making it known to us that they know, and kind of shedding light and creating that uncomfortable feeling. But it's interesting about the Facebook compensating people for it. That kind of sets a strange precedent where they are now directly paying you for your information as opposed to just paying you through allowing you to use their service for free. Do you think that might continue to expand as they try to damage control or affect our future for giving up of information?

Eric Anctil: I don't know. I think the thing that ... It's an interesting economic model that you would just pay somebody for that. But we've been paying ... It's an interesting economic economic model because you don't know how much, what they're taking from you, how valuable that really is. Like, is \$20 a good deal? Maybe it should be \$1,000. Excuse me. What bothered me about that story, and I think the reason it really rose up, on people's radars is because some of the users were like 13 years old and they were getting these \$20 gift cards, and they just weren't thinking ... I mean, I don't know what the 13 year old was thinking. They were probably just thinking, "Well, you have access to my stuff anyway. What does it really matter?" Which is a really sad potential reality that they do have access to those things.

Eric Anctil: I think one of the things that that makes me feel worried about this trend is that we are starting to learn more and more how monetized we all are. and how it's inescapable. So we reach that tipping point where do we just accept it for what it is? Like, "I can't get out of this abusive relationship anyway. I might as well just not resist so that the blows don't come so hard." Which is a crazy way of thinking about a relationship. We don't have that relationship with Nike. You know? You just buy their sneakers, and you wear them out, and it's fun, and that's it.

Eric Anctil: But this is a really different kind of relationship. Probably unlike anything that we've really had before, where you have these longstanding ties to a company, and they have so much access to kind of who you are and what you do. It's really unsettling. And then, just even hearing Jack a minute ago, Stephen, about they know this and they know that just feels so Orwellian and so Big-Brotherly. I

mean, these are hardly new themes, but I just feel unsettled in general in a way, today, in a way that I haven't felt before, and that's telling me something.

Maria Erb: Yeah. I think there's going to be a kind of an emergent trend for privacy tools, you know? I mean, in part from just browsing in incognito mode, which gives you some protections but not others. I mean, just the other day when I was trying to book a flight to Albuquerque, and I'm like, "Why did the price just jump \$40 in five minutes?" You know? Like, "What do I have to do? Delete my browsing history? Use a different browser? Use DuckDuckGo? Browse it?" I'm just going through the list of what could I possibly do to avoid this kind of thing from happening. I feel like there's going to be more tools available for us to kind of have more control over things that we used to have control over.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. And dynamic pricing in general. Again, feels, I don't know. It feels uncomfortable. I was booking, it's interesting you'd mentioned that, because I'm traveling in a couple of weeks and I needed to get a hotel. And for the traveling for the university, so I was using my university credit card. When I went to purchase the ticket it said there was an error, and then when I went back ... Or not. I wasn't a ticket. It was reserving a room. But let's say the room was \$200, and then it said there was an error at the very last like submit. The purchase kind of thing, and then it came back. I went back and repeated the process, and suddenly the room was to \$280, and I thought, "Is there an error because you realized you undercharged me?" Like I'm using a corporate credit card, but I don't know. And just that I don't know makes me feel so uncomfortable about my relationship to even just Hilton, or whomever it was.

Eric Anctil: And then, so dynamic pricing is one of those ones where it's like, "We know what you're willing to pay, or able to pay, and so we'll just charge you more." And oh, I don't know. I don't like that. Uber operates that way when it comes to things like they charge more when it takes longer, or there are a lot of examples of dynamic pricing models, but it's still, when it feels like it should have a fixed price but it doesn't, that's where it makes me feel like I'm suddenly against them. The they. Yeah.

Stephen: Well, that's interesting because there's kind of a difference in perception there, because they are just trying to get as much money out of you as they can. But on the other end of the spectrum, you put something in your Amazon card. I remember a few years ago, this kind of was a common tip or whatever. You put something in your online store cart, and then you leave the site, and then a couple of days later you get an email saying, "Hey, here's 15% off," and now that's what you're willing to pay. That's a get for you. That's a get for me, you know? I want to save some money on that. That's a big difference in perception as opposed to them having the price at the start be, you know, 300, and then turn it down to 280 versus having it lower and go higher. I think that's just ... Does that reflect kind of a, again, that new status quo of, "We're trying to get as much as you out of possible, and we don't care that you know, we're trying to do that?"

