

## Xchange Episode 11

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MICHAEL AVIS: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Xchange, the podcast for faculty by faculty. I'm Michael Avis, Professor and Faculty Facilitator, and I'm here with Nicki Monahan, Faculty Facilitator and coach. How you doing today, Nicki?

NICKI MONAHAN: I'm great, Mike. It's my 60th birthday today, so I'm feeling really grateful for being healthy and alive and going into a new decade, being able to do this amazing work with faculty and I'm super excited that we have students with us today because that's really why we're all here.

MICHAEL AVIS: Yes, I was going to say -- If you didn't say it, I was going to say happy big birthday for you. I sorry that we're not celebrating together over a scotch somewhere but I'll send you a virtual scotch later on tonight. How about that?

NICKI MONAHAN: Alright. How are you doing, Mike?

MICHAEL AVIS: I'm good. COVID continues. We're now into the second lockdown. My kids are precariously in school but I think any minute they might all be sent home. So my work life is about to change, I think.

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, we take it all day by day, right, Mike?

MICHAEL AVIS: That's right. Today we got a very special Xchange podcast. So today we're joined with two special guests and fellow podcasters, Asna Khan and Yasmin Ranjkesh. Asna and Yasmin are students from the School of Design. And since the fall, they and other fellow design students have been producing the SOD Talks Podcast.

NICKI MONAHAN: Yes, and as we all know, feedback and assessment are integral parts in teaching and learning. And there were lots of surveys made available to students, staff and faculty asking about the state of affairs during this year of remote learning. And after hearing these SOD Talks, we thought this would be a great opportunity to speak to current students and have them help inform our faculty on how they're doing and how we can all improve as a college. So we're recording this podcast on Teams for the first time. So you can catch us on the TLX YouTube channel as well and we'll be right back.

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NICKI MONAHAN: Welcome Asna and Yasmin. It's such a pleasure to have two fellow podcasters on Xchange. What inspired you to create SOD Talks in the first place?

YASMIN RANJKESH: Well, Asna messaged me one day, so I think she should go ahead with that.

ASNA KHAN: Honestly, when we heard initially that school was going to be online, I was just super bummed about that. And it's just like we've had one year, so I just felt like the whole community was a really nice space and it felt really collaborative. And when I heard that it was going to be online, I just figured it would be such a shame because we're all just

going to be doing our courses and that's it, like nothing else on the side. And we were lucky because we made friends, so we had a group and everything. So I just thought that I wanted to do something else as well and I was just thinking what else could we do while being remote. You know? So I just -- honestly, it's random. I actually went on Skillshare just to watch videos or learn how to do something new. I wasn't thinking about the podcast at that point. And then just the first video popped up about how to make a podcast and I just watched the whole thing. And I was like, "Wait, why don't we make a podcast?" because that would be really cool. And then immediately I just thought of my friends and I messaged Yasmin and I said, "Let me just ask her and see if it's stupid or not." And then I messaged her and then -- Do you want to take it away?

YASMIN RANJKESH: Yes. She messaged me and she's like, "Hey, I have like this crazy idea. Why don't we start like a podcast for the School of Design?" because we're in the School of Design right now. And I was like, "Yes, that sounds amazing." And then we pitched it to the rest of our friends Felix and Emma and they're also part of the team and they all agreed and here we are now.

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, I think that's so amazing and such a great example of how students learn, too. Ah, gee, I went online and I saw this and I figured out how to do it and then I brought other students with me to collaborate. So we listened to your podcast and we love the idea of using it to support fellow students and create a listening community for students in the School of Design. So we invited you here today to share some of your perspectives as students with our listening faculty, our listening audience who are faculty. Your week one podcast from back in the fall, you shared some of the things you were enjoying about learning online like not missing the commute and also some of the things you found challenging like Felix mentioned he didn't have that teacher looking over his shoulder for support when he was working on something. So, you know, that podcast back in the beginning really raised some of those challenges. And as this semester comes to an end, we're wondering what would you like to say now about what you see as the benefits of online learning and also what do you see as some of the challenges?

YASMIN RANJKESH: The challenges I definitely say trying to keep track of everything because I don't know about Asna but I have a really bad issue with like trying to keep track of everything and making sure everything, getting down all the due dates and getting everything done as well having -- because I live with my family, having family around all the time. And then they think that because your school is just on the computer and you have class just during those times, you're only, you know, doing stuff in those times that you have actual classes and there's no outside classwork. So that's a bit of a challenge for me.

