

Limed: Teaching with a Twist

Episode 12 – Refresh: Course Construction: Bridging the Academy

Matt Wittstein (00:10):

You are listening to Limed: Teaching with a Twist, a podcast that plays with pedagogy.

(00:24):

This summer, Limed: Teaching with a Twist is reaching back out to a couple of our guests from season one. This month, our extraordinary summer intern, Jeremiah Timberlake, caught up with Katherine Fox from episode six, Course Construction: Bridging the Academy. When we first talked to Katherine, she was developing a new course in her department at Southern Oregon University that centers creativity and innovation while being adaptable to different instructors' expertise. Enjoy the show. Here's Jeremiah Timberlake.

Jeremiah Timberlake (01:00):

Welcome back to the show. Katherine, how are you doing today?

Katherine Fox (01:03):

Thank you. I'm doing well. Glad to be on break. How about you?

Jeremiah Timberlake (01:06):

Pretty good, pretty good. I want to jump in by going back to that core capacity you mentioned of creativity and innovation that's bringing together the goals you have for the course, as well as the goals that the university has for their new Gen Ed curriculum. I think it's safe to say that most people have a sense of creativity inside of them, but it's more so of a question of whether they've tapped into that and grown a sense of comfortability around that mode of expression. So because of the creative framework this course has, and from the panelist conversation, have you thought about or isolated any specific strategies that you plan to share with potential professors leading this course that might help with their students lean into their creativity and curiosity for both the coursework in the class and their endeavors beyond, or maybe a general creative expression end goal that you wish for your students to meet when they finish the class?

Katherine Fox (02:03):

Yeah, sure. I'm happy to report that this class did get approved for the Gen Ed curriculum. It's an open topic, so different professors can teach it in whatever ways they wish, and this conversation about creativity was part of that. I think it was useful to be putting this forward from a social science perspective too because there's a lot of gut equating creativity with arts. And while that is definitely a way that we might want to go, incorporating some artistic media in things that we do, can we do some non-traditional formats instead of just writing a paper? Could you make a podcast? Could you do an art piece or a reading of something? But also research is inherently creative.

(02:54):

So I didn't want it to be something that had to be arts-based where people would feel like they had to be an artistic person or a creative person per se because anytime you make a new research project, when you're looking for, okay, what has been done on this subject? What has already been tried? What hasn't been tried? That also is a call for creativity in different ways. So I wanted to leave space for all of those sorts of things.

Jeremiah Timberlake (03:24):

That makes so much sense, especially when you said when you are taking on some research task that there is a creative decision that you're making based on what's been done in the past and then also what you plan to do with your specific question or what you're looking for. But with that in mind, have you narrowed down any top projects or are there any standout ideas that you've come up with or brainstorm with your colleagues? Or are there any ideas about certain projects or types of projects that you're still oscillating on?

Katherine Fox (03:52):

Yes. I'll only speak for myself. I will probably be the first one to teach this class. And having only been at this institution for now one school year, my options are a little bit limited. That will, of course, grow as I get more familiar with this community. One thing that I have been thinking about a lot is science communication and how we can use the things that we're learning in academia, but communicate them to a wider audience. And there are a lot of strategies for this, sometimes strategies that I use in my own classes.

(04:28):

For instance, as you're teaching something that's really academic, can you make it into a protagonist, can you flip the script, change the narrative to tell something unexpected and make a story out of it? So for instance, when I teach global health and we're talking about infectious disease, I don't go through all of the diseases. I start with, "Okay, here's how to die of an infectious disease. Ready? You're going to be poor. You're going to mess around with your environment. You're going to urbanize," all of these things, which makes it a little bit more memorable. So that's one aspect.

(05:03):

And this year, I've also been fortunate to be involved in a community health assessment locally, and that has also provided some ideas for things that are needed within the community that a course could perhaps work on. We had some focus groups and interviews with local LGBTQ populations who were saying that they had come from these big cities where there was a resource center and you could go in there and you could get information and pamphlets, and that's how you would know where to find things. But there's nothing like that here. So I'm going to have, not this particular course because of the rotation and when it would be taught, but I'm going to have them working on putting together a directory of local resources.