Eric Anctil: Yeah. Because we're hoping you just don't think about it.

Stephen: Yeah.

Eric Anctil: I think there's so many psychological economical models at play that we just can't win on the commerce side. One of the things that what you were saying a minute ago reminded me of is when you have something in your cart for a while, like saved for later, and then it changes in price a few cents. But, that gives them an excuse to send you an email that says the thing went down, the price went down, and you think, "Oh it did? Is it free now?" And then you go, and it's gone down a nickel, and on something that costs \$15, so it's nothing, but it was still enough to trigger you to reengage with and potentially then use that. And you're more likely to engage or purchase that product, the more you are engaged with it. So you think, "Oh, you're just using really basic consumer economic modeling behavior against me, and now I have to suddenly put up a wall if I want to, or at least come up with some kind of defenses against that."

Maria Erb: Yeah. I think that that's kind of the spaces that we're going to be moving towards anyway. You know? This sort of like necessary evil kind of thing. Like, "I've got to put up with certain things to have the conveniences that I have decided are essential in my life." I think we're going to kind of be trotting that path for awhile. And then also, I think we'll see some contrarian waves come through too, where it's cash only, or no credit cards anymore, or whatever it's going to be. I think we'll see some of that too.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. I don't know if that's just going to be fringe the way that you sometimes see fringe movements.

Maria Erb: Yeah. It will be.

Eric Anctil: Yeah, I know, but my college students make me feel like it could be bigger than fringe. But then my fear, of course, is that the marketers are so good at this, at these various companies, that they'll just figure out where the mass is moving, and then they'll just try to accommodate that.

Maria Erb: Yeah.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. One other, an interesting thing that I've been talking to students about too, and has come up a couple of different times, is feeling like you can't ever get lost or be on your own. So hypothetically you have a group of students who live together, and they have Find My Friends on their phones as a way of keeping of track of people. So, your friend goes off to a party and you're worried about her, and she hasn't come home. It's 2:00 in the morning. You could find out where she is, and you can just surveil her, and try, at least track her location.

Eric Anctil: It's a good thing because maybe she was in harm's way. She needed someone to go over to that house and get her out of a situation that was bad. But at the

same time, what if you just don't want to be tracked by your roommates all the time, and you just want to be on your own? I feel like I've been having conversations with students who have this tension between, "There's times I just don't want anyone to know where I am." That's an okay thing to want to be lost intentionally. Like if 40 college students in a classroom, I can say, "How many of you have a parent who right now can tell you that they know where you are?"

Eric Anctil: Several hands will go up and I'm not comfortable with that. Personally, I just feel like you should, as a college student, should just be able to skip class, or go to the beach for the day. If you want to sit behind the Sip'N Save and smoke cigarettes with your friends, you know? I just feel like you should be able to go do that without your dad knowing that you're behind the Sip'N Save smoking cigarettes. But there are college students that I've been having conversations with, and other people too, but it's interesting in this generation of students because they, for safety's sake, they keep an eye on each other with that, which is good, but at the same time then you can't ever really get lost. People don't always need to know where you are. So it's an interesting one, too, to take on, thinking about this, like you're being surveilled not only by Facebook and Google, but by your friends.

Maria Erb: Yeah. What else have you been thinking about? I mean, these are some really big themes and really big cultural shifts if they are really in fact happening. Anything else grabbing your attention?

Eric Anctil: You know, my big fear about schools is that it's going to be a collision of three things that's going to change school from what it is now, where you go to school to being at home. One will be that we have materials that we can deliver. Not like it is today, where you sit in front of the computer, listen to a Khan Academy video. I don't see that, but I do see something that's much more engaging that technology brings to us, that you have a truly immersive experience. That, coupled with an Amazon Echo kind of teacher, nanny kind of thing, where you have a smart home that's so smart that it keeps track of your kids for you so you can leave the house, you know? It sounds kind of dystopian and kind of horrible if we really drill down on it, but this ability for there to be almost like a virtual teacher there.

Eric Anctil: And then the other thing is guns. You know, I've had a couple of teachers over the last about year or so, and it's so interesting because both of them made these comments to me in different places and different times, but they were both high school teachers doing an active shooter drill, and they overheard students saying, "When I have kids, I'm not sending them to school. It's too dangerous."

Maria Erb: Wow.

