

NEXTcast Season 1 Highlights Part 2

Before we start our second season of NEXTcast (first episode on September 18!), we thought we'd release a couple of "best of" episodes, which pull together some highlights from the conversations we had with Humber faculty and staff in our first season. This episode is the second of two parts. Enjoy!

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to NEXTcast, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. My name is Nathan Whitlock, an editor at Humber Press. This is the second of our "best of" episodes, consisting of great moments from the first season of NEXTcast. Our first all new episode will be out Tuesday, September 18th.

Nathan Whitlock: In our first clip, former Humber student and current Humber employee, Sarah Nieman, talks about the importance of doing real world style learning projects.

Sarah Nieman: The ability to interact with a live client who is giving us the type of feedback that we would be given if we were ourselves working on a real life project. And just going through that whole process just gaining those transferrable skills that we can use in the future. It was definitely, it made everything worth it.

Nathan Whitlock: Yeah.

Sarah Neiman: Yeah.

Nathan Whitlock: And it's not always, I mean I'm not telling tales out of school here, but it's not always a positive experience in the sense of when you're dealing with a real client they have, they can be challenging because they have very specific needs. Whereas if you were doing this only theoretically or with a partner in your class, you would always feel like oh we're, I'm only going to get good feedback, I'm only going to get positive feedback, I'm only going to get supported fully whereas a live client might say, that's not what I need. I need something completely different, this is wrong.

Sarah Neiman: Yeah, I think that an assignment that might be created solely internally for the purposes of maybe demonstrating various skills, would give you all the information that you need, transparently. Whereas when your interacting with a real client they might think they know what they need, or they don't disclose certain information that you need and so you have to be able to adapt to that and kind of figure out how to work your way through it.

Nathan Whitlock: The analogy I always think of in these situations is, people I know who play music, and I play a bit of music, there is a very different thing when you're playing in your bedroom or in your basement and then you go to play with other people and all these things you're sure you mastered, suddenly get revealed, all your vulnerabilities and all your blind spots and the things you kind of skipped over. Dealing with actual real world situations show you where those blind spots are.

Sarah Nieman: Exactly and seeing how other people view the exact same subject, in so many different ways kind of widens your view on everything.

Nathan Whitlock: Next up, Media Studies professor Anne Zbitnew shows us a game that she plays in the classroom.

Anne Zbitnew: Okay so.

Nathan Whitlock: My first step.

Anne Zbitnew: Your first step, close your eyes.

Nathan Whitlock: Okay, I'm closing my eyes.

Anne Zbitnew: Okay, then you're going to pick up the piece of paper and you're going to fold it in half.

Nathan Whitlock: All right.

Anne Zbitnew: And don't worry if it's even, don't worry if the edges are sharp, that's okay.

Nathan Whitlock: It's folded in half.

Anne Zbitnew: It looks great. You keep your eyes shut.

Nathan Whitlock: Eyes still closed?

Anne Zbitnew: Eyes still closed. So I'd like you to tear off the top right corner.

Nathan Whitlock: The top right corner.

Anne Zbitnew: Yes, here we got left and right so we'll see how it goes. Good, okay fold it in half again, keep your eyes closed.

Nathan Whitlock: Got it.

Anne Zbitnew: Tear off the bottom left corner.

Nathan Whitlock: Will this be a snowflake at the end of it?

Anne Zbitnew: Maybe, or a gingerbread man all attached holding hands. So then you're going to fold it in half one more time.

Nathan Whitlock: Got it, I'm doing that right now.

Anne Zbitnew: You are, looks good.

Anne Zbitnew: Yeah. And then tear off the top left corner, it will be bit of a challenge, as its thicker but tear what you can off.

Nathan Whitlock: I'm extraordinarily strong.

Anne Zbitnew: I know you are, look at that, amazing. Okay so, now you can open your eyes and you can unfold your paper and it is a beautiful snowflake, or kind of a snowflake. So what, there's a big whole in the middle and then it looks liked you chewed the outside edges of it.

Nathan Whitlock: Is this sort of a Rorschach thing?

Anne Zbitnew: It is, now I'm going to leave. So what happens is, so everyone opens up their paper and then okay everybody holds it up and when people hold it up they all look different. Which is really interesting, so they go "hey, mines got two holes" "mine's ripped there" "mine's folded this way". So I say to everybody, "what happened, you all listened to the same directions, you all had your eyes closed, what happened?" And the answer is we are all different people and so even though we heard the same directions, you know you're folding it maybe length wise, I'm folding it the other way. You've torn a big piece off, someone else tore a little piece off.

