

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number 140 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast Steven Michels helps us think outside the LMS.

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**Bonni:** [00:00:20] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our productivity so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

**Bonni:** [00:00:47] I'm absolutely thrilled today to be welcoming Steven Michels to the show. He is a professor of political science and also the director of University assessment at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield Connecticut. He's been teaching there since 2002 and is involved with initiatives related to assessment digital pedagogy and undergraduate research. His most recent book is Sinclair Lewis and American democracy. Steve, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**Steven:** [00:01:21] Hello, Bonni. Thanks for having me.

**Bonni:** [00:01:23] As I was reading your bio even though I knew this already I just realized that we are about as far away as you could possibly be from each other in the United States.

**Steven:** [00:01:32] Correct.

**Bonni:** [00:01:33] I will not be sharing the weather.

**Steven:** [00:01:34] The weather is probably better.

**Bonni:** [00:01:35] Yes. I will not be sharing the weather.

**Steven:** [00:01:38] The weather is probably better there.

**Bonni:** [00:01:38] I would think so. My kids would get a kick out of it's probably still snowing there at least some some a little bit.

**Steven:** [00:01:45] A little bit it's not good there's nothing good to say about the weather. It's very cold today.

**Bonni:** [00:01:48] Oh, OK. Well we'll move we'll move on to the next subject. And I didn't think I'd ever start one of the podcast talking about Blackboard but I know you have some intriguing data to tell us that was recently released by blackboard. What can you tell us about that?

**Steven:** [00:02:03] Yeah, Blackboard released some interesting statistics on their user data in October. It was a bit surprising. It turns out that mostly it's not used to its full capacity. 77 percent of its use according to data accounts for what they call supplementary or complimentary use which mainly means you know one-way communication from faculty, students you know uploading the syllabus, or some some readings and then the percentage of faculty who really use it to its fullest only accounted for about 2 percent.

**Steven:** [00:02:34] So it seems to me like a huge lost opportunity with the learning management systems. You know one in particular is the one that I'm most familiar with. That was surprising and shocking. And there's a couple of ways to read that is you know on one hand faculty aren't using it. But also I think a little bit inclined to blame Blackboard a little bit because you know every technology suggests how it should be used. And you know what is it about Blackboard or the learning management system in general that suggests that this kind of usage rather than a use that's a little bit more engaged.

**Bonni:** [00:03:08] I'll be posting a link to this data in the show notes we're a little bit lower in this section than you were talking about they talked about the proportion of course time by tool used. And 58 percent was time being spent used on course content which as you said it's it's sort of shocking not shocking all at the same time because this really does come down to our own pedagogy. I'm super excited to get to hear from you a little bit on what's changed for you as you think about teaching in general but specifically teaching online. Take us back to 2004 to simpler times to your first online course.

**Steven:** [00:03:48] Yeah it was it was pretty bad. I have to say I didn't really think much about what it should be. I sort of I think I did what most people do is just to

try to create an environment. You know I took my existing content and just you know upload it a little bit and ask some discussion questions not making use of you know even back then in 2004 we had you know videos and things that were a little bit more interactive and I didn't use all the tools that were even available in blackboard.

**Steven:** [00:04:16] And we had a series of speakers on campus and one of the speakers like who remembers me talked about the importance of digital personality and it was so liberating I felt with him and I can be myself online and now when I'm talking with my students. So I read the content and make more conversational. I included some pictures and videos. I even had some jokes. I changed the question to make it a little bit more open ended.

**Steven:** [00:04:40] You know that would require students to take the questions and do research or take them in and nurture them in a way that made sense for them. So it was much more open ended and it was so so much more enjoyable. I know from my perspective it didn't feel like a qualitatively different experience. It was more about a different way of engaging and the course evaluation changed considerably too.

**Steven:** [00:05:02] Up till that point the first couple semesters I was teaching my course evaluations were much lower than they were from my on ground courses and I just thought that was kind of how we're supposed to be. But now you know the more I think about it the more deliberate I am with how I put my courses together that the evaluations for my online courses are even higher than my golf courses which is pretty great.

