



The Secret Sauce for Successful Online Student Teams

Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

00:06 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Hello, my name is Alexandra Bitton-Bailey and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida and our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations, and stories about teaching. Harrison Hove is a faculty lecturer in the College of Journalism at the University of Florida, Harrison came to the University as an undergraduate student. And today he still nurtures a deep admiration and gratitude for the learning the instructors and the overall experience UF offered him. Coming back as a faculty member is tantamount to coming full circle in life for Harrison.

00:47 Harrison Hove

I get to teach students all levels as a matter of fact, about broadcast writing, television, news reporting, television storytelling. And so I work with students when they enter the institution as like first or second year students all the way up until they graduate. So it's really an amazing experience to see students transform before your eyes. But I spent the bulk of my career working for local television news stations, in various roles. You know, I was the weather guy, I was a meteorologist news anchor, I was a news reporter. And those experiences really helped me understand all different aspects of broadcast news. So I think it prepared me to work with students who have these aspirations in different capacities, you know, everyone's different, has unique goals. And so if you want to go into television news, you know, I get to use some of my experiences to help propel you forward.

01:45 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Harrison loves a good challenge, a riddle or puzzle to solve - anything. And teaching in challenging times for Harrison does not under any circumstances, leave him room to offer students who have just a small window of time at the University of Florida, a lesser learning experience. Therefore, for him, it is a challenge worth all his efforts.

02:08 Harrison Hove

You know, I think I'm a creative at heart. And so, disruption and challenges in terms of methods of delivery is like a puzzle that I am willing to work through. And the reason that it's important that we all work through this right, and we all use our creative abilities to, to chart a course forward is because my students time at UF is finite, they only get three or four years, in most cases, some two if they're a community college transfer. And so, you know, if I have a semester where I say, Well, you know, we're facing challenges, or this method of delivery is hard, then that's not really doing a service to the students whose clock continues to tick. Regardless of existential circumstances, you know, what's going on in the world, we still have to make it happen.

03:11 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Harrison, rather than getting bogged down or discouraged with the idea of changing a course to a new medium mid-semester, started with the basics. What his students most needed, what tools he could use, and what ideas he could glean from others to make his course, into a fantastic learning experience no matter the medium.

03:33 Harrison Hove

You know, in terms of the pandemic, and as well as just online teaching or hybrid teaching, in general, I sit down and I think really critically about what are the skills my students need, and then figure out how I can leverage technology, for example, to make that happen. And so for me, you know, especially when the pandemic started, I couldn't just stop. Instead, I, I wouldn't even say I blew my course up. But I thought really hard about Okay, in this age of technology, what tools might exist tools that I might not have heard of before, I don't know about that can help my students develop the needed skills and necessary skills they have to have going into industry that no one else based on the courses they take might help them develop? Right? So that's, that's the task at hand. And that's where you just kind of sit down and think hard. And you also look over your shoulder and see what colleagues are doing, both at this institution and in higher education in general, and even, you know, secondary education to like there are tips and tricks and it's all about conversation, you know, asking others for help, seeing what other people are doing to help provide that light bulb moment for me as an instructor to raise my level of awareness so I can better connect and educate regardless of the format.

04:54 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Harrison mentions the supports that the University of Florida offers for new faculty, especially. Faculty who've been practitioners in their fields, but have very little or no teaching experience at all.

