

Ep. 030: Back to The Classroom

We're back for the new academic year with a conversation about course design. CTLT's Director, Dr. Claire Lamonica, is teaching a class of freshman for the first time in more than a decade. We discuss her expectations, her concerns, and how she's building her unique course. We also explore the importance of "letting go" when we find ourselves using the need to cover course content as an excuse to avoid innovation.

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2017/ep030.shtml>

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: And I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching!

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today once again, Dr. Claire Lamonica., our director. Hi, Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi, Jim.

JIM: So today we're doing a little episode, maybe the first of a few updates, I'm kind of hoping; because you have something exciting happening this fall,

CLAIRE: I do. I'm so excited. I'm going to teach a class and teach a class of undergraduates. And I haven't done that I haven't taught undergraduates in 10 years. And I'm going to teach a class of freshmen and haven't taught freshmen in 12 years. So, I'm feeling very, very brave and not just a little terrified.

JIM: So, as as the director here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, you're dealing with teaching every day. But again, this is kind of a new, or a renew renewing experience, I guess we'll call it or whatever. And because that's not usually part of your you know, your directorship, here, necessarily, this is something extra, and it's a unique course here on campus. Can you describe first of all exactly what the course is?

CLAIRE: Yeah, I'm getting I'm going to teach a freshmen link course LinC is capital L, lowercase i and n, capital C, stands for learning and communities. It's a freshman seminar designed to aid the transition to college. So, it's not, it's not necessarily for students who are at risk or any specific populations, students do self-select into it, it meets for only the first eight weeks of the academic year, twice a week, and the students get one hour of credit. It's, well, you know what, it was a perfect opportunity for me because I've been wanting to go back and teach undergraduates for some time now. But there just wasn't a good way to do it. I, you know, my area is writing and the teaching of writing

and to try to teach a full-blown writing class or a methods class and attend to my administrative responsibilities just wasn't gonna work. So, when this opportunity came along, I, I, I actually went out sort of seeking an opportunity. And when I was offered this, I got really excited about it.

JIM: Damn, should I ask, what do you, may be worried about at this point? Or what if I'm-

CLAIRE: -Worried I'll blow it? What if I forgotten how to do this? Yeah, you know, actually, it's not so much that I forgotten how to do this. Um, so the really good thing about working at CTLT Is that you, you get to hear so many faculty stories. I mean, it's, it's just really fabulous. The really bad thing about working here is that you get to hear so many faculty stories. So, I've been hearing so much about how 18 year-olds now are different than 18 year olds used to be that I'm a little worried that not having gone through some sort of transition gradually, you know, maybe I'm going to go back and they're going to, like, seem like total aliens, like, I'm not going to be able to recognize these picture. I just I don't know, I mean, that that worries me a little bit I- To be quite honest. But well, and in my will will will muddle through.

JIM: Yeah. In my experience, you know, it was about three years between teaching freshmen when I went back and taught the basic speech course again, and I noticed that there were differences in terms of attitude. But not necessarily bad. It was just different. And a lot of it and of course, I tend to notice things centered around technology. So, a lot of it was how they how they wanted to interact with the class in terms of technology and stuff. But and they're far more disciplined in terms of technology, like their smartphones and stuff, because they because I was- I had freshmen who had gone all through high school being told to put their bleeping phones away. Oh, so they had been conditioned to a certain sort of order. And so, when I kind of said, well, no, we can use our phones for this. And this they were a little I mean, they were a little reluctant to because I thought it was it was it was, I guess uncivil. It was against the rules. I think you're gonna find I think it'll be an interesting challenge. I think so too. But I think I think you know, there's still students.

CLAIRE: Yeah. Well, and that's and they're, and they're 18-year-olds in their first eight weeks away from home. Right. So, there's something almost universal about that experience. Not entirely universal, but but almost.