**Bonni:** [00:05:22] One of the themes I hear you talking about and there is yes being authentic and engaging but also a sense of surprise. Do you find that it is easier or harder to have that sense of surprise in an online class versus an in person or is it just as equally challenging and exhilarating to try to have that sense of surprise and curiosity in the class?

**Steven:** [00:05:47] Stuff is more difficult it's only because you know one of the things that I try to do is you know do you want some kind of structure for on course students often times you know for his textbooks. We think they are they're very anxious about take an online course. You know they're kind of like being kicked into the middle of a pool. You know you don't exactly know where you are.

**Steven:** [00:06:06] And they very quickly meet they need a sense of what's going on and what the expectations are. So I think you know if and when I'm in an on-ground class I try to engage with them and explore the unknown and make it a little more student directed at you know one of the first objectives but in an online course.

**Steven:** [00:06:22] My first goal is to have them understand what's going on. The structure is almost required right. If you're going to take an online course which is you know the learning management system excels at structure but that is also its greatest weakness that the structure is learning and makes students especially if they take multiple courses at the same institution they know where to find things right. Syllabus is always in the same place the discussion board is always in the same place is structured in the same way.

**Steven:** [00:06:48] Clunky you have to click around a lot but you know they kind of get the lay of the land soon enough but it becomes problematic you know where do you go from there where do you. Does blackboard or learning management system give us the same. It certainly gives a structure but does it give us something more than that or is it you know is it a ceiling more than a floor. And that's sort of the problem I have with it.

**Bonni:** [00:07:10] And one of the first forays you had taking yourself and the students out of a learning management system involved Google blogger. Can you tell us about that experience.

**Steven:** [00:07:21] Yeah you know it became obvious to me that you know the most important part of an online course or learning management just needs discussion board. You know that's where all the students come together. All the research shows that you know of an on line experience students are most dissatisfied with the amount that they engage with the other students in the class.

**Steven:** [00:07:40] So I was never a big fan of the blackboard discussion board. Even if you know how to work it seems pretty clunky. There's always one or more two clicks should be. I mean students don't seem to know how to gather all the comments. So there were a lot of engagements and it seemed like students were doing what I would call like to drop the drop in visit.

**Steven:** [00:08:02] You know they would open up the learning management system and they would have a big block post you know 200 to 300 words you know and didn't sound like they had read what other students were posting or

that they had come back after their post to see what other students said in response to them so they were doing the minimal expectations for them for the course but they weren't really engaging.

**Steven:** [00:08:23] And it seems to me that the better way you know that the structure the blackboard discussion was something that the students were a little bit more familiar with. So this was you know 2006 or 2007 and you know blogs were very big back then so. And Google blogger had this free platform so I just started a blog for the course and I used the existing blackboard shell.

**Steven:** [00:08:44] So I hosted it in Blackboard but the students could go right in there. And I noticed immediately that the level of engagement with students was greater that the posts were longer that they were referring to each other had said which is which is really important. The participation was greater. They were saying more things. So it was sort of my first inkling that you know where we present our materials in the the place and the locus of the discussion the you know the aesthetics really impacts the quality of the conversation and the engagement.

**Bonni:** [00:09:15] I was teaching the other night I'm I'm fortunate I get to teach a few times a year in a doctoral program that's not at my normal full time institution. And I'm also fortunate that they let me play a little bit because the normal way that is doctoral students they use the I won't say the name of the product but it's just a very bloated synchronous video conferencing tool and they seem to be in this arms race I guess features race to say you know these synchronous conferencing tools are going to have every feature there but then it's confusing to use and it causes crashes and bandwidth issues and all of this.

**Bonni:** [00:09:51] And the one that I've mentioned on the show before that I just love is called Zoom and I don't make any money by anyone interested in Zune but what it has not done is it has not participated in that features raced and people just come there you talk about discussions you come on that tool and you're just it looks like you're sitting around a table. You can see everybody's face if you want or you can click the button to just have it focused on the person who's talking and it automatically switches the view to do that.