05:06 Harrison Hove

So in terms of like, the pedagogical framework and stuff, I would say, you know, at the university, my go, tos are always the Center for Teaching Excellence as well as CITT. You know, both of those centers have been amazing in terms of generating light bulb moments for me. I came to UF as an industry, person, you know, my experiences, and what makes me valuable is, is the time that I spent in industry. It doesn't mean that I was ever classically trained how to really be a teacher, and I think most of us are in that boat. And so I've looked to resources that already exists to just immerse myself in learning. And through that learning and just consuming content. That's where I've learned, you know, about Bloom's taxonomy. Before I came here, what was that I had no idea. That's where I learned about scaffolding my lessons. I didn't know necessarily, that's what I was doing. But that's what I was doing, right? I learned, you know, about think pair share, or how to really effectively utilize groups or, you know, the, the importance of low stakes assignments to build confidence. So not even about subject matter expertise. It's really about helping your students believe in themselves. I mean, that's part of the teaching process too. Giving feedback is another big one, right? In any class, you know, there's an art to giving feedback. And while I'm a communicator, I really learned an impactful framework for feedback through some of these resources. I would say, you know, in terms of lessons and how to teach journalism, which is what I teach, I'm in some some industry groups, as well as some journalism, education groups that go outside this institution outside of UF. And so I get to talk with other college and university educators who focus on broadcast journalism, and that idea exchange is always fruitful. And then, you know, the last thing for me is I talked to the hiring managers, I see what's being done in local television news these days. And so I know, I know what is needed to be successful in industry.

07:33 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

It may seem really challenging to create active team-based and experiential learning for students in an online setting. But it is possible and according to Harrison, there are great tools and strategies that make it possible. Part of the secret is dreaming big and exploring all the possibilities. Listen to the incredible assignments, his creativity, and the available resources at UF made possible.

07:58 Harrison Hove

I teach a fully online writing class. And I want my students to socialize with one another. And particularly during the pandemic, I felt students need that socialization just for their mental health and well-being. But also, they still need to develop these soft skills, too. And so, you know, we use tools, simple tools like Zoom, and Google Docs to collaborate in real time with one another, instead of sitting in a pot of four in an in person class, where you can just talk to one another and write on one sheet of paper, things are a little bit different. But the truth is, you know, we have those tools. During the pandemic, I actually attempted a team-based learning activity that was really like a massive project that I had never done before. So in my television news reporting course, students typically will create video news packages or video news stories individually. Well, I felt we needed socialization, we needed that group learning experience. And so I tweaked that requirement during the pandemic. And I actually wanted to internationalize the curriculum simultaneously. And so I thought, you know what, let's do a 30 minute news special, where every student will have the opportunity to still create their one story, but I wanted to weave these stories together to create an impactful 30 minute news special about how the covid

19 pandemic is impacting people around the globe. And I did this, by of course, you know, we're utilizing Zoom. We've got some handouts so students can hear the explanation of the project, and the requirements verbally through zoom. I have handouts so they can read through them in their own time to ingest information that way. And then the collaborative tools that we just started with, we just jumped right into Google Docs. You know, a shared document where students can collaborate in real time to where they outline like, what story idea would they like to focus on? What country? Would they like to report from? Right? And who are some potential sources from that country? And that was the deal. The cool thing about a virtual or online format is that students can go places that we could never go physically, right. So in the pandemic, we could go to South Africa, and we went to Indonesia. And we went to Ireland and Australia. And we went and talked to nurses on the frontline in Italy. And so students realized that, you know, geography can no longer be a barrier in storytelling. So students picked countries, I helped them identified sources if they were getting stuck, so that's me kind of helping them push forward. But they're all collaborating in a group. So everyone's story idea is a little distinctly different, so we don't have overlap. And then, you know, once we collaborate in that space, here comes the individual contributions, you know, where a student then has to go out and set up those, those Zoom interviews with their sources. And they have to figure out how am I going to tell a visual story when I can't shoot video? That's relying on user generated content, or finding content from social media, or utilizing government sources, right. So instantly, we're talking about navigating through copyright laws as well, which we don't often have to talk about when we're out shooting video ourselves. So it was really interesting. The amount of learning taking place in such a short amount of time. I picked a couple anchors, students to anchor this special. And they did it from their own homes. And we created like, some of them were able to create teleprompters on their computer screens. I didn't even know that was possible. They recorded their own voices from either a microphone on their computer or their cell phone by putting a blanket over their head and sitting in the closet so it didn't echo and sounded of high quality. You know, we just really had to be creative with how we broke through these barriers and overcame these obstacles.