NICKI MONAHAN: You know what, Yasmin? You're not the first person who's said that. You know, in our survey of students, many of them identified kind of feeling overwhelmed by the workload and a lot of assignments and how you keep it all sorted out and how do you do your time management. Asna, what about for you, either the benefits or the challenges as you get towards the end of this semester?

ASNA KHAN: I'd say the benefits is, because of the commute, I feel like there's more time. So when we would have a school day, like we would take the whole day and we wouldn't think about oh, there's time to study because obviously the commute, that just cancels out that day. But when you're done with class here at 12, you can start working on other stuff at 12:01. But then that's also gone in the sense that because you're working and doing school work from like your home space, they blend a lot, so you just feel like you need to be working all the time and I have to like tell myself, "Okay, now take a break," you know, you don't have to be doing homework like 24/7 even though like this is where you do it now.

MICHAEL AVIS: Yes, we talked about --

NICKI MONAHAN: You know, it's so interesting that you say that because, you know, you're saving time with the commute but you got to manage that time and, you know, some of our faculty are saying the exact same thing. There's no separation between my work life, my family life. I have people around but I feel like I'm working all the time and sometimes you got to force yourself to turn that computer off and take a break. But Yasmin, you said the opposite thing. Maybe your family doesn't always realize you still need that computer to be working even though maybe it's not class time. So yes, big challenges around time. And sorry, Mike, I interrupted you. You wanted to jump in too.

MICHAEL AVIS: No, I was going to interrupt you. On previous podcasts, we've talked about just the working from home reality and, you know, sometimes just going outside and walking around is good because [inaudible], you know, you could sit there for seven hours in front of the computer and not even realize you've been there that long. Oh my gosh, it's three o'clock and I haven't had lunch. Right? So like that happens a lot. Yasmin, I want to apologize. I practised your name but I bet you I butchered it in the beginning.

YASMIN RANJKESH: That's okay.

MICHAEL AVIS: I know I did. So I apologize for that.

YASMIN RANJKESH: That's okay.

MICHAEL AVIS: So you guys are second years and you noted that you and your fellow podcasters, you and your team, would meet in class in the hallway. So you had the luxury of meeting prior to pandemic. But you expressed some concern about first-year students and making connections and how they do that and how hard it is to do that sometimes when we're virtual. So what is your sense of the first-year design students and how do you think they're connecting with peers or how could they?

YASMIN RANJKESH: I've heard that they have a Discord channel which I feel like is very useful because you're able to connect both with the classes as a whole and you're able to privately message people as well. Sometimes you might see, oh, they have a similar interest to me, like just shoot them a private message and then you start talking.

MICHAEL AVIS: Okay, I'm going to put some context here. Sorry to interrupt. A lot of our faculty are not going to know what Discord is. Can you tell us about it?

YASMIN RANJKESH: So basically, it was originally created for like gaming and gamers but it's just like a messaging service, kind of like WhatsApp or like --

MICHAEL AVIS: Twitch, I've heard about Twitch. Is that the same thing?

YASMIN RANJKESH: Twitch is more so streaming. So Twitch, you would log on to Twitch and then you would watch people play games. So that would -- But people also, I think, are also starting to use it for other purposes as well, like I've heard some professors talk about maybe using Twitch for classes because it's built for streaming.

MICHAEL AVIS: Okay.

NICKI MONAHAN: So the bottom line is, you know, you expressed your concern about making sure that first-year students connected because you were able to do that face to face but what you're saying is that you're hoping first-year students are using some sort of ways of connecting so that they can get support and find out what each other's interests are and there's lots of challenge to do that. So you still see that as a important part of being in a program is to make those peer connections?

YASMIN RANJKESH: Yes, 100%. Asna, go ahead.

ASNA KHAN: No, I was just agreeing but like I think so, yes, because honestly, I would not be able to do school without these guys. I mean, we collaborate all the time. We always send our work to each other and in that sense like, oh, can you tell me if it's fine? So critique wise as well. And just the support. So I just think it was really important which is also one of the main ideas that I felt like it would be just give them a sense of community, like SOD Talks and then if they had any questions or anything they could send those in because sometimes you don't want to ask the teachers a lot. So just like they have the space for any questions or anything like that.

MICHAEL AVIS: Clearly, very social and you've created this group and it seems like your ability to create that group is really supporting you. Just for faculty in thinking about faculty, for a group like yours, it seems like you could probably, you know, on your own you've created this group and you've started to rely on each other. I'm just thinking about those students who don't necessarily have those, maybe that ability or that desire to be that social, how could a faculty member help encourage to create a group like you guys have? What can we do as faculty to help those students do that? That's a tough question, right?

ASNA KHAN: It is. It definitely is.