**Bonni:** [00:10:20] And then it's got breakout room so hey Well let's go. It's going to you know going to send out to some breakout rooms I want you to talk about the three biggest challenges you have with us and then come back and it's just so natural it really feels like a true discussion. But so many times these asynchronous discussion tools they're so clunky and then you have to click

through to see it. And often times it is pretty bloated so it takes a while for it to load on your page and especially if you're on a mobile device Goodness gracious. So you ever gonna have to wait.

**Steven:** [00:10:49] Exactly.

**Bonni:** [00:10:49] And I know one of the tools that you have used to get outside of the learning management system but also to start to have quicker discussions and just a little bit a little bit less structured is Slack and that's actually first what got me thinking we need to have you on teaching in higher ed. You talk a little bit about how you use slack and how that sort of changed the structure for you.

**Steven:** [00:11:13] Yeah I heard about slack a couple of years ago I can't remember where and this is I mean everyone knows what it is now think seen it or is familiar enough with it. But you know whenever I hear about a new tech tool I'm one of those people that can't help but you know checking it out.

**Steven:** [00:11:25] So I signed up for an account and I got in there and I was originally thinking that I would use it for some committee work because I do a lot of assessment things and I thought I needed a place where I could bring faculty together and discuss you know reports or whatever we're working on and you posted documentation.

**Steven:** [00:11:41] My first reaction was that the it was really simple which I liked it was good to look at what's important but it might be a little bit too involved for faculty members might be too oppressive. You know just for committee work. But then I thought well this is perfect for a class. You know the hub of any good class should be a discussion board. I mean really what Slack does it builds self around the discussion boards because when channels is very personalized.

**Steven:** [00:12:05] So you can create as many different channels to have conversational conversations on it you need. You can set them up thematically or you could set them up according to groups and I was just really really simple and it's simple but it's also customizable they have a lot of different plug ins that you can do there that are put together by third parties. So you can make it as simple or as complicated as you like.

**Steven:** [00:12:29] And the other thing I mean just the quality of the conversation was amazing. So I set this up this is where summer when I first used it so I sent out the invites to the studios and three or four days before the class even started. Students were signing on and then they didn't know what to expect and they

were looking around and so just posted a posting already and I could see that they were because they were a little white next to their name.

**Steven:** [00:12:53] So I started sending the messages so we had sort of the meet and greet channel. And at one point there were four or five students there and we were all talking about their expectations for the course and what they talked about Slack. And this was before the semester even started and I thought this would never happen on blackboard.

**Steven:** [00:13:10] The fact that everyone is here looking you know I'm asking them about you know the features and what features should we add one to students with on his mobile phone because it gets downloaded Android and iOS app and he was just astonished that he was you know in class while he was out somewhere.

**Steven:** [00:13:27] Students love the mobile capacity and I think that's one of the things that blackboard is definitely falling behind them. The mobile arms race are all about the mobile. They like to read on the phone I think is a little weird to read because you know hobs on my phone. But the students are fine with it provided that we can make it available to them. So that was a really great experience.

**Steven:** [00:13:45] And the other thing. What you you're saying about that is really important. During that course there was that awful shooting in Orlando that one Saturday night into Sunday morning. So you know I got up and I saw the news. Oh this is terrible and we were talking about something in class related to criminal justice or you know police violence or something and it does seem relevant so I posted something and because the mobile app has a notification feature. So I think it was 9:30 or ten o'clock in the morning so I posted something that I thought that student would be interested in reading that was relevant to the current event. The date at the time and for five students jumped on and we were having this live conversation in response to a current event that was going on that morning.

**Steven:** [00:14:29] So students and some students were watching CNN and someone was doing it following the Twitter feed about what was going on. So we were talking about a live news event as it happened on a Sunday morning through slack. I mean that for me was sort of the wake up call that you know again this would never happen on a typical learning management system or something that was asynchronous or that's something that students couldn't have. You know the mobile notification probably half of them were in bed still

right there. They were in bed a notification came on they grabbed the phone all of a sudden they're in class. So they really had a really you know a qualitative change in the nature of the discussion that really impressed me.

