

Ep. 083: A Look Ahead to Fall 2023

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2023/ep083.shtml>

At the midpoint of summer break, we pause and take a glance behind to get a sense of the road ahead. Dr. Jennifer Friberg, the Center's director of scholarly teaching and the Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, joins Jim to talk about teaching in the coming academic year. They explore the idea that we may always be "pandemic adjacent," in terms of the COVID-19 years' impact on student learning and how it has informed how we conduct classes. They discuss how issues with student engagement, attendance, and emergent AI tools are causing us to rethink our teaching strategies.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

JEN: I'm Jen.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Integrated Professional Development here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee, and joining me once again our Director of Scholarly Teaching, Dr. Jennifer Friberg. Hi, Jen,

JEN: Hey, how are you?

JIM: I'm fine. We are in new environments, in our old environment, in our temporary old environment. We finally, we've been on a little bit of a hiatus as we've been working on a lot of other projects here at the Center, especially the transition from ReggieNet to our new Learning Management System Canvas this fall. Coming up, stay tuned for podcast episodes about that. But we have set up a new little room to do this recording in.

JEN: We have a studio now.

JIM: We are no longer in what I used to call studio Gee, which was my office with the rickety desk and, and, and the air conditioner blowing on the microphones. I don't know if people will hear a noticeable improvement in sound quality, because we're still using the same pretty good recording here that we've had. I'm hoping it will make editing it a lot easier, because there's not as much digital ledger domain that needs to happen in order to make it sound good.

JEN: Right.

JIM: But it has been a long time since we've talked and we were talking today about, you know, not only do we need to start testing out all of this stuff in order to start producing stuff for the fall, but also the fact that fall's coming Well,

JEN: Frightenly.

JIM: Yeah, frighteningly soon, it's a little after the Independence Day holiday, when we've decided to sit down. And so we were talking today about what just kind of...

JEN: Taking a breath and thinking about where we are, you know, we have with the last several years have been so focused on the pandemic teaching coming out of pandemic teaching. And you know, what, what is the space we're in now, you know, where are we? Where are our heads? And what's happening around us in terms of teaching and learning?

JIM: Can we even say, post pandemic? Is that even?

JEN: I honestly don't know.

JIM: I haven't gotten the memo on that one way or the other. You know what I mean? I mean, in some ways, vaccines are still in the news, there's gonna be a new round of them this fall potentially, for some populations and stuff like that, you know, I'm going to be teaching again this fall, I don't think you're going to be teaching again, spring in the spring. That'll be another episode. Yeah. So but you know, I'm teaching incoming freshmen again, in some ways were post pandemic in our teaching

JEN: I think we might always be pandemic adjacent.

JIM: Yeah.

JEN: I think and that might not be the right way to say it. But I think, you know, the, the impacts of COVID to society at large but, but to specifically a higher education are undeniable, and probably long lasting, I think we we've changed a lot about how we approach ourselves, our peers, our students, and the work that we do.

JIM: So that's important to keep in mind because, you know, when I think COVID adjacent, or pandemic adjacent, I think that okay, never again, am I not going to be prepared to pivot? You know, fool me once, shame on you fool me twice. Shame.

JEN: Right. Right.

JIM: But, I think, I think what you're talking about is much more salient, especially for those of us who are thinking about teaching in the fall. And we're, we got a couple of weeks left to or, you know, we really need to start working on this at some point.

JEN: Right, right.

JIM: With your ear to the ground, what have you heard, in particular about the impact now that we're a year or more out from returning to campus? And we have students who are starting now who were probably sophomores in high school?

JEN: Right.

JIM: Is that if I'm doing the math correctly, something like that? I mean, they weren't, you know?

JEN: Yes.

JIM: Yeah. So

JEN: Actually freshman.

JIM: Freshman

JEN: My daughter will be college freshmen this year, and COVID was her freshman year of high school.

JIM: Right. So, they had so it wasn't just, you know, coasting through your senior year in high school doing online classes where you, if you were typically like me, you weren't paying much attention anyway, by that point. Right. But it was, you know, it really it was truly the Whammy. So, what have you heard about the specific impact that we're kind of seeing with that?