Anne Zbitnew: You might not know your left, from your right so they all look different. So the point being, okay here we are, we are all in the same room we are doing the same class, you're different, you're all going to see things differently.

Nathan Whitlock: I spoke with Cheryl Francis-Nurse about the new partnership she helped develop with the Toronto Chapter of the Project Management Institute.

Cheryl Francis-Nurse: I mean this particular initiative will afford our students many, many benefits, you just certainly touched on one, where they are engaging with

practitioners from industry. They are seeing themselves and the people they'll be networking with engaging with. I mean based on our new relationship or formalized relationship with PMI Toronto. So if I look at some additional benefits to our students yes, we're strengthening relationships, but the strength of relationships means that the students will have access to such a vast pool of project managers.

Cheryl Francis-Nurse: They will have the ability to seek advice, coaching, mentoring as they transition from being a student to a professional. They will have access to Capstone sponsors, they will have access to various networking opportunities many of which will be hosted here at Humber. Which is why it is so important to have our program and certainly to launch our own student community, because this means that their also going to be coming to us and engaging right here at the North campus with our students.

Cheryl Francis-Nurse: It also means that our students will have volunteer opportunities, there's also the potential for internships and I must say that when we initiated this project, last year around spring time, the PMI invited our students to compete for internships on their special outreach program that they were piloting. Two of our students got the opportunities, they were supposed to be three-month internships, in one case this turned out to be a nine-month engagement.

Nathan Whitlock: Oh wow.

Cheryl Francis-Nurse: Both students were there last semester, last week and they essentially said "we have had an opportunity to jumpstart our career, we'll be forever grateful for the opportunity afford us by Humber, the PMI Toronto, and the employer." So already we are seeing those results, and we're just starting the journey and we are confident that we will see many opportunities evolve from this.

Nathan Whitlock: School of Media Studies program coordinator Bernie Monette spoke with NEXTcast about a common first year for students.

Bernie Monette: So, the ideas that is that we will teach, you know the basic skills across different programs and bring all students together and sort of let them experience these things, not based on a program but more based on the subject matter. I believe the business schools running something similar with theirs as well and so its hard, you know, different programs feels strongly that you know that we are teaching something according to the needs of our discipline. But we are also trying to look at this but how do we just, what are the core things that people need to do and then you

know, later on in the program we can say okay this is what you need to know about this particular topic, this is specific to what we do.

Bernie Monette: And so, you know that's been interesting from a curriculum development point of view, its been interesting from a scheduling point of view, its been interesting from you know remediation for students that might not do very well, or students who need accommodation, and we go back to my fundamental position on something like this, is why don't we just try it and see what happens.

Nathan Whitlock: In the next clip, Colin Flint explains how student perceptions of internships change before and after their work study placements.

Colin Flint: Before they were interning the students didn't really think that having a mentor when they got to agencies was that important, but once they'd been there that really changed, it was 26% said it was absolutely essential before it went up to 44% thought it was absolutely essential to have a mentor. And if you include the people that thought it was very important that's 91% of people thought it was really important or essential to have a mentor.

Nathan Whitlock: Why do you think that is? Why do you think, even if you were just to guess, why do you think the members were so low going in, and then spiked once they'd gone through the experience?

Colin Flint: I think its when they find themselves in the situations and a lot of the time they don't know what to do, we do our best to kind of train them, we give them all the knowledge, but still its kind of their going to find things that they don't know how to handle. And having someone they can go and talk to and help them, or if their just getting stressed out by stuff, to find someone to talk to who isn't the person who's evaluating their performance. I think they find incredibly useful.

Colin Flint: Someone to model their behaviour off, all those kind of things. I think they thought of it very much as I'll go in there, do the job, and everything will work out fine.

Nathan Whitlock: Right, right.

Colin Flint: So that was a bit of a surprise to them.

Nathan Whitlock: Next Leila Kelleher explains how the flipped lab and workshop model maximizes the time instructors spend with students.

Leila Kelleher: A flipped classroom, its pretty cool right now flipping your classroom. So what it means is students are responsible for learning the material that traditionally would have been taught in lecture time, so if you can imagine a big lecture theatre, you know, you would have some professor lecturing to you about some theories and background information on a topic, you might have done a little bit of reading beforehand but basically you're getting all that information in the lecture.