**Bonni:** [00:15:04] The learning management system that we use at our school is Canvas and I also teach on Blackboard at the other institution I teach at occasionally and I have with Canvas because it is so mobile friendly. I just challenge myself to not have anything that a student couldn't access on their mobile device and that has made a pretty big difference. I used to do what I call pencasts and there was a proprietary PDF output that the actual smart pen enabled and that meant they had to be sitting in front of a computer and so I stopped using that.

**Bonni:** [00:15:35] Now I do everything on the iPad with a stylus and outputs to an MP4 that's then on YouTube. And that just makes such a difference where any time I can lower the barriers to them being able to learn but as you're talking I'm thinking about just how powerful slack is for that engagement and it's very hard to articulate but you just did. But I have our time sometimes explaining to people why it's so good and does just that just how it enables those kinds of conversations.

**Bonni:** [00:16:02] And I wish there were a way to have that kind of structure in the sense of I think it's helpful to our students to have a centralized calendar that something like canvas offers they can see all their reading assignments when they're do all the tests all the papers it's all there in a calendar that if enough of their professors are using the learning management system means they can even subscribe to that and have it on their phone and just keep themselves that much more organized which I think is critical for all our students but especially our most at risk students but and is just interesting to hear you talk about now when you taught with Slack you were entirely on slack. You did not use the learning management system or did you use that for your grade book I can't remember what you said.

**Steven:** [00:16:44] Yeah I'm very invested in Google also in terms of supporting it. So I had had to keep working Google Docs so they created a doc which they're very familiar with that I just saw a statistic the other day that I think 70 million elementary school and high school students are using Google Docs and kind of it's really spread.

**Steven:** [00:17:03] So they're very familiar with the them that I keep grades in a Google spreadsheet that I post and I keep I keep all the grades in the same



spreadsheet but I used the last three numbers of student ID and no one knows who the grades are Who's the kind of old school. Remember back in the beginning of the 70s and 80s I guess before technology the professors used the post-trade outside their doors around on the strips of paper.

**Steven:** [00:17:27] So it's a little bit like that. And so I've been doing that for a while and that's actually worked really well. When I first thought about posting the classes grade a little apprehensive I thought it might lead to some great grubbing or or or or whatnot but it's really actually supported teaching and learning a little bit because the students know where they are with regard to the rest of the students in the class.

**Steven:** [00:17:48] You know sometimes a B minus is a good grade and that they might not know that I sometimes think they catch errors that I make which is also been helpful but I try not to encourage another little obsessed with grades sometimes. I try not to encourage that. But you know also understanding why they're a little preoccupied with grades sometimes I think gives me a little credibility. So you know I know what they're interested in and can speak to that.

**Bonni:** [00:18:14] One of the other issues I know you bring up you talked about the learning management system and how we should be thinking about its over structure and how that might minimize the true connected learning opportunities that we could have with our students. Talk a bit about some of your concerns around OER textbooks.

**Steven:** [00:18:32] I mean I love the OER concept I mean I've been waging a battle against overpriced textbooks for a while. I can remember the last time I had students by textbook I mean they're they're expensive even with American government stripped down versions of textbooks. Fifty or sixty dollars. You know most of the information that's in there is available online. You know in the textbook manufacturers you know they come up with an updated version every two years after the midterm elections.

**Steven:** [00:19:00] So they you know they feel a little bit. So I've been moving away from textbooks for a while. But my concern about the OCR is it has the potential to be great. You know you can put together sources you can have a little mash up you know this book in that book and there's a lot of free things on the web.

**Steven:** [00:19:17] But my concern about the OER is that in some respect there are still textbooks right there that they're just they're cheaper and they're digital.