JEN: You know, I think there's different conversations that are happening, and not all of them are. Not all of them touch on anything related to the pandemic, there's, you know, certainly, we're talking more about online learning and online programs, because, though, many students like to be face-to-face, we had a lot of feedback from our students here on campus that would suggest they liked the flexibility of asynchronous or hybrid classes to accommodate family schedule, work schedule or other, you know, personal priorities or needs. And so, I think, you know, we're hearing more and more about that, and with Tony Pina being part of our Center now and working to build out entirely online programs on behalf of the institution. You know, I think there are a lot of conversations happening around online teaching and learning that we weren't engaged with quite so much several years ago. But I'm heartened because I think a lot of the conversations that are happening around online teaching and learning now are really focused on how to do it well.

JIM: Right. Right.

JEN: That I think is, is you know, a really positive focus to think about how do you harness the technologies and an LMS or other Ed technologies that can, you know, support your, your pedagogical aims, you know, the things that you want to achieve with your students?

JIM: So sure, well, and technology rings, another bell, we could talk about in a moment, but I think, you know, where that's going. But what about what about in the face-to-face class? Because I just feel like, okay, so students always change. I love teaching, occasionally teaching this communication course because it's the basic speech course, it's communication is critical inquiry. It's you have to give the three public speeches, but it's for freshmen.

JEN: Right.

JIM: So, gen ed class for freshmen. And so, when I teach it in the fall, I teach at 8am, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, so I get to say to them, welcome to your first day of college.

JEN: Right.

JIM: Okay, for most of them.

JEN: Right.

JIM: But the other part of that is it, I'm always fascinated by how different those classes are, every couple of years when I teach that course.

JEN: Sure.

JIM: That that the freshmen of 2018 were vastly different from the freshmen of 2020. And then

JEN: 2023.

JIM: Yeah, 2023 is going to end 2022 was very different when I taught it last year. And I felt that there was a it's not necessarily just COVID related, as you said, there are other factors involved as well, including the fact that we've had a lot. We've had big freshman classes, which...

JEN: We have.

JIM: And this is a good thing because it means we have a more diverse population of incoming students. And I also felt, I feel like we're, we're catching more students who didn't learn how to learn before they got here. So, what are your thoughts about that? Because I had a lot of engagement issues without going into too many details.

JEN: Sure.

JIM: What and I was, I was coming into your doorway, talking about it?

JEN: Well, we've had some really interesting conversations in the Center here, because so many of us do teach, which I think is a huge asset to actually have your boots on the ground where, you know, our people are. And so, we, we've been having some really interesting conversations amongst the staff this last year, about the realities that, you know, they were facing as instructors in the classroom, similar to what you're, you know, alluding to for your yourself. And, you know, we were professional developers, that's what we do here in the Center. And we offer workshops and other learning opportunities to, you know, explore evidence, informed instruction. We know how to do those evidence-informed things. We know how to talk about those things, but they aren't working right now. And that's yeah, that's the conversation I keep having is, yes, I'm doing this, I've developed a syllabus that is responsive, I'm being, you know, as, as inclusive and accommodating to my students as possible. And yet, they don't seem to care about the topic, about, you know, the, what's happening in terms of the content

in the class. And that certainly can't be generalized to all students in all classes in all places. But I've heard enough people say, my students aren't into this right now. That I think it's a conversation that needs to be had what, where are we missing as instructors, cues from our students, feedback from our students that might help us bridge the gaps that we're seeing?

JIM: I am so glad to hear you say that, actually, because this weekend, I was sitting out on the deck, and I'm, it's like, okay, I'm not. I don't have the emotional wherewithal currently to actually start building stuff in the computer. But I just kind of start do little doodling a little bit on the notepad. And I pulled out my syllabus from that I revised and revised and revised over the years. I don't feel like I'm doing a good enough job anymore, meeting them where they're at, in terms of their interests, in terms of why they're here.