MICHAEL AVIS: It's not on Twitch but it just came to me right now.

YASMIN RANJKESH: I feel like something like a group project would be very hit or miss because sometimes you get that amazing group dynamic, you get all those amazing people that you just connect with but then sometimes you get those people where you're like not 100% like connecting with. I think maybe in that case, having, because we were discussing this earlier on having different like events like movie days and stuff might be helpful. So maybe like different -- It's like apps like Netflix Party and even with like Discord and stuff, you can stream movies. So it'd be really nice if you can do something like that and then it

also gives the students a break from that constant work, work, work and it allows them to like relax a bit.

MICHAEL AVIS: So even faculty helping to create these spaces would be valuable for students, you think, even if it's not curricular but just say, "Hey, guys, you know what? I know it's been tough, so let's do a movie night." That would be valuable for students, you think?

YASMIN RANJKESH: I think it would be very valuable, yes.

NICKI MONAHAN: And, you know, it sounds to me like a lot of this is peer generated and peer supported but maybe the role of faculty is to remind students of the importance of taking a break and connect with your peers whether it's for critiquing work or just socializing, et cetera, because, you know, it's like teenage kids, they don't want to socialize with their parents but they for sure, you know, want to socialize with one another.

MICHAEL AVIS: We don't even know what Discord is, so like, forget that. So sort of moving to the next step here, what about curricular? What one of the things that we heard in the surveys that we've done is -- and I think you've also mentioned it in a couple of your podcasts, is the lack of motivation for learning and sometimes it can be the workloads are hard, you're at home, you're in front of the computer all day and it can be hard to keep that motivation up. Could you share a message with faculty about just how to support student learning, maybe not the social part, but just the learning, the challenges of the online environment? What can we do as faculty to help motivate those students to keep going?

ASNA KHAN: I guess one of the main things about not being motivated is you just figured that you won't be able to ask those questions or, you know, I just feel like us -- I mean we've talked about it that we just feel like a bother, like okay, I asked one question, like I won't be able to ask her three more, you know, because one likes one's enough. So in that sense, I just feel like maybe this should -- A lot of our teachers are, so that's really good. So just to keep that up in the sense to let us know that they're here and that we can ask any questions and like just like when we have teachers who are so passionate about their work, like we can see that and that just we feed off of it, honestly. Like when we have teachers who love their work, we just want to love it more because we just want to learn as much as we can. So I just feel like if they're very passionate about what they're doing, they should show it and, honestly, that's one of the main things. Yes.

NICKI MONAHAN: Those are such great suggestions, Asna. So faculty share your passions, make sure students know that you're really passionate but I heard that message, let students know it's okay, ask questions, so you don't feel like you're limited, "Oh gee, I asked you a question yesterday. I'm going to come back [inaudible]." I love that, though. I love that message about no question's a stupid question. All questions are welcome. We're here to respond to your questions. Mike was referencing that student survey that talked about students struggling with workload and motivation and paying attention and focusing. The same survey showed that 52% of our students said that they had faculty who were supportive and while that's good for those 52%, maybe some students are not feeling as supported by their faculty members. In your experience and you already mentioned

passion, but in your experience, what are some favourite ways in which your teachers have helped you to be successful in these challenging times?

YASMIN RANJKESH: I think just being very accommodating for like any situation that occurs, especially because like we don't know, even like right now, we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow with the news and like the situation with COVID, just being super accommodating and understanding like okay, this person's going through some stuff, maybe we can like either extend something for them or like cut down something or just be, you know, like think about what they might be going through as well, because I have seen some experiences with some teachers where they're not really taking into account that okay, these people actually have lives. They need to like actually -- They need to actually do stuff with their lives and stuff and stuff is going on but --

MICHAEL AVIS: That's the reality right there. Yes. You guys --

NICKI MONAHAN: I understand this. We're noting that somebody wants your attention, maybe somebody wants to use your computer. So you keep --

YASMIN RANJKESH: That's my mom.

NICKI MONAHAN: Your key point here, Yasmin, is that it would be really helpful if teachers really recognize these are unusual times and that their students might be dealing with a lot of difficult things and to be flexible, whether it's with assignments or deadlines or reaching out. For you, Asna, are there other ways in which your teachers have been or could help you to be successful in your program?