The structure is still there the way it's circumscribes learning is still there to make the new textbooks. I guess value for the new textbooks a lot of times come from the ancillary rights. Textbook companies are producing videos in different parts like learning to older platforms that come with a textbook and that in a lot of ways that makes it worse because you know not only are you having the printed structure information but you're also be expected to watch videos or to take exams. And I think it makes it even easier for instructors to not personalize the class or put together the material in a way that requires students to quickly engage with the material.

**Bonni:** [00:20:07] One of the tools I know you're using to try to counteract some of that is called Hypothesis. We've talked about it before on the show but I don't think we can talk about it enough just in terms of some of the innovative ways people are using it. Can you share your experience with hypothesis.

**Steven:** [00:20:21] Yeah this is my first semester using it. So I'm actually not using Slack this semester I've created a Google site that just redid sites the new feature is that it's sort of like Google Docs and you can have multiple editors some having the students put together the Web site.

**Steven:** [00:20:37] So the first step in creating the content is for American political thought. We've sort of picked four point in American political history beginning with the founding and we've identified identified a couple of primary source documents that we think are interesting and important. So I had them use hypothesis which is a Chrome extension very simple to add on to Chrome.

**Steven:** [00:20:57] And as you reading the document you can either highlight or make annotations on the hypothesis. Keep track of who does what and who says what and it aggregates it all on their website which is great for grading. It's been great for the students because it forces them to slow down a little bit. They can see how their classmates are interacting with with the text in a line by line who's thinking what and we're using the annotations to put together some questions. So the course of our inquiry based learning so I had them all make two or three comments annotations for each documents. I'm asking for every document there I starting a conversation or a line of inquiry or qualifying or building on someone else's line of inquiry.

**Steven:** [00:21:36] So you know they're having to point out something that's of interest to them and also engage with someone else who's also identified something that's interesting and we've been working to that in class and putting together groups students who have similar lines of interest with them and putting

them together so we've been researching them and they're going to write up little reports and we're going to use that as the content for the Google site.

**Bonni:** [00:21:57] With hypothesis. I've used it before but I've just used it where it's all public are you having their annotations public out that any of us could see. Or is this something that's just kept private for your class.

**Steven:** [00:22:09] No it is private you there is a public feature I've created a separate private group for the course. So I sent out the link to the students so when they sign up to create the account they're automatically put in the group for the course. So all the annotations they make for the group are private.

**Bonni:** [00:22:25] OK. If I was in your Google site then I would see those same hypothesis but since I'm not I can't. That's that's the way it's working?

**Steven:** [00:22:31] That's right.

**Bonni:** [00:22:33] And I know you're also making use of Google slides and quick time in your teacher I'd love to hear a bit about that too.

**Steven:** [00:22:39] Yeah. I really like Google. Just it's the platforms are simple They're intuitive the speed together which speak each other which is really important. So I'm just I think last year started making voiceover videos flipping my class a little bit and in an automated way I started doing this last year. The students really responded to it well.

**Steven:** [00:23:03] I realized that you know lecturing is maybe not the best use of class time when you're working through some difficult you know ancient text that students might not you know they're reading on their own before they come to class. But you know what are they getting out of it. And then we come to class and I explain to them what they should have already known that they struggled through and then I send them on their way when they have to read difficult papers which seems to me not a very good way to do things so I've been doing voice videos not video or video. I don't I don't need to see myself on screen especially. I don't want to see myself age.

**Steven:** [00:23:34] Right it is a really good I'd like to use them for a long time and I don't want anybody to be looking at video and then have to come to class and you know I look like this. So I've just been doing a video. So I do Google slides and I do the voiceover through time quick edits and I upload them to YouTube.

**Steven:** [00:23:51] And then I put them on the Google side and it's really great. I can use the slide that in class to project them and then they have the questions about this slide slide and then really use class time to work through the material to ask analytical questions.