JEN: I think that's fair. There's a lot of introspection happening right now. Because there's, in my, in my mind, the thing that I love the most about higher education is teaching I love I came here to teach. That's what I wanted to do. And there's a sense that's really fantastic about leaving a class and thinking, wow, that went really well. I feel like the students were connected. They, they're asking great questions. I had great participation, like this went really well. And you walk out of there, and you think, yay, you know, this is why I do this. I love this. And then I just get a sense that we're having less of those moments because we are recognizing that we aren't making those same connections in the same ways. And I've been thinking about this a lot, actually. I've been really reflecting on a movement that's very strong in the scholarship of teaching and learning, called students as partners, and certainly, students as partners is not new to SoTL. It's just some are new to the world if it's newer to SoTL. Right. Yeah. And so, this, this idea that students can be partners in their learning and our teaching in ways that maybe we haven't fully explored ourselves or even talked about much on this campus. And I know Mayuko Nakamura and Dana Karriker and David Giovanelli, the, you know, some of the professional developers here in the center, we've really started talking about students as partners, and how can we harness where the students are now, which you just referred to, as part of a conversation that we have at the beginning of a semester to say, Okay, what, what are your expectations? What are your goals for this class? How can we get there, and it helped with that kind of co-creation process? Not to change the content, or adapt course learning objectives or anything like that, but really to say, Okay, there's different, there's different pathways towards the same destination, what works? What, what do you want to see happen in this class and have that sense of engagement as a co-creator? And

JIM: In other words, they're kind of they're kind of having input on the lesson plan before the lesson plan is delivered.

JEN: A little bit, you know, there's a pretty robust scholarship out there that looks at student learning in courses where students have helped plan the course.

JIM: Okay.

JEN: And it's actually a pretty effective way of moving forward. And so I wonder, to bridge that, not really knowing where my students heads are right now. You know, gap a problem, if that might not be a way to bring students to the table in a slightly different way that might help them be more involved. Engaged. Interested.

JIM: Yeah.

JEN: Present.

JIM: Yeah, present. That's great. It's something that we can follow up on as we develop our approach to it to kind of start getting the word out in front of our instructors here on campus.

JEN: Well, and I will say, just to tack on we, we have on our campus, the Provost, Innovation grants there, we call them PIE grants. And now I can't remember what the E stands.

JIM: Yeah.

JEN: But we here in the center, the individuals I just named my Mayuko, David, Dana and myself, we were awarded a PIE grant for the coming academic year to establish a student advisory council. So we're going to be engaging with students to get feedback about what's working for them in the classroom, what's not working for them in the classroom, we feel like we engage with instructors full time. But we do want to be able to represent the views of students when we talk to instructors.

JIM: Sure. Because our ultimate mission here is student success. It's just that we're taking the route through the instructor.

JIM: By working on professional development for them, that's great. In my own class, you had mentioned maybe not necessarily changing around the content or something like that. I am thinking though, because this in particular, this course, it is, it is very logically planned out. And it has, you know, there are 90 sections of this course that are delivered every semester, at least the last few years. And first you learn about the basics of communication, then you learn about how to do an informative speech, and then there's group work. And then we get to the persuasion. And I know some instructors have kind of mixed it up a little bit. But I'm thinking one way to meet them where they live is to start engaging with the communication that they're probably most engaging with, which is persuasive. It's not just informative. It's not just a report on it, which is which is you know, so they still have to learn how to how to be good researchers, they still have to learn how to be critical thinkers to make critical inquiries.

JEN: Correct.

JEN: Sure.

JIM: But I'm, in some ways I'm kind of saying, Well, why don't we just start? If we break a couple plates along the way, that's fine. Why don't we start juggling now with the with

the really big things which are with as you're walking across campus, as you're walking through life, people are constantly trying to persuade you of something.

JEN: Something.

JIM: Buy this, vote for this, don't do this, be afraid of this.

JEN: Right.

JIM: All of that stuff. So that's, that's as far as I've gotten in course redesign.

JEN: Sure.

JIM: That's, but those are some that's those are some of the things. And then I'm hoping that that will also allow me to early in the semester, bring in another discussion with my students, which I need to get boned up on in the next six or seven weeks, which is AI. Because this is a class, this was not the class I was originally going to going to do this fall.

JEN: Okay,

JIM: Going to do my media performance class, which is kind of AI doesn't come into it that much at this point.

JEN: Right.

JIM: So, what are you hearing?

JEN: Well, it depends. I'll give you the lawyer's answer. It depends. It depends who you talk to. There tend to be two schools of thought that about AI, that A it can be used to support learning in the classroom, where B, it's going to be a dangerous sort of tool that could compromise student learning in the classroom. And there's probably truth to both sides of that, right. I think that you know, there are many resources, ours included, that talk about how you can ethically use AI to help support student learning. So, for instance, have a first draft written through of an assignment, you know, created through AI, but then students have to go fact check, expand, extend, you know, whatever it is to engage higher learning or, you know, higher levels of cognition and things like that. I mean, and people have talked about that now for a little bit and I think, you know, some of our peers here do that sort of thing. The what do you call it? The tricky wicket though is, is

JIM: Sticky wicket.