12:20 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Harrison is really adamant about the importance of teaching not only the subject matter, but also the professional and teamwork skills necessary to help students tackle their future work with confidence.

12:33 Harrison Hove

I think the value is really, really important here. And it's impart the motivation for doing some of these things. And that is, in our classes, we are tasked with teaching subject matter, right, we want our students to learn about whatever topic it is, we're teaching for the course. But I also think that we should really invest in soft skill development. You know, these are skills that will transcend regardless of what students pursue as an occupation once they graduate from UF. And I think that, you know, our task is not only to build subject matter experts, but it's to build employable people, it's to build stronger human beings. And I think by intentionally helping students develop these soft skills, we aid them in this process. And that's this idea of, when you go into a workplace, they're going, you're going to have to work in teams, you're going to have to work with a diverse group of people. And so I want to help my students gain those experiences that I know they're going to have to do in industry. And I don't want them cutting

their teeth in industry, I want them to stub their toe with me, because I can help them work and process through that. And so when it comes to working in groups, I mean, that's the value right there is being a collaborator, being a team member learning how to not monopolize, right, but also learning how to step forth from the shadows, find your strong suit, build confidence and leverage technology too.

14:12 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Students are often apprehensive about trying out new activities and assignments, especially if they involve group work. But Harrison has some helpful recommendations that can lower anxiety and boost buy in.

14:24 Harrison Hove

We need to find low stakes ways for our students to practice that information. And I think a low stakes group assignment is sometimes awesome, because it takes the headache away from what happens if a group really just derails and has poor communication and a high stakes assignment then you're left with like, maybe a little bit of a mess, but in a low stakes assignment, you know, it's just five points. Right? And so, the students if it goes wrong, you know, it's solvable. It's fixable, as you know, on the instructor end. But if it goes right, your students get to know each other your students get to collaborate. Right, your students get to look at how to solve problems from many different angles.

15:05 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Harrison offers some invaluable suggestions for implementing Capstone or large scale group team assignments. These strategies are key for students to have a positive experience and achieve the learning they'd hoped for.

15:20 Harrison Hove

Be hands on as the instructor, help students in real time navigate through hurdles, which they will face. Create an opportunity for students to have check ins or milestones. So that way as the instructor, you can ensure they're making satisfactory progress. And then I would say before this all starts, you need to create guidelines for respect. So whether that's netiquette guidelines, or talk about and emphasize respect and welcome diverse ways of solving problems from the very beginning. And when you go through that, and you begin to verbally or in written word, explain the assignment, just be very clear with what the requirements are in providing students framework to be successful. So I think it's setting students up for success from the beginning, helping them navigate through the process too, intentionally, and just being there to push them forward to the end goal.

16:19 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

For Harrison, teaching is really about having the opportunity to impact each and every student's life. This is what he loves most deeply about teaching.

16:29 Harrison Hove

I wanted to take my influence and experiences into a classroom setting, knowing that these one on one professional relationships that we're building, can really change a student's life or help them chart the course forward for them. And so, you know, instead of helping my community with a story a day, now I get to help a young person really blossom and be an industry leader of tomorrow. So instead of one of me, I feel like I'm building an army to go and do great work at a time when journalism needs good people more than ever, it is an extremely challenging field right now given disinformation and trust issues, and just the economic fracturing as well with these media outlets, and figuring out a sustainable path forward as the fourth institution, you know, within our democracy, so really, on a very serious level, it is important to invest in this next generation, and prepare them and I love that I have some sort of part in that process. Whether it's a light bulb moment in my classroom or seeing a student say, you know, I never I never thought I could do that, but we did it.

17:47 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Thank you for listening to this episode of the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. For more helpful resources developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida, visit our website, teach.ufl.edu. We're happy you joined us and we hope to see you next time for more tips, strategies and ideas on teaching and learning at the University of Florida.