

Nathan Whitlock:

Welcome to NEXTcast, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Nathan Whitlock, a professor at Humber College and an editor at large at Humber Press. As you probably know, due to the threat from COVID-19, all of Humber college's programs have gone online and its campuses are closed, so this is the second of our remote episodes.

Nathan Whitlock:

In this episode I speak via Skype to Kristi Kennedy, a professor in the fashion arts and business program and Humber's faculty of business about how she is handling the sudden shift to you online teaching.

Nathan Whitlock:

Welcome to NEXTcast Kristi.

Kristi Kennedy:

Thank you.

Nathan Whitlock:

Just to start things off because we are doing this by Skype and we are not doing this in person, we can't actually see each other. I was wondering if you could just sort of tell us what program you're teaching in right now and what courses you're focusing on right now.

Kristi Kennedy:

I'm in the business school and I'm in the fashion program, fashion arts and business. I am focusing on fashion history and I've got retail buying course two and then I'm at the postgrad. I'm teaching global trade in the apparel industry.

Nathan Whitlock:

So you have a fairly full plate right now?

Kristi Kennedy:

Oh yes. Yeah. Very full.

Nathan Whitlock:

And how have things been going in the past few weeks? I mean in general, not just in terms of your teaching, but just in terms of dealing with this weird time?

Kristi Kennedy:

Well, yeah, this is a really weird time. I would say this is a huge adjustment. I mean, we've gone from going to work every day, all of us, myself included, to being at home and we're not supposed to leave except to buy groceries. And then of course there's work and just trying to focus on how to get all this material across to the students online and think that through. And so it's been very busy, to be honest.

Nathan Whitlock:

And in terms of that question of getting that material to students online, what are the classes that you're teaching right now that were the hardest to make that transition from classroom to online?

Kristi Kennedy:

I'd say each in their own way has had different challenges. Fashion history, that's a really visual course. And so, when I'm teaching in the classroom, I've got this great big screen and I bring in garment, then we look at what we're wearing and we have these big discussions on each of the areas. So I'd say that one is... How to get those visuals and understanding across, that's been really interesting actually.

Kristi Kennedy:

I'm using obviously Blackboard ultra and last class was the 1970s and I had all the students run around their wardrobes and where all their 1970s outfit online, myself included. And that was a lot of fun. And then they had to prepare a dance. The Hustle, 1970s hustle. We put the dance. I know it was a riot. I know it's absolutely hilarious. I practiced all week and so did the students and we were all wearing our 1970s outfits and we're going to do the hustle online together and like I put it on Blackboard ultra.

Kristi Kennedy:

I did the shared screen and I said, "You've all got to get up and do this." And so I played it. We all did it, and I did it. Even though I was right behind the computer screen, they couldn't see me, but I was doing it and they just had an absolute riot wearing their outfits. And then we proceeded to go through our clothing online with each other and the trends and name them and come up with the terminology. And frankly it was a hoot. We had an absolute riot. That was a lot of fun.

Kristi Kennedy:

We put on our COVID masks that we had and then decided to redesign them for 1980s. They're so excited. They're already sending me all their designs and they've got 1980s Versace fabrications going onto their masks and it's hilarious what they've come up with. But they have to review the '80s so that they can figure out what to put on the mask. Anyway, I'm just laughing, I think it's hilarious.

Kristi Kennedy:

Then retail buying course. Yes. That's a tough one because that's pure math. So the challenge with that course has been testing. I've found that really tough because in class you don't get to whip out formula sheets. You're in a meeting, you've got to be able to do the calculations. Now I know that they're at home, they can use all their notes and they have everything at their disposal.

Kristi Kennedy:

And how do I test that so that they get the learning outcomes and understand how to do the math quickly? That's been huge. That's been very time consuming to come up with these exams that are all... So that you're using a random test bank notes, two exams are the same. Every exam, I'm trying to do as many calculation formula questions as I can and just hope that there's some integrity there.

Nathan Whitlock:

You have a very complicated task right now that... Keeping a lot of balls in the air.

Kristi Kennedy:

Yeah. This is... I guess when I first found out we were going online, I thought, "No big deal. I'll just do everything on Blackboard. It shouldn't be any different." I definitely underestimated how much this was going to take. Like what sort of thinking process. As been re-thinking and then just trying to understand the technology in such a short time span and then how to use the technology and it's experimenting and I try this and I try that. It's been pretty huge, really huge.

Nathan Whitlock:

It sounds like you were sort of in the thick of it with those courses too. In terms of the material you were working on, in terms of the discussions you were having and the content you were working with the students. I mean, in my own case, I was lucky enough with one of the courses I was teaching that we were just about to go into a period where they were working on group projects anyway, and it was somewhat self-directed. So there wasn't a whole lot that I had to throw online.

Nathan Whitlock:

It sounds like you were still very much in the thick of delivering direct lessons. Did that kind of add to the challenge as well?