(05:52):

So it's a project that could involve some of those creative aspects, but could also be a useful product for the community. And we've also had some other discussions about doing that around some of the findings of the way that there's cultural competency lacking in local providers. So these are... I think seeing community needs is really a good way to present these problems to students and try to work on some creative solutions.

Jeremiah Timberlake (06:22):

Do you have any plans for gaining some census of the students you have in your class before you go into the timeline of your project? Because I remember you mentioned how there is a main theme in the class of bridging what the students are learning in social sciences, but also putting them together with transferable skills for whatever path they choose beyond the class in school. And everyone might have little goals that might be different. So is there any plans to gain a census beforehand of where

everyone's at? Are there any similarities or any major differences that may affect how you want to structure projects and the way you want students to go about their creative thinking?

Katherine Fox (07:06):

Definitely. I usually like to check in with students at the beginning of each class regardless, not just in this class. We did decide to make it a class that required junior standing or instructor permission. We weren't really looking to have people for whom this is their very first college experience. We want them to have a little bit of experience under their belt. When we choose the topic for the course, I think that is very much going to change the body of students involved in it.

(07:37):

For instance, if I were to build a class around something COVID-related, that would probably get a lot of SOAN students, but also probably some healthcare administration students. And we could have some discussions about the ways that these kinds of research and public health outreach techniques could be useful in both fields. For instance, for the healthcare admin students, they don't take as much research methods and that sort of thing, but there's still a level of data literacy that people in that field need to have. So they know who to ask when they have questions, where do they need to go to find the answers for these things. A lot of times people's gut responses to do a survey, but that's not always the thing that's most appropriate for answering that question.

(08:25):

So those kinds of things are some of those transferable skills that I'd like to build into the classes. Here's what you can get from it if you are going to be in this field versus a SOAN thing. And I think that having things that are locally relevant also gives them ways to practice implementing and talking to people beyond just their classmates and their professors. So yeah, I survey them on the first day and then we go from there.

Jeremiah Timberlake (08:53):

One last question. I have a feeling our listeners would really love to know what that first topic is going to be for your course. So what do you think that is going to be?

Katherine Fox (09:04):

I think it's going to be the science communication just because that requires fewer existing relationships and inputs beforehand. I would love to, maybe in a year or two... I'm really interested in moving into some research around people who are suffering from long COVID. That is on the horizon, but I don't have all the pieces in place yet for that to start. So I think it's going to be the science communication, and that will in some ways look more like a creative writing class. Maybe they'll decide to make a podcast, maybe they'll decide to make some infographics, but letting them choose a topic and then build on that in ways to reach the public as they choose. And we'll build in some different types of peer review and have them approach someone in the lay public or approach someone from their internships that they have to do for other parts of this degree or something like that. So they're getting some feedback and opportunities for iterative development that isn't just within our own little echo chamber of the university.

Jeremiah Timberlake (10:09):

I think that's a great idea for the first class, especially jumping off from a creative writing structure. I think that's a great way to get students engaged in that sense from the get go.

(10:21):

Well, thank you, Katherine for joining us again and giving us an updated sense of where your course is at. It sounds like it's shaping up to be a very important and enjoyable opportunity for your students, and I wish you all the best for the future of your plans.

Katherine Fox (10:33):

Thanks. Thanks for having me back, and I'll keep listening to your podcast.

Matt Wittstein (10:46):

Limed: Teaching with a Twist was created and developed by Matt Wittstein, associate professor of Exercise Science at Elon University. Dhvani Toprani is Elon University's assistant director of learning design and support and serves as a producer for the show. Jeremiah Timberlake is a class of 2024 computer science and music and the liberal arts double major at Elon University and summer 2023 intern for Limed. Music for the show was composed and recorded by Kai Mitchell, a class of 2024 music production and recording arts student at Elon University. Limed: Teaching with a Twist is published by and produced in collaboration with the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. For more information, including show notes and additional engaged learning resources, visit www.centerforengagedlearning.org. Thank you for listening, and please subscribe, rate, review, and share our show to help us keep it zesty.