JIM: Well. And so, I wanted and it's those universal experiences that you're now getting to do firsthand again, that I think is of interest in terms of our of our humble little pokey little podcast, because we were sitting in a meeting a couple weeks ago, or last week, I think, and we were talking about accessibility, and we were talking about helping faculty members with accessibility best practices helping expose different ways of exposing them to that. And you had brought up you said, you know, I'm doing this course. And I've, I realized I wasn't using styles in the word word document. When I was when I was doing that.

CLAIRE: I wrote my whole syllabus, and I wasn't using Styles in Word just...

JIM: Well, what you didn't notice when I was sitting right next to you was me go, oh, ah, so guess what I'm doing this summer, right? Because I'm teaching a course in the fall too. So, I need to go through and do that, because I always just had bolded headings and stuff like that. But if someone's using a screen reader, and just for ease of information standpoint, it makes sense. So, so, I think that there are probably little things that that you're going to be able to bring to our podcast that you've you've experienced, either preparing or then delivering this court, what are some of the other things that you find yourself doing cuz you have been working hard on it.

CLAIRE: I'm working hard on it, because I really, because, you know, it's gonna come and go fast. Yeah, you know, eight weeks as a as a flash. And I want to be able to be available to the students I don't, I'm trying so hard to get ahead. And so that I'm not having to build the course, while I'm teaching the course. I don't know if I'm going to get as far as I wanted. But I but but I tell you, the thing that's happened to me so far, is that I decided that I needed to practice what I preach. And so, I started using D Fink's course design process. And it's worked out great, you know, I'm not doing all 12 steps, necessarily, but you know, I was starting with the basics. So, I took learning outcomes, I, you know, I have a set of learning outcomes. And I thought, okay, well, how will I be able to tell this is what the students need to learn? How will I be able to tell whether they've learned it, so I started thinking in terms of, you know, some things I might be able to assess. And then I was thinking about, you know, things that we could do to help them accomplish those outcomes in a way that would make them feel good when when they were assessed. And I, I mean, I had this, I had this table, that was a thing of beauty. Beautiful, a beautiful table of all the exciting, wonderful, great learning opportunities that my students were going to have and all the great things we would do together. And then I pulled out the template for the course schedule. And I realized, oh, this is an eight-week course.

JIM: Yeah. Oh, and so you hadn't built it out. For longer that?

CLAIRE: Yeah, well, yeah. Because, you know, usually, I am planning for 16 weeks, 15 weeks, and, and I had too much for that. So, the thing that I have learned to do this summer is to let go some things and so some, there are a lot of things that I was really excited about doing with these students that are you know, we're we're not gonna, we're not gonna be able to do because I had to prioritize, I had to look at them really hard and say, is this need to do? Or is this nice to do? And practically all of my nice to dues are just wandering off, because, you know, I have so at best, I would have 16 class sessions, but the truth of the matter is, oh, I'm teaching Monday, Wednesday. So there goes Labor Day, right? Yeah, there's one session gone. And then there are at least three, at least three sessions that have to be devoted to sort of programmatic sorts of things that all the students in the program have to do. So there's three or four more sessions guy, so I'm really down to like, 11, about 11 sessions that I, you know, that I get to take advantage of, and so, it's gonna be a little bit of a challenge.

JIM: Yeah. Sounds like it sounds like it. I mean, I, I'm also teaching on Monday nights dis autumn, and I add after the week after the schedule, you know, and I usually taught on Tuesday nights, and just to help out, and because of some of my colleagues have commitments on different nights. So, I ended up teaching on Monday night, and I, and

as soon as I realized that, it's like, oh, every semester, I'm gonna lose, yeah, either with Labor Day, or with the Dr. King holiday, or whatever. So, I'm not good at letting go. So, this is, so I may be coming to you for some event, because, and of course, this is an evening class, it's three hours long. So, even within the, you know, I usually have too many things to do. And I'm better at this now. But it used to be that I was kind of like Captain Ahab. I was like, we're gonna get that white whale by the end of the night. And I know you're all tired, and you really want to go and you're all not really paying attention. But you know.