**Steven:** [00:24:05] And you know that's one of the things that people have noticed up for classes is that you really need to know what you're doing within class rates not just enough to expose them. But I noticed immediately that the quality of the conversation is just so much improved the questions that they have that they really do watch the videos and take notes and. They come with good questions. Not only that but we're able to I have them little micro essays every week. So we start those essays in class so there's a little bit of time that we're able to spend you know beginning the writing assignments and working through the writing assignments or the quality of their written work has improved also.

**Bonni:** [00:24:41] One of the things I've heard that's going on with Google slides too is that they've added some ways to engage with students so some kind of Polings slides or quiz type slides that students can engage with on their phones so I think they also added something more students could pose questions on their mobile devices using Google slides and to get to heaven. But there's this exciting innovations that are happening there to create perhaps a bit more engagement in the class as well.

**Steven:** [00:25:07] You know they added a poll everywhere function. A couple of months ago. So that's an option if you are using poll everywhere you can actually embed the questions from everywhere in the slide and have students use their phones and use the slackers as a mobile device to where you can. You know you can create a pool on a channel and then students can pull out their phones and then project the slug channel to stream in the class.

**Bonni:** [00:25:34] That's great. That's great. I wanted to mention that I, like you I don't do a ton of video where it's my face on the video I typically use slides but there are occasions where I think it's helpful and I can't really explain to you when I do and don't. Now you've got me thinking about aging and goodness gracious.

**Bonni:** [00:25:52] But what I just realized that SnagIt is the screen shot tool that I have been using for decades now. As crazy as that is to say about a piece of software and they now have it where I can be having a video of one of my power points and I can switch back and forth between my webcam and the

PowerPoint because a lot of times you see people where they just have themselves in the lower right hand or right right corner kind of thing.

**Bonni:** [00:26:20] But if you had a need where you wanted to change it up a little bit and oh now you can see my face and see that my expression and oh now you can see my slides. It's as easy as just clicking back and forth and I thought that's pretty nice and snag it does. It's kind of like a little mini toolkit. It does all kinds of things just everything from if a faculty member asked me a question about something on our learning management system I can just go create a simple gift for them or I can do a quick screencast or even just grab a screenshot and put an arrow and show them where to click or stuff so it's just really nice nice tool that this is not free you like quick time is free for for us but as a nice nice tool that I find myself using more and more.

**Steven:** [00:27:01] Well that would be a nice feature. I wonder about that about the either or. You know if I want to have my face on there or not I wonder if it's true. If it would distract the students or they would distract me I'm not sure.

**Bonni:** [00:27:12] I did see a study and I don't know if this has been replicated in any way. But that said that it made no difference if we show ourselves on the video in terms of the students learning. There's no difference in terms of comprehension or anything like that.

**Bonni:** [00:27:26] And that it just there was a slight bit of maybe more personal approach but that there's not a learning benefit by doing it so you don't have to.

**Steven:** [00:27:36] Well that's good to know one one of the most important things that I've realized about making new videos and I came away I heard this but you know my reluctance to go to do this for a long time had to do with the production value. You know I get the sound right and I go you know the slide is going to be good. And then I just you know I read somewhere that you know it doesn't matter so much with the production value.

**Steven:** [00:27:59] And not only that I would go further and say this is one thing I've learned from my students. They like it when it's a little bit it seems a little professional. You know I tell jokes on the video sometimes I don't script what I'm going to start. And you know they say that a lot like class and they really appreciate that. So if any of your listeners are thinking to me that they want to do some videos or audio recording to add to their courses you know please do

not worry about the production value. You know make it as much like you as possible and it'll work.

**Bonni:** [00:28:27] I sneezed once and one of my pen casts and you would have thought I was like a comedian that was about to take my show on the road. Just because I didn't edit that out. They just loved it. They love that we're human and that it seems like we're talking to them just in a casual conversation. I totally concur.

**Bonni:** [00:28:42] Before we get to the recommendations part I don't want to miss this piece of what you have to offer which is we've talked about a number of different tools. Talks about learning management system versus not using one. And I wonder if you would just share a bit about your overall philosophy for what tools you use how many do you use. I mean how do you decide whether or not oh you just talked about this great new tool. I use that one. What are some of the thoughts that come to mind when you decide your possible tools for a course.