JEN: Sticky wicket. Okay.

JIM: For all your cliché needs.

JEN: There you are. The, you know, what do you do in, in cases where you really do need students to generate their own stuff, you know, their own intellectual property, not

somebody else's, not something that's been, you know, created in a technology space that, you know, is rapidly changing and getting smarter, and you know, all those things. So, you know, there's, there's personal feelings about this, at where it should be positioned in the classroom and at the university. But also, I think there, there needs to be disciplinary conversations to where we come together with our colleagues and say, what, what is our expectation as geologists, speech pathologists, communication experts, you know, what, what? Where is this going to be positioned in our students' professional lives once they've left here? What skills do they need to leave here with relative to things like AI? And where does that go? We certainly haven't resolved that question or those that issue, nor has anyone else.

JIM: No. And so, in the short term, one of my goals with this class coming up is to have a conversation about it that is not puritanical. And implies the fact that they I know they're all going to cheat. I don't want to be disrespectful to them like that. I'm committed to figure out some way to use it and not just ban it. Because also, I don't think that works.

JEN: Right. Right. And, you know, I think there's ways that that you could do that. I mean, I'm going to be teaching a professional writing class when I dip my toes back in

JIM: Oh, so you're all Yeah. Okay. There you go.

JEN: And so, I have been thinking a lot about AI and, and how that might work. You know, I, my disciplinary background is speech pathology. And so, I'll be teaching graduate students about professional writing for reports and communications with clients and families and other stakeholders like that. I started thinking about, Gosh, can I have them do a press release with AI, but then they have to translate it for this, you know, audience in class right in front of us? Or, you know, what does that look like? I don't know, I think there's a lot of possibilities out there. If we let ourselves think about just approaching what we're trying to accomplish a little bit differently.

JIM: We're kind of in the middle of all of these things. There's no, there's been no history written yet about AI in higher education. Certainly, there's really no history written yet about impacts of pandemics in higher education. So, all we can do is move forward. And we'll continue to have conversations as we go along this summer, we got our podcasting space back up. And, of course, you can always find resources on our website, ProDev.IllinoisState.edu, including syllabus language, which we're going to be putting out the call, we haven't talked about this, we're gonna need to put out the call here in a couple days to ask all of our partners on campus if there's any suggested or recommended syllabus language to get that updated, so people can get that. And although we do, we, you know, they're constantly updated. And so I think if you're working on your syllabus, now, there's still some good examples out there on that page, so we have things like that. And we're also talking about talking about our fall programming, and the consultations we're going to offer this fall. So, all of that is coming up, coming to both a website and a podcast. And for those working here at Illinois State an inbox.

JEN: Yes.

JIM: Near you.

JEN: Well, you know, this, this fall is certainly not going to be boring for us here at the Center. You know, we have Canvas coming.

JIM: Where we managed to go about 15 minutes between references to Canvas.

JEN: We did.

JIM: I'm very happy about that.

JEN: You, you know I am as well. So, we've got that rolling out. But what will be less visible for everyone? Is the fact that we're also rolling out a whole new registration system for our campus stakeholders who will be coming to participate in our programs. We have...

JIM: Registration system for events here.

JEN: Correct

JIM: Not student registration.

JEN: Correct. Yeah. Not student registration. Participant registration,

JEN: You want to come see us, there's going to be a new, new experience for you. And so, we're testing that, and we have some new collaborations that are really exciting. We're going to be working with Office of International Engagement to do a year-long cohort program. And so, there's all kinds of fun things that will be communicated soon to our campus community. I think that will, you know, hopefully, offer something for everyone.

JIM: Yes.

JIM: Jen, Thank you so much.

JEN: Thank you.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. Again. Find out more about our pokey little podcast about all the services we do here at the Center for Integrated Professional Development, and where you can get help for your teaching go to ProDev.IllinoisState.edu. For Dr Jennifer Friberg and for all my colleagues here at the Center, until we talk again, happy teaching!