Eric Anctil: Is school the place where you go to being the target, and I think there are a lot of people, and if you talk to people who work in schools, the active shooter drills, the trauma that these young little kids are experiencing, who are in kindergarten or first grade because they're in a lockdown situation, has a drill, and there's true trauma to that experience. At what point, when we become able to deliver things at home, will we just pull away from schools? Because they're expensive to heat. Someone has to clean those washrooms. Someone has to manage the cafeteria, and at doctor's offices, too.

Maria Erb: All those teachers.

Eric Anctil: All the teachers that ... We've been trying to make schools teacher-proof forever anyway, right?

Maria Erb: Exactly.

Eric Anctil: You know?

Maria Erb: Yeah. No, I definitely see that coming into play for sure.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. There's places like these big industries that we didn't expect, that we've always kind of expected to be in place. When I say industries, I don't know if they're really industries as much as they're like social, whatever. What are they?

Maria Erb: They're kind of iconic institutions at this point.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. Yeah. Schools, hospitals, doctor's office.

Maria Erb: Are the background fabric.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. Our grocery store relationships are really changing. You know?

Maria Erb: Yes.

Eric Anctil: The ability to when you can just ... I mean, I was almost forced into using a self checkout at Fred Meyer the other day because the line to use a person checkout was so long. I could not get this thing to scan, and I thought, "I'm going to have a heart attack. It would be great if I was wearing my DOCTORnow because they can resuscitate me at the self checkout." Because I was so frustrated, and I thought, "No. We just need to get to that place where you walk in, load your basket, and walk out like Amazon Go."

Maria Erb: Exactly.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. But I feel badly for the checkers, and sometimes you have really good conversations with those folks. You know?

Maria Erb: Yeah.

Eric Anctil: We could talk for a little while about what I feel like we're going to lose when we lose those brief moments of human interaction, but I do see the efficiency of going in, getting , and then of course the groceries will just be delivered to your house in an autonomously driven vehicle. It'll back in and leave a big huge plastic box of stuff, and it'll just unload it, and you'll just go on with your day.

Maria Erb: Yeah.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. That'll be in 15 or 20 years, in the same way that if you look back 15 or 20 years ago, it would be hard to believe that you'd be getting much more than books from Amazon. You know? It was only books, you know? The idea they would send you an exercise bike that weighs 200 pounds, you know, but you can. You can get anything through them. That was a crazy idea back in the day.

Maria Erb: Yeah. No, I think, especially with the public schools, just thinking about all the stuff that those teachers have to fit into one day now that they've got the shooting drills, and before that just all the federal and state-

Eric Anctil: All the standards. Yeah.

Maria Erb: ... It's the standards, and just the other implications they had to deal with around not having treats for birthdays, or if you did, all the hoops you had to jump through just for that, and the paperwork, and the signing of the parental everything, you know?

Eric Anctil: Yeah.

Maria Erb: Just all the stuff that's on their shoulders now. I just feel like that's made the schools almost just this unbearable weight to keep going, you know?

Eric Anctil: Yeah. Schools have taken on so much of the social. It might be where you get a free breakfast, or a free lunch, or you get your eyes checked, or you have a health exam, or you have afterschool care, and just lots of things that are sort of extra to what the experience of going to school. And then, what does the teacher have to do in terms of managing anxiety, or managing a shooter drill, or these different things? You do wonder. There are so many other efficiencies that could be built into a different model of doing it. We would lose something for sure, but I kind of feel like it's going to be a little bit like family, or not family reunions, but class reunions. Class reunion stays, and maybe even family reunions to some ... I misspoke, but now I'm thinking on it.

Eric Anctil: Maybe this is it too, but you know. I remember reading an article years ago, Did Facebook Kill Class Reunion? Because class reunions were when you got together and said, "It's been 10 years since I saw you. Literally 10 years. I haven't seen a picture of you. Nothing." Now, it's like, I can't-



Maria Erb: Get away from that person.

Eric Anctil: ... [crosstalk 00:21:26]. "What are you doing on Facebook?" So this idea that why would you go to your reunion because you see all those people virtually now? It kind of eliminates the curiosity. Like, "After 20 years, please tell me that awful person I went to high school with just really went downhill. Nothing will bring me more schadenfreude than that." You know? That's changed, and people are like, "Ah, class reunions." I think the people that graduate from high school today, they're like, "Class reunions? What was that?" In the same way that we might wonder about a telephone booth. So I wonder too, in the future, will we think about kids all coming together for a set amount of time each day? Will think of that kind of like the class reunion? Like, "Oh well, it was a period of time where that's what we did, but we don't do it anymore."