Leila Kelleher: In a flipped classroom model, the student is responsible for essentially learning those theoretical basics outside of the classroom, so that when they come to the class they're able to engage at a deeper level with the material and the professor can really use their expertise at that higher level to engage with the students and with the material rather than just teaching kind of basic 101 level theory on whatever subject it is.

Nathan Whitlock: So they're prepared, they've gotten the hard content that they need, the information they need and now they're prepared to start applying it in class and go a little further with that, in other words.

Leila Kelleher: Absolutely, yeah so often times when the flipped classroom model is used, it usually using a little bit more technology and media to do it, so often times there might be videos that students need to watch, they might need to do modules on their classroom management system, so a Blackboard for example, they might need to watch videos, maybe answer a little quiz to test their mastery as opposed to just reading through some readings, which you know, as we know some people do, some people don't.

Leila Kelleher: It's supposed to be a little bit more engaging and then the students can actually gain a higher level of mastery of that material because they're actually using that classroom time to really push those ideas and get a full understanding.

Nathan Whitlock: Helena Moncrieff joined NEXTcast to discuss her new book from ECW Press, *The Fruitful City*.

Helena Moncrieff: One of my mentors said, "never ask what a book is about, but rather ask what it will do" and I really like that concept because it does bring it to teaching as well. But this is a book that makes you look at fruit trees that grow in our cities and wonder where they came from, who planted them and why it is that we're not looking at them anymore, or picking them and so many of us no longer know whether a fruit is okay to eat anymore. So we've become so food illiterate and in this case I'm looking at the fruit, so I'll say fruit illiterate, that we don't recognize that those tie dye

sidewalks can lead us to a bounty of mulberries that are just above our heads: easy to be picked and to be included in a menu.

Nathan Whitlock: And this seems like a subject, I mean the idea of food and fruit being all around us and where to find it and how to spot it. It seems like an idea that's literally sitting right there in plain view, it just needed somebody to pluck it.

Helena Moncrieff: Well that's the whole thing is its so simple, its something that's right there and I think we are always looking for the next new thing, something big to be discovered some new way of doing things and if you look at something like the 100 mile diet which couldn't be any simpler but started a movement, this is the same kind of idea. This is food that's growing in our neighbourhoods, in our cities you don't have to get in a car to go to a farm to pick your own, its right there it seems to simple, it seems a little quaint perhaps or old fashioned.

Helena Moncrieff: But there are so many trees in our cities that are growing food that can easily be included on our tables, without requiring any kind of change in agricultural practices your don't need a new form of botany, you don't need a degree in it all you need to do it look up and see what's there and say, "I'm gonna use what I have."

Nathan Whitlock: In our final clip, program coordinator Christine McCaw shares insights she gained as a result of her Teaching Innovation Fund research project, where she studied how teaching spaces affect student learning.

Christine McCaw: I had experience in my corporate life seeing engagement levels with different room layouts, and so I kind of had an inkling that it was going to have an effect, but I need to be honest Nathan, I was surprised. The biggest thing that surprised me was as a professor, when you go in at the beginning of a semester to your classes you kind of get a vibe. Is this kind of a turned on class, is this kind of a "I'm gonna have to work a little harder"? And I remember when I started this research study I went back to Heidi at the CTL and I said, "Heidi, aww jeez my really turned on class is in the traditional classroom, I'm really kind of nervous how these results are gonna shake out," and it was unbelievable as the person in the research study to see the change in the two classes over the semester.

Nathan Whitlock: Wow, so they definitely like made that shift in engagement.

Christine McCaw: Yeah, we measured lots of things in the study, we measured attendance levels, we measured students feelings about being engaged with their peers, did they have a better relationship with their professor, and we

measured this at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester we asked questions like, did you contribute an idea in class? Did you ask a question of your peers? And what we found was, I was really surprised, what we found was that it was definitely in the HIVES it in was more peer to peer learning, stronger feeling of connection with the professor, more contributions and ideas in class, more percentage of time students were on task, and at the very end of the class we also looked at the overall class average and it was 7% higher in the HIVES.

Nathan Whitlock: NEXTcast is produced by Humber Press and the creative productions team at The Centre for Teaching and Learning. This episode was edited by Kristin Valois. Special thanks to Santino Pannozzo and Eileen DeCourcy. To suggest stories for future episodes of NEXTcast or to just let us know what you think, email: humberpress@humber.ca, that's humberpress@humber.ca. Thanks and see you next time, that's still not a pun.