**Steven:** [00:29:13] Well I'm a little worried that sometimes I get caught up with the new things but I think I've come to realize that teaching should be learner driven not Tool driven. And we really need to take a step back and think about you know what we want our students to do or what we want them to know and then see how the technology that we incorporate into the class can serve that rather than just find something that's that's that's new or shiny and try to make it work in the classroom.

**Steven:** [00:29:41] The other thing I've come to realize is you know there are a lot of tools you know communications tools or pedagogical tools. I've also started to think about from a student perspective that you know they have five courses and all of us are using our favorite new pedagogical tool you know three four five different things. This the really overwhelming for them. I can't imagine you know walking into a class you know class in the first day week having to sign on for 15 new accounts for different things you know whether it's Slack or whatnot.

**Steven:** [00:30:08] So I really try to keep it as simple as possible so that the students know I can Google Docs now so I don't really count that as something new that they have to do. But you know with this hypothesis I would count that as something you had to start an account. I actually did a video about to show them how to sign up for it and how it works and what my expectations are in terms of the technological requirements. I used the Remind app a lot.

**Steven:** [00:30:34] I count that sort of as one just because it's something else. It's another place they have to look at for notifications even if it's just their phone. So I really try to keep it keep it simple so they can I obviously want to focus on the material but I don't want to have them overextended because you know for all the conversation about her students being digital natives I mean they're still learning and they're still young and they might not have all the experience that we do to think critically about the technology that they use or to be able to manage their time well or to be organized in a way that all of us are getting things done. People are right they don't have all these skills. So I really want to focus on the content without having to spread themselves a little to fit their attention.

**Bonni:** [00:31:13] Another reason that I find for keeping my toolset as minimal as it can be is just if I'm going to break out of the mass then I do need to keep track of who's accepted that invitation. And in my doctoral class we're using Diigo which is a social bookmarking tool and that's on my list of things to do today because I don't think I've seen them show up as far as so-and-so accepted their invitations. I got to go compare the roster or get a t.a to do that. And it's just one more thing. Not that I'm not willing to do it but like you said if it doesn't actually benefit their learning support them better then you know the extra work just isn't going to pay off for any of us.

**Steven:** [00:31:51] That's right. I was also worried about the private versus public aspect of it look a little bit. I've never talked with Twitter but I know I know some people teach with Twitter very well. When my colleagues here on Monday she teaches Spanish and she's has a little community around the world with native speakers so the students in her class get to communicate with people. That's really great. But I'm a little apprehensive about having our students present their works whether it's you know written or videos. I think that you know in general technology's better bringing the world into the classroom than it is taking the classroom out into the world. Thankfully not everything I did during my undergraduate career career is posted somewhere to the web because I think some of it was pretty awful.

**Steven:** [00:32:30] So even you know I've had my students write essays for Medium before which I think is a great problem with writing is having their students know what the audience they should be writing for. But I would make it optional if they want to publish it because I think there's some really great writing medium because the pieces tend to be a little bit smaller. It's very you know there's a different kind of writing personal essays and reflections of them political some of the more academic and book reviews. It's a great outlet to show

students different examples of the kinds of writing that they'll probably do when they graduate.

**Steven:** [00:32:59] You know they're not probably not going to be academics they're not going to write journal articles thankfully but that that is more like the kinds of things are going to that they're going to have to do. But I always make it optional about whether they want to share it because I'm worried about the anxiety that they might have we had we have a platform here a public platform because she's square and it's a way to have faculty and students share their work across courses and have a little bit of an issue with a couple of semesters ago when we started.

**Steven:** [00:33:27] One of my students had posted something and it was projected into a class and one students commented on something that she said in a critical way and word got back to her that they were projecting her work into class and making fun of it. And she didn't think she was a very strong writer. It was it was a really sort of a wake up call for me that you know we need to do everything we can as instructors to make sure their students are producing work and learning in safe spaces and maybe safe spaces aren't always public spaces.