ASNA KHAN: Well, they have in the sense that I love when they talk about not just the curriculum. So I love when they talk about their work, too, so their experiences and stuff. So like if you're giving a lecture, they pitch in and go like this happened to me, just to keep it, just to make it seem like we're in a room together and we're having an actual conversation. This isn't just like a recorded lecture. So that's helped a lot. And for stuff that hasn't worked out, it's like when people or when teachers like just stick to the curriculum as if we're in front of them and as if it's the same because we've had that a couple of times like when the teachers just send you the curriculum and they don't realize that it's just harder, especially for sometimes when they're teaching us brand new things or like a 100% new program that we have never seen before. So in that sense, it would be nice for them to realize that we have no idea what we're talking about right now. This is like we would love for you to walk us through every inch of it, especially if we haven't used the program before. You know? But yes.

NICKI MONAHAN: Asna, can you say a little bit more about, you know, what makes it harder right now to learn or you want your teachers to understand that it's different, it's not just the same? So what's different and what's make it a little bit harder?

ASNA KHAN: So like for me personally or for us personally, because we've been through first year, so we know about InDesign or we know about Photoshop, so what we're doing now, it's more like implementing the things that we have learned already in first year. But if we were learning like a brand new program, so let's say if I'm first year and I'm opening up

Photoshop for the first time, then I'd feel like I'd need that support in the sense that you understand that this is brand new and it's overwhelming because obviously for us too, first year, for those who haven't touched Photoshop or anything before, it is overwhelming and just ten times more online because we also learned a couple of new programs this semester like for coding and then XD and everything. So when the teachers have realized that this is not something that we've used before and they walk us through it, it's great because we feel comfortable. We feel like, okay, we're learning. We can ask the questions. But then when teachers assume that we would know about this or we have used it before and talk to us like we know what they're talking about, that just makes it a little bit harder.

MICHAEL AVIS: And that's back to the over the shoulder thing that you were talking about earlier, right. I'm assuming whenever there's new program and especially with technology, doing it in distance is really, really challenging. So like the fact that there's not over the shoulder who could just look at your screen and say, "Hey, try doing this or think about doing it this way," that doesn't exist anymore or if it does, we have to find a better way to do it. Yes.

NICKI MONAHAN: Yes, those are really great points. One of the things I love that you mentioned in your first podcast was that as students, you were aware some faculty were teaching online for the first time and you wanted your fellow students to take that into consideration, which I thought was really thoughtful as students. And we're trying to foster spirit of appreciation here at George Brown and encourage students to express their appreciation to their teachers. So if you had a couple of minutes right now, which you do, to say thank you to faculty, what would you want to thank them about? What would you want to thank them for if you had some moments to give some words of appreciation?

YASMIN RANJKESH: I'd say that for a lot of the teachers, they've been so supportive. Especially us, like personally the teachers that we've had this semester, they've been really supportive and we want to say thank you for just making it seem as real as possible, so making it seem like we're in a classroom together and we're learning together and we're in this together. And some of them, even like consider that yes, this is overwhelming especially now. Towards the end, a couple teachers have lightened the deadlines or got off a couple things because they realize that it's just 100 times harder. So we want to say thank you for that and thank you for just being passionate about what they do and being able to share it in a really good way.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thank you so much. Mike, final questions or words for our wonderful fellow podcasters before we sign off?

MICHAEL AVIS: Well, I think, Yasmin, did you want to add a little bit to that? I know you're waving your mother away but [inaudible] you can thank --

NICKI MONAHAN: This is the reality of online learning. I think it is. Your mom's bring you a cup of coffee or [inaudible]. Who knows what's going on over there.

MICHAEL AVIS: My mother isn't here to bring me coffee. She hasn't brought me coffee in years. So you should appreciate it.

YASMIN RANJKESH: Oh yes, I definitely do. It does get a bit too much sometimes but I definitely 100% appreciate everything she does. But no, I'd just like to add like just thank you for being accommodating to every situation that pops up and just understanding that like this even though we are students and we did sign up for this, some things happen and sometimes we're not able to be at our fullest at all times and just being super supportive at all times and making us feel like we're wanted and accepted here.

MICHAEL AVIS: That's great. And you know what? We have really caring faculty and we have faculty who are really passionate, you've talked about this already, who are really passionate about what they do and that bleeds through and they can see and you as students and learners can see their passion. So thank you for thanking them. And I think we're going to take this opportunity to thank you for spending some of your really valuable time with us just to give us a little perspective on students and [Background Music] where you are and we appreciate your hard work and we appreciate the fact that you've come and spent some time with us.

YASMIN RANJKESH: Thank you for having us.

ASNA KHAN: Thank you for having us.

NICKI MONAHAN: To our listeners, thanks for listening to this episode of Xchange, the TLX podcast for faculty by faculty and we'll talk to you again soon. Have a great day and a great week.

MICHAEL AVIS: Bye-bye everybody.

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