Kristi Kennedy:

It did and there was definitely more content that I felt was important to cover and I wanted to get through that. And what's interesting too is they wanted it, like they're all at home, they need something to do. The busier we are during this time period, I think the better off our mental health is because we wake up every day and we've got structure and things to do and goals to achieve and lessons to learn.

Kristi Kennedy:

Sure, I maybe could have cut out some, but I didn't. I didn't because I just wanted them to learn it. Like I wanted them to know and I didn't want them to feel that the bunch of content had been removed because they wanted it. They said, "Give me everything, we want it." That's what they told me. So I did what they told me.

Nathan Whitlock:

That's actually kind of ideal when you're getting that kind of feedback.

Kristi Kennedy:

Yeah. I mean, I think the feedback that I have received from the students is they're telling me they're very, very busy. They've got lots of projects and adopting to online. They're okay with the technology unlike me who I'd say I'm not their generation, so I'm definitely finding it harder. But they definitely are driven. I mean they want it. I figured I'd get a bunch of students emailing me saying, "Oh, I'm sick. I can't do it. I can't do it." No, there's a lot of communication going on. A lot of emails, a lot of messages. Blackboard ultras.

Kristi Kennedy:

I'm also using Panopto. I love Panopto. That is the coolest app. All I do is just take a quick little video with my phone if I have to explain a concept and then it's just like magic. It goes from my phone and you push process and then you have to decide who you're going to share it with and I just share it with everybody.

Kristi Kennedy:

And then you go into Blackboard and it says you're going into... I go into learning outcomes or learning materials and then it just says embed a Panopto video and you just pick one and boom, it's there. It's just amazing. And I find it the minute I put the Panopto video up the first one, I didn't do it right. Technologically speaking, I didn't allow everyone to see it. So then you get these emails or messages saying so-and-so was asking for permission to see your video. And I put it up seconds later. I've got message, after message, after message from my students saying, "I need to see the video." I think they were just really starving for it. I was completely shocked actually that they are sitting there by their computers all day just waiting for this stuff.

Nathan Whitlock:

What's something that you actually are missing right now in terms of teaching? What's the main thing that you really want to get back to when this is all over?

Kristi Kennedy:

Well, I just missed the interaction. I miss seeing their faces. I miss talking and interacting. The classroom discussions, they're good and they're happening, but it's like some are speaking, some are typing. It's very disjointed at times. So I think I miss that interaction and the discussions. I'm missing it. They're missing it too.

Nathan Whitlock:

One last thing, I mean this just happened yesterday. It was announced that all of the summer programs and the rest of the semester essentially will all be online. So there's a whole group of faculty, full time and part time, who are now looking towards doing exactly what you're doing right now, which is taking courses online and not just the last three or four weeks of a course but an entire program.

Nathan Whitlock:

And I was wondering if you had any advice that you could pass on to someone who's in the thick of it right now to those people who are just getting ready to do it.

Kristi Kennedy:

One of my saving graces in all this—because again I'm not tech savvy—has just been, I've got a network of other teachers that by pretty much talk to every single day. We talk and we FaceTime each other and every time one of us is feeling frustrated and you do get frustrated with this, very frustrated, we'll call each other and someone will say, "I got a solution or have you tried that?" And we're running all our ideas past each other and then we just talk about life.

Kristi Kennedy:

What's going on and how we're feeling. And I'd say that try to develop a network and get close and then vent. Many of them just call and say, "I have to vent. I've got to say. This is so annoying." And we say, "Okay, we'll listen." I think we really need that interaction just from a human perspective.

Kristi Kennedy:

Other words of advice? I guess just try to look at this as a big learning curve for us. And the fact that... I mean I've been teaching 15 years and I'm used to going in the classroom and I've gotten a comfort zone

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there and I'm definitely not fully in my comfort zone right now. And it's almost like I'm being educated now. I'm going back to school to learn how to teach online and I'm teaching myself and just to look at it that we're re-educating ourselves too. And that's kind of fun in a way. I feel good about that because it's a challenge. So I'm trying to look at it as a challenge in that way.

Nathan Whitlock:

Those are all great suggestions and that's all great advice. I just had one suggestion for you, which is next year, if you are refreshing your history of fashion course when you're looking at the learning outcomes in terms of what the students come out of that course knowing, I think you have to add that they will know how to do the hustle. I think that's a century.

Kristi Kennedy:

I will. It was an absolute riot. I can do it with my eyes closed now, so can they.

Nathan Whitlock:

Well, thank you so much for being on NEXTcast.

Kristi Kennedy:

Thank you for having me. This was a lot of fun.

Nathan Whitlock:

This episode of NEXTcast was produced by me in my basement for Humber Press. Special thanks to Kristin Valois and Meaghan Strimas. To listen to previous episodes of NEXTcast and to read issues of the magazine, go to humberpress.com.

Nathan Whitlock:

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