**Bonni:** [00:33:54] Well thank you so much. I love all these tools and I'm going to be busily excitedly putting together the show notes. And before we conclude we have the recommendations segment I'm just going to quickly mention a novel that I enjoyed reading in January and I used to think it was called A Man Named One because that's what I had always heard everyone refer to this wonderful novel by. But I saw on good reads that it's actually called A Man Named Ove because it is a Swedish novel.

**Bonni:** [00:34:23] So in this best selling and delightfully quirky debut novel from Sweden a grumpy yet lovable man finds his solitary world turns turned on its head when a boisterous young family moves next door meet. He's a curmudgeon the kind of man who points at people he dislikes as if they were burglars caught outside his bedroom window and behind the cranky exterior there is a story and a sadness is just a delightful story and if someone needs a good novel to read to take you away from this world it's a good one.

**Bonni:** [00:34:58] I was mentioning to Steve before we started recording that I had a few political things I was going to share since he is a political scientist and then felt guilty for laughing at what's happening in the world and he said that's



OK so I'm feeling better now. I'm allowed to laugh and cry all in the same day. And Steve what do you have to recommend today.

**Steven:** [00:35:19] OK I have a couple of quick ones. I wanted to mention at some point that we didn't get into the main part of the show about ublend its some developers at the University of Oxford are putting together a new platform. It's there it's with education in mind and they're very deliberate about the mobile part of it. So the nothing that there's hard takedowns like what they're trying to make make a slacke like application that might be a little simpler and maybe a little more user friendly for other faculty or students.

**Steven:** [00:35:49] And the one thing I like about it is that it looks a lot like a discussion board maybe looks like Facebook in the it gets a little bit more prominence to the faculty. And what we present in terms of our discussion like if you post a discussion question the questions are easier to find and the responses are easier to find. Slack is more just like a long list. So it sometimes gets a little confusing if there's a long discussion. So I think you will in a lot of ways is superior to just like in that way because of how the they present the discussion and the other thing.

**Steven:** [00:36:21] So I'm going to go old school for my last one it's a book by Susan Blum analog It is called I Love Learning; I Hate School An Anthropology of College. And so she's an anthropologist at Notre Dame and she begins with the premise that we're social beings and naturally curious which isn't understandable. I think that's true. But then she recounts all the ways in which school frustrates that tendency and she has this really great section where she talks about the you know school as an institution and the way that is structured it sounds it sounds ridiculous.

**Steven:** [00:36:56] I really use that as a touchstone since I've read it a year ago just in thinking that anything that we can do as faculty members and professors to harness this natural love of learning that our students have and make it feel less like it's not required that it's institutional that it's bureaucratic I think is a good thing. So I encourage everybody to read. I Love Learning; I Hate School by Susan Blum.

**Bonni:** [00:37:21] Sounds so good. Well Steve it has been so good to get to know you a little bit on the Teaching and Higher Ed Slack channel and also just through our other communication and thanks so much for being a guest on today's show and sharing all this great information.

**Steven:** [00:37:35] Thank you so much by Bonni, it's been a pleasure.

**Bonni:** [00:37:38] Thanks again to Steve Michels for joining me on today's episode and to all of you for listening. And as always I'd like to remind you that I send out a weekly email with all of the links of the great stuff that are talked about on each show including all the stuff that Steve mentioned on today's episode. And if you'd like to receive that e-mail you can go to [teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](https://teachinginhighered.com/subscribe) and you'll get just a single e-mail each week with the show notes and also an article written about teaching or productivity and that's that's written by me.

**Bonni:** [00:38:12] And if you have yet to leave a review for this show you know I always like to give you a little nudge here at the end of the episode. That's the best way where we can spread the word about the show. Whatever service it is you use to listen if it's iTunes you just go to ratings and reviews. Once you you're on the episode page and give it some stars or write about your experience listening to the show that's the best way to help other people discover it. Thanks so much for listening and I will see you next time.

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