Eric Anctil: This is totally an aside, but I made a phone call. I got a call from an antique store the other day, because I was wondering about the price of a new product they had just put out. They called me back and they left a message, and then I went to call. They said, "Call us." So I went to call them and I got a busy signal. I grew up in using regular phones. I didn't know what it was for a minute. I thought maybe something was broken. It took me a minute to really register. Oh, that's a busy signal, because I haven't heard one in so long. I don't know that I've heard a dial tone in a long time, because I don't pick up. I just always use it a cell phone. But even me, who grew up hearing busy signals, and remembering when call waiting came back in the day, like in the '80s, we know when call waiting became popular. It was like, "Oh sweet." You know? You were on a phone call, and then you got a little beep, and you can click over.

Maria Erb: And answering machines. That was a huge thing too.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. Huge. That was such a big deal. I remember the Rockford Files, watching reruns of the Rockford Files, and his show always opened up. It was a James Garner show with Jim Rockford, and it always opened up with the answering machine. That was the intro, was the answering machine making the, "I'm not home. Leave a message," kind of thing. It was so cool at the time. That was just like the mid '70s, and that answering machine probably cost \$300 even back then. It was a really cool thing. And now, of course, we just kind of think that these people are like, "What's an answering machine?" I wonder if they'll ask the same question about, "What do you mean go to school? Math? That one kind of is weird." And the idea of going to the doctor. "We don't need to go to the doctor. What do you mean you go there?"

Maria Erb: Yeah. Especially when you think about body scans, you know, like on Star Trek, right? When they had the bzzz like that?

Eric Anctil: Yeah.

Maria Erb: Well that's the way it should be, right?

Eric Anctil: Yeah.

Maria Erb: They should get all your readings, and you shouldn't have to step on a scale.

Eric Anctil: Right.

Maria Erb: They should be able to know your blood reading, and all that stuff just from the scan.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. It's really creepy to think about some of it, but then at the same time, my oldest son is a Type I diabetic who has to carry ... He wears an insulin pump that goes into a port that gives him insulin, and then he also has something called a CGM, which is a continuous glucose monitor, and it tells him his blood sugar just throughout the day. But he has two of these things that he wears all the time. The idea of being able to have an artificial pancreas, it'd be incredible for him, and so exciting for him to not to have to wear these two things.

Eric Anctil: So on the one hand, while I kind of, I don't know, blanch at the idea of something scanning me and knowing everything about me, and it's kind of intrusive, at the same time I think, "Wow. A development like that would be amazing." So, with all technology there are compromises, and it's always, always something that you give up to gain something else, and it'll be like that too. Because sometimes I just like to go to the doctor, and just have a laugh and chat for a little bit, you know? The idea of seeing that person just through a screen feels so personal. But, I think there are a lot of people who would really welcome that, and I don't begrudge them that.

Maria Erb: Have we covered everything you want to talk about?

Eric Anctil: Yeah, and more.

Maria Erb: Okay.

Eric Anctil: This was awesome.

Maria Erb: All right. Well, thank you so much for being our guest today. We really appreciate always having you, and we'll be looking forward to your talk next week.

Eric Anctil: Me too.

Stephen: Yeah. Thanks for coming on.

Eric Anctil: Yeah, you're welcome. It was great.

Stephen: We really enjoyed talking to you.

Eric Anctil: Yeah. I've loved talking with the two of you, and I'm always happy to be a guest here. It's just the most positive experience, so thanks a lot.

Maria Erb: You're welcome. Thank you.

Ben Kahn: You're listening to UP TechTalk, the podcast from Academic Technology Services and Innovation at the University of Portland, where we explore the use of technology in the classroom, one conversation at a time.

Maria Erb: We invite you to subscribe to the show on Apple podcasts or Google Play music so that you never miss a new episode.

Stephen: To continue the conversation with us on social media, you can find us on Twitter. I'm @thebenkahn, and Maria is @erbfarm. That's E-R-B-F-A-R-M.

Maria Erb: For more information, please visit our blog at TechTalk.UP.edu, and browse our archives for dozens of episodes featuring great conversations with our UP faculty guests.