CLAIRE: I have content to cover. It's like, you know, what that I mean, I and that's part of the good reason for sort of telling this story is that we all this is one of the you know, top five quotes that that we hear at CTLT but I've got so much content Yeah, I'd love to do that active learning thing, but I've got so much content to cover, you know, I'd love to do some civic engagement in my course. But I've got so much content to cover. So, you know, here I am. Yeah. You know, in the same, pretty much the same boat thinking, wow, I've got all these things that I that I thought were really important. And so, I think the lesson is the sort of general lesson about teaching here is that we sometimes have to let go of some things. And that's, I'm learning that the hard way at the moment.

JIM: So, two final quick questions, because this is going to be a shorter episode today. Number one, how much, and because it's a one credit hour course; How flipped is this course going to be? How much? How much outside work ahead of time? Yeah, you know, time on task. Yeah. Are you gonna...?

CLAIRE: Yeah, it's gonna be pretty flipped. I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm actually going to tell them. It's a one-hour course we're meeting. But we're, it's only for eight weeks. So, we're meeting twice a week. So, we're spending two hours a week in class, I actually wrote this into my syllabus. Yeah, there you go. And I said that conventionalism wisdom is that to do well, in college, you should spend at least two to three hours outside of class preparing for every hour that you're in class. And research tells us that students don't do that they don't spend nearly that time. So, what I said in the syllabus was that I was going to ask them to commit to spending that much time and that to help them with that. The work that I give them to do outside of class, I'm going to guesstimate how much time that will take. And I'm going to put that in the the course schedule. So, where it says, what to prepare for class, it will have you know, watch this video, read this chapter, you know, take this, you know, take this survey, whatever. And then it'll have next to it a little time, guesstimate, I'm going to commit to not going over four hours per week. So, two hours for each hour, two hours of preparation for each hour we're going to have in class. So, it's pretty flipped.

JIM: Yeah. And I think I think for a lot of students, freshmen coming in, even in this day and age, I think that will be a new experience for them. I think they're still probably thinking college is sit and listen to someone wise, talk about something I'm vaguely interested in for a while. Yeah, we just kind of the whole point of the class is to get them out of that mindset. So, it'll be interesting. Final question. We've talked many times on our pokey little show about the importance of assessing our teaching and using it as a tool for reflection. Have you thought about how you're going to do that with an eight-week course? Because I mean, there's no midterm chat.

CLAIRE: Yeah, we would have to do it. You know, like, yeah, by the end of September, right. I suppose you could do it earlier in September. Yeah. I mean, I'm sure I could get somebody that actually the problem with doing a midterm chat. And this is not that I couldn't find somebody to come in and do a midterm champion, because I know people, and I probably could get somebody to do it. But it's the idea of giving up one of my remaining Rob and class sessions. To that I will do a quote midterm. So, four weeks in, I'll ask the students one of their outside-of-class assignments will be to ask answer a little questionnaire about how the class is going. And I'll probably use the midterm chat questions to compose compose that questioning clear.

JIM: It's exciting stuff. It is exciting. So, what's the next what's the very next thing you need to do as far as getting ready to teach?

CLAIRE: Oh, my gosh, well, I need to finish my my, my syllabus is pretty much done. But I need to finish building my course schedule. And then oh, my gosh, I haven't started building my ReggieNet site yet. So, I have to start building my ReggieNet site. And that's going to take more time because I don't use it often enough. And because it takes time to build a unique website. I mean, you know, it's just just the right is right, but because I don't use it very frequently. It takes me a little longer to do things and somebody who's using it for three courses or four courses, webmaster.

JIM: And obviously, I think you're gonna be using the Lessons tool and stuff like that.

CLAIRE: The lessons, I love the Lessons tool, but yeah, it's gonna take a little longer. It's a little time. Yeah.

JIM: Well, we'll let you get back to it, Claire.

CLAIRE: Thank you.

JIM: Thanks so much. You can find out more about our podcast by going to our website CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. And if you have an idea for a future episode that you'd like us to talk about, you can email us CTLT@Illinoisstate.edu. For Dr. Claire Lamonica, and for all my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching!