

Bonni: [00:00:00] Today on episode number 160 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Dr. Brenda Gunderson shares approaches for motivating large classes.

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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 improve our personal productivity so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Bonni: [00:00:48] I'm very grateful for being connected with today's guest by the Association of College and University Educators, ACUE. You might be familiar with them as we've had some recent guests that were connected with us by ACUE. And today's guest, the moment I saw a video of her on their site I thought, "Oh I would love to have a conversation with her on the show," and today it was able to happen.

Bonni: [00:01:16] Today's guest is Dr. Brenda Gunderson. She's a senior lecturer in the Department of Statistics at the University of Michigan. She coordinates and teaches the largest undergraduate statistics course, Statistics and Data Analysis - oh hold your breath on this one - with approximately 2,200 students each term. That's a lot of students. She serves as the graduate student instructor, training leader, developing and leading the training for all new statistics graduate student instructors. The training includes both general teaching pedagogy and course specific details.

Bonni: [00:01:59] She is also the undergraduate advisor for students electing to major or minor in statistics and a member of the Statistics Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Her research focuses on statistical education, in particular, technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Bonni: [00:02:17] And I want to mention before we start the episode that she received an award from her institution, "The Teaching Innovation Prize" for her work on infusing technology for guided continuous learning in a large gateway course. And you'll hear a little bit more about that in the episode, particularly, some of the projects that are focusing on the analysis and use of data about students, courses, and programs. And you'll hear a little bit about the E-2 coach, the Electronic and Expert coach. A data driven personalized program that combines next generation learning analytics with the best of behavioral change theory. Brenda, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Brenda: [00:03:07] Thank you for inviting me.

Bonni: [00:03:09] It was wonderful to be introduced to you by ACUE and I absolutely loved seeing the video that they have of you on their site, which I'll be linking to of course in the show notes. But, since we can't necessarily see you, we're going to get to hear more from you today, and I'd like to start out by a broad question just about motivation. If one of your colleagues who was newer to teaching came to you and said, "I just can't crack this nut. How do I motivate my students?" What would be one of the first things that you would talk about?

Brenda: [00:03:44] That's a good question. I would probably talk a little bit about what they do in the class currently to see what the structure of their current time with their students is like. Because one of the things that I have done from the very beginning in teaching is to make sure that the students are not just sitting back and only listening to me for that entire time, and that the information that's being shown in the front of the classroom is already complete and they just have that right in front of them, but rather to make that time a little bit more interactive in the sense that they're going to be a co-author of their writing materials from that class that they use for studying.

Brenda: [00:04:22] I call it Interactive Notes and that's their main material that they create with me during our time together. They have examples. They have the- for our statistics course, that picture of the data with the graph, and then, we can go to asking questions; and the answers aren't there on the slide, or they aren't there in the notes for them but rather, we discuss them and we complete them together.

Brenda: [00:04:47] I'm writing on my tablet to put together the ideas and write up that conclusion. And we're doing the same thing in that classroom too, so it is a much more interactive time together. And that would be one thing I might

suggest to them to think about how that material is being discovered with their students in the classroom.

Bonni: [00:05:05] Oh this is fascinating to me so I come into your classroom and by the way, you teach large classes. What is it what is the size of your typical class?

Brenda: [00:05:15] The course as a whole has about 2200 students enrolled every semester. I teach a couple of the lecture sections that are anywhere from 250 to 400 students at one time.

Bonni: [00:05:28] So you are teaching 200 to 400 but this is a massive class that is 2200 students?

Brenda: [00:05:35] Right. Co-coordinated. They all go to the same content. They all have the same homework, same exam, but we don't even have a facility that could teach all of them in one room. It's broken up with a couple of other wonderful instructors that are part of my instructional team.

Bonni: [00:05:49] So I come into your classroom and I sit down and what do I see as you begin to talk to us as we start our class time together?

Brenda: [00:05:59] Right. So they have notes that are available in a number of ways: they could get it as a course pack, they could download it from our course site, it's on our open Michigan site. But these notes are material that they can complete with me. So they'll sit down and we'll do a recap of where we left off and we might go through some new idea where there's one little bit of background and some explanation, but there's always blanks in their notes.

Brenda: [00:06:24] There's places - it's like a workbook in that sense - that they're going to complete that concept with me. If we need a definition to look at and refer to, that will be in their notes and I'll have that on the slide up front to. What I project on my tablet is exactly what's in their hands, and those blanks are on my screen too so that we will look at it. We'll highlight a word that might be important in that question that's being asked.

Bonni: [00:06:48] You mentioned it being a course pack. I tend to think of course packs as physical copies or hard copies of materials but it also sounds like they're available electronically. Do students have a choice as to whether or not they are interacting with these notes on their computer or in a printout? Or is there some compelling reason to use one or the other?

Brenda: [00:07:08] They have either choice. I have some students that do bring their laptop or tablet and they prefer to keep that electronic copy and they're able to perhaps turn it and complete it that way. We also have students that like to have a hard copy, to turn to the pages and put those notes in. So they are available in both ways in a very economical way for them to use that content.

Bonni: [00:07:28] I want to circle back to a word that you used a few moments ago, but let me first just give you an example of why it's so intriguing to me and inspiring. There have been so many debates about whether or not we should let our students use devices in our classrooms, whether it be smartphones or computers, or you'll sometimes hear people say we should ban the laptops.

Bonni: [00:07:54] And I wrote a blog post and said that perhaps we could shift our conversations to be around inviting students to experiences. There are times when I invite students to put their devices away because I know that whatever we're about to do is going to have a lot more likelihood of them being able to retain the information if they aren't distracted. But then, I also invite them to pull their devices back out again.

Bonni: [00:08:22] And so you used this word "co-author" and that has just completely changed the way I felt. It wasn't like you were talking - take notes, fill this out, here's a workbook, here's a worksheet - that all feels so mechanistic when we talk about it that way but you said "co-author." I just really liked that. In what other ways do you see yourself as sort of shifting the conversation from you must do this to now you're a co-author, now you're invited to this experience, now you are having a door open to be more motivated than you might be used to in the classroom?

Brenda: [00:08:58] Well that's exactly right. I mean co-author, they are completing their notes, they're adding their own thoughts of what they get from our dialogue together into that workbook. And that is one of their main pieces for studying and referencing. I don't even have a textbook for this class for [central] math class that's required.

Brenda: [00:09:18] And so this is the core concept that they work through. And if you keep it active enough, they can't get distracted by going off to some other site or texting other friends. They have to stay on that content with you to follow along. They're not only co-authors of that content but they're also co-learners in the classroom as we do a clicker question, a question where many of the students might not get it right the first time. Where you pull up and show the

results and 50% said true to that statement, and 50% said false. So you get them to then do that sort of think, pair, and share idea.

Bonni: [00:09:54] Brenda, could do you tell me a little bit about this "clicker experience"? So I'm back in your classroom again and do I have something physical in my hand or am I using my phone or some other way? Talk to me a little bit about what I experience once you start asking questions like this.

Brenda: [00:10:10] Right. They may either have the actual clicker or they can use their phone or devices so that's another reason why that needs to be available for them to use in the classroom. We have clicker questions interspersed throughout the class. Sometimes it's just one of those fun clicker questions at the beginning. Early in the term, it will be up and it will say, "So have you started your homework one?" It might say: "Yes, I have", "No, but I will today", or "Homework one..What homework one?" Just for something fun to remind them yes that first homework is out there. That opportunity to productively practice those skills that we've been going through.

Brenda: [00:10:46] Or there'll be perhaps, a content question and you pose it and you can see as the results are coming in on my screen that there's not - they're not gravitating towards that right answer. And so you might want to either show them those results or get them to talk with each other, which I often try to do. Most clicker questions are, "Alright, here's the question, we go through it. Hey, you got 15 seconds to share with your neighbor or your partner - talk to them."

Brenda: [00:11:13] And then there's that buzz in the classroom that gets them to discuss with each other. That's another way to wake up and kind of change focus for a few minutes and keep them going in that learning experience in the classroom.

Bonni: [00:11:24] How do you get students early on in a semester to feel comfortable talking to the person next to them? What are some techniques that you use?

Brenda: [00:11:33] Well for one thing, we started it on day one, and one of the earlier just basic ideas about types of data is an art activity, I actually kind of called them "Let's Do It Activities" in the course packer notes. So there can be a full question that is sort of like a quiz question or potential exam question that has no answers at all so I ask them to work on it first together with someone next to them.

Brenda: [00:11:58] And then I'll walk around and answer questions for two minutes and then I'll come back up and discuss it together. So you do start that and make it quite natural that first day. It tends to go much easier. I have them introduce themselves to those around them. I say you've got 2,199 other possible study bodies that are out there and about 300 or 400 right here in class.

Brenda: [00:12:19] So, let's get to know each other and that talking really starts up very quickly so they're engaged in talking to each other for those around them. At that first day, they'll tend to do that quite well throughout the rest of the term.

Bonni: [00:12:32] Do you ever notice that there are students who refrain from those discussions or are you achieving 100% participation?

Brenda: [00:12:40] I'm certainly not able to see everyone out there but if there is a person who prefers not to, then that is their choice that's not something that I'm going to require them to go and turn to the next person. But, there tends to be good activity. The room is so full that you do have to sit next to somebody. There is often not too many empty chairs. So, there is that natural ability to just show your work to the other person or maybe that other person will explain it to them first.

Brenda: [00:13:09] But if it's something that you know that they can - it's not a hard question upfront when you ask the first day question. It's quite easy to dialogue on the notes and to be willing to share that in the future too.

Bonni: [00:13:19] I really appreciate that you have allowed enough space for students to make that choice on their own and that that would be more important to you. It does go back to you defining your students as "co-authors and co-learners". That means I have some choice in it but it's going to be hard to resist your compelling ways because you have a lot of fun ways that you use to kind of keep us on the path of being that co-learner.

Bonni: [00:13:48] And in fact I'm going to play a short clip from one of the videos that they captured of you and I say, "they", this is ACUE. And we've had prior shows with other people that have been involved in their course. And I'm going to play the clip and then I'll just ask you to share a little bit about if there's any background that you want to share more than shows up here.

Bonni: [00:14:09] But, I just love getting to hear this and speaking of which, just to set it up a little bit, this has to do with using clickers. So whether it's a physical clicker or they're interacting with a quiz question on their phone or their computer, and then it also has to do definitely with keeping a large class motivated. Here is Brenda talking on the ACUE course.

Brenda: [00:14:29] But we have a clicker question coming up then for part A. So look a question A and let's start clicking in some answers here. I do like to give them a little motivation to try to answer these clicker questions correctly. So if they ever get 100%, all correct on a clicker question, I promise at the beginning of the term I would do a cartwheel for them. All is closed and we have - say it louder - That's 100%! OK. 1, 2, 3. *Brenda does a cartwheel* *classroom cheers*

Brenda: [00:15:04] ... it communicates that I'm trying to help them go through this process of learning, that I want to reward them with something that's fun- life. Well you know, this is not - life is not just statistics and learning and taking a test. Life is all around us. And if that little bit of motivation helps them to have fun in class and come to class to be able to observe that and watch that and try. I mean that's half the battle getting them to come, to get them to engage, to help me to help guide them through content and they complete it with me. And that's the first pass. Then they can go off and do it again by reviewing notes; then they can go off and do it again on homework. But I need them to do that with me and I wanted to have it be a good experience a fun experience and have them come to class happily ready to learn.

Student: [00:15:44] Knowing that Professor Gunderson will do a cartwheel if we get a 100% accuracy on our iClickers, motivates me in the sense of, I love watching my professors goof off sometimes and knowing that they can be funny and they're humans too. They're not just robots throwing information out at you. So seeing her do a cartwheel because she's so excited that her entire class got the question right - it's awesome.

Bonni: [00:16:04] Well, what people didn't see was that you did quite a cartwheel. Not only was it perfect in its form, but you actually have a little skip that you sort of do getting yourself into it. Did you have to practice this or is this something that you have kept up with in your days as far as most of us forget how to do this after we stopped being kids?

Brenda: [00:16:25] Exactly. Oh my, that is something that came up when my daughter was doing gymnastics way back and she asked, "Mom can you do a cartwheel?" And so, I was off at the same time on a committee where we tried

to talk about how to improve our own evaluation rates and one professor had said some thing about - maybe I'll promise them to wear a tutu in class or something if they have a high response rate.

Brenda: [00:16:49] So I thought, "What can I do to motivate my students to really try these clicker questions out that they aren't having to complete four points. There's no points attached to it and it's OK for them to get it wrong. But to motivate them to try to get to the right answer in that discussion that they have with their neighbors around them to convince someone that maybe they should change their answer to this other answer. Why not give them that incentive of something fun to do to watch their professor in front doing a cartwheel." I do have a couple of questions in my notes that I know of that are more likely to get 100% correct.

Brenda: [00:17:24] And every once in awhile, if I look ahead to my lecture well enough I might go down in the basement and practice it in the basement once just so that it's kind of there in my memory and background and physically able to do it in front if them that they do get that 100%.

Bonni: [00:17:38] So most of the time students are not getting 100%. This is not something you're doing every class session.

Brenda: [00:17:45] Oh no. Not at all.

Bonni: [00:17:46] What is the percentage - I guess - I don't know if you would have - you teach statistics you probably do. Well what's the average percentage then that students would typically get a question right when you first ask it right out of the workbook?

Brenda: [00:17:59] Well you know when you have large classes, the chance of everybody getting it right certainly isn't quite as high. But I will get something that's really cool to show them the responses first, even though the polling is still open. They might see that one is a little higher than the other and I'll let them talk with each other, and then they can work to convincing someone next to them of the answer and then that correct answer bar goes up higher, which is wonderful.

Brenda: [00:18:27] And for them to be able to teach each other the idea - Not me just telling them what the right answer is - it's so much more powerful for them to remember it and to learn it to be able recall that when they have to take an assessment on that topic later.

Bonni: [00:18:41] In case people are new to or have never tried this kind of interactive questions, the best practice would seem to be that we keep the answers hidden initially because otherwise I see that oh "B" is getting the preponderance of the answer so I'm going to go with "B" even though I felt like "D" was the correct answer.

Bonni: [00:19:03] So we keep those answers initially hidden, but then it sounds like from there it would kind of depend on how people did. So you're able to see on your end how people did even though you haven't shared it with the entire class. You can see on your end or do you not see it either?

Brenda: [00:19:21] No, I can, I can have it up on the screen. So I have my own tablet that I'll be interacting with and writing on, and then I can have on the machine that's in the classroom setting, have the clickers be run on that. And then certainly provide that screen to them if I want to show them the results.

Bonni: [00:19:36] Oh OK.

Brenda: [00:19:37] It's really cool to let that polling go on and you can even describe with them the process of elimination maybe during that. I said so - while you're thinking about this, let's just think look through this. Think about the background of the study - Was it an observational study or an experiment - in that they can think through the process that might mark one of the answers out.

Brenda: [00:19:57] So we should probably remove which of these answers then and they'll say it out loud and I'll cross it out on the screen. The polling is still going. So the few students that might have picked that and not saw that idea have now picked it up and can move on to picking the next most logical answer. Having seen now that guidance so you can guide them through the choice of those different options and kind of mimic what they might be doing if that were an assessment provided to them in an exam or quiz.

Bonni: [00:20:24] I've experienced this before and it's going to sound like I'm playing games and by no means am I trying to play games. I am attempting to have students think very critically. But we can start talking about a question that there is a less obvious answer to.

Bonni: [00:20:42] We can get the students to start talking about well those of you who picked this what are some of the reasons or even if you didn't pick it. Give me some of the arguments for this one. Oh interesting. Oh OK. Oh and then you

start to see all the students changing their answer to that one but that's actually not the right answer.

Brenda: [00:20:59] Right, right. ?

Bonni: [00:21:00] What about this one though? So they're kind of like jumping back and forth. And I do think it helps them, and again, I hope it doesn't sound like I'm playing games with them but it's just more thinking through the various arguments and almost teaching them good critical thinking skills so like you say then when you get to the test they can do it a little bit better.

Brenda: [00:21:19] Right. And you're doing that and training them on that when it's low stakes, when you don't have - they're not going to be penalized at all for thinking maybe first time that wrong answer. You'd rather help them correct that understanding in that large classroom setting so that they can take that learning that they have and be able apply it when you are doing the assessment.

Bonni: [00:21:38] Have you had colleagues criticize you for making learning too entertaining for being an "edu-tainer", or do people just get inspired by you and don't offer those critiques?

Brenda: [00:21:52] I haven't been criticized in terms of those cartwheel offerings. There's lots of different things you can do to incentivize them. It doesn't have to be a physical cartwheel at all. And I think it's just truly whatever you can bring to your teaching to let them know you're excited and that you're you're pulling for them and that you want to encourage them in whatever way that means. Maybe it's hey, we can watch a video on the last day of class and we'll put some of these ideas together. But let's get through this content and show me that you know this material. Something that will just be a nice prompt for them to - something to look forward to.

Bonni: [00:22:26] When I'm - by the way, I'm so glad I don't have to relearn how to do it a cartwheel because that's never happening with the wrists that I've got. But one of the things that - it's funny because you've got cartwheels and then Mike, Oh my gosh, Mike Wesch, he does handstands he actually learned how to do handstands. And so he'll do that in his classes, although I don't think it's as a reward. I'll have to go and look at that if it's a reward. But one of the things I notice, and it's not about what it is but often times it's because it's unexpected.

Bonni: [00:23:01] It's the surprise. Oh my gosh! She just did a cartwheel and they and people have to go look at the link on the ACUE Course in Effective

Teaching Practices that I'll have in the show notes because I love getting to see you do the cartwheel but then I love that they quickly pan over and do a shot with the students. They're delighted, but they're also somewhat flabbergasted. Oh my gosh! Our professor just did a cartwheel. And I guess in the filming this probably maybe wasn't the first time they saw this but they still managed to capture that delight and surprise from them.

Brenda: [00:23:33] Right. And I usually do end up promising that it will happen at the end of the class so that if indeed you know I'm not going to go back to the teaching side right away something if something wasn't quite as elegantly looking. It's just fun that way to wrapping up.

Bonni: [00:23:47] Oh so then, rather than students packing up their bags and trying to get out early they're going to sit in that seat for as long as it takes to get to see that.

Brenda: [00:23:57] Right. And I do capture my lectures too. So there are occasionally the students who will send an e-mail because maybe they were ill or whatever it might be that they weren't able to attend that day but they'll watch it, and they'll send a quick email about how fun it was to see that still on that captured lecture.

Bonni: [00:24:12] Oh, how wonderful! And then you know that people really are watching those video captures and getting something out of it. That's great. You mentioned that students sometimes watch the video -Oh! You also mentioned that you're not having it be punitive, if I get the answer wrong on my clicker question. Do you track those answers for your own learning of maybe next time how to be more effective, or does that all go away? Do you analyze that data in any way? Is it captured?

Brenda: [00:24:42] It is looked at. In fact, sometimes what I'll do is use the clickers and I give them a practice quiz, a clicker quiz in class. And so I will be capturing the data and even recording whether they get it right or wrong or maybe show the results as a class or as a whole next time. But it is still low stakes, even if they ended up only getting three out of five questions right. The two that they missed means those are the two they could take a note on and say I need to go review that topic.

Brenda: [00:25:09] So I do try to give them those challenges in class too. Also, I might use it because I might be asking a question about how I'm planning for the future class and asking, "Would you rather see more of this idea or that

idea?" And I'd ask that at the end to kind of prepare for that next class and I'll use that advice from them of what they need more practice on and bring something that at the beginning of the next class that addresses their muddy point that they might have had during that time.

Bonni: [00:25:35] A few years ago I wrote a blog post that I called, "The Dip" and it was my attempt at describing what I saw as an often archetype of how a semester goes and I'm speaking of 15 week semesters, but it doesn't always prove out in shorter classes. But just that we're going strong we're motivated and then, I don't know maybe three quarters of the way through there's this natural dip.

Bonni: [00:26:00] And I used to be more self-flagellating about it like I was doing something wrong and failing as a teacher and I realized that some of that is just the nature of the seasons of teaching or the seasons of the class. And it was interesting because a man from the UK wrote to me and he had written a similar blog post, although his was far superior to mine, so it was really cool to get to see other people noticing that we can be doing effective things as teachers and still experience a dip in motivation.

Bonni: [00:26:32] And collectively, as a class, do you find that in your classes? Do you experience this dip? And if so are there any techniques you use to try to either accommodate it or bring people back or even recognize that it's happening.

Brenda: [00:26:49] Good question. Yes and certainly there are those ups and downs in the semester. Sometimes after that first exam, there's a little bit of a lower break and you really just don't want them to give up that drive and still touch that statistics or that knowledge often so that it's regular for them.

Brenda: [00:27:08] Because if you do take a week off and then you're trying to get back, it can be very hard to know recoup all that learning that you missed during that week, you kind of took away from that course. I know that one of the things we try to do in this large class is bring good advice to them.

Brenda: [00:27:27] And certainly that's not able to be done by having each person come in personally to office hours and talk through how things are going but that we've been harnessing and embracing technology that allows us to do that. We have what we call an "electronic coach" that our students have available for them when they're going through these larger gateway introductory courses that kind of personalizes the experience and can talk to the

students from not only my perspective but other students who took the class; whose advice would be much more heard and resonated with.

Brenda: [00:28:02] When it comes from another student, who says be careful about after that first exam if you take too much of a break or be careful that you don't just not do some of those short simple assignments that you think might not be too many points because every point adds up. And with advice from the students to current students delivered electronically and in a personalized way.

Brenda: [00:28:24] So these are some of the ways we can try to keep students motivated by also sending them that targeted message at the right time about what's important now and how to be so successful in the class and keeping that motivation going.

Bonni: [00:28:38] The origins of the electronic coach, is this something that was developed at your institution or something through the course publisher? I guess you don't use the textbook so where did this electronic coach come from.

Brenda: [00:28:52] Well it is something that was developed here at our institution. It was something that's based on an open platform that was used in more of a health behavioral aspects. Trying to help people maybe stop smoking or whatever change they were trying to exhibit.

Brenda: [00:29:06] So kind of comes from that medical side and it's been something that we've been working with at U of M and have now brought to many of these introductory gateway courses to be able to deliver good personalized messages that we can tailor based on a little information from them. To help give them feedback on their performance. To help motivate them. To improve their study behaviors.

Brenda: [00:29:28] Right. Look here's a picture and some advice from the past students about starting the homework just one day earlier and how much of a difference I can make when you connect to that content more regularly than just that day before. We gather some information from them that we can know what they're like, what their goals are, or how good they are in the course and tailor those messages to them from students that are like them in the past.

Bonni: [00:29:56] Whenever I have the honor of getting to talk to people like you who just have these magnificent tools at their institutions it can be hard to then translate it into what it would look like at an institution like mine where we don't have electronic coaches.

Bonni: [00:30:09] And one of the things I just wanted to mention - I'm always listening from that standpoint is one thing that we all can do. It doesn't matter what kind of resources our institution might have, is to gather experiences from past students who have taken the class. And even - you talked about this first exam- I hadn't really remembered but sure enough I mean that is an often dip that happens much earlier than three quarters of the way through the class.

Bonni: [00:30:35] And so we can gather up that advice with the sole purpose then of being able to provide it to future students and have that be that much more relevant like you say because it's coming from a student, so we can do that. And then sometimes, our learning management systems have ways built in to be little mini electronic coaches. I use canvas. We just moved to it last year so I'm still a relatively new user.

Bonni: [00:31:03] But I know that there's something in the grade book that I could send a message just to students who received a grade of "X or lower" or "X or higher" or whatever on a particular exam on a particular assignment. So I could go back and those students who perhaps didn't receive a passing grade on that first exam and I could copy and paste a message from those past students and be my own little electronic coach and even encourage them. Yeah and if you did fail, I want to just extend the invitation to come see me during office hours, but here's a couple of tips in the meantime. Here's the link to schedule time to come see me in my office hours.

Brenda: [00:31:42] Yes. Exactly. I mean anything that we are doing in this electronic world - different pieces of it can be done at all different levels with whatever technology or tools you have available to them. One of the items that's in this coach is just even a to do list, a list of things that I provide them and a checkable list because I'm one that likes to check things off.

Brenda: [00:32:02] And it's one that just kind of lays out that week ahead and it may be something that they should do to earn points toward the class or it might be something like: Hey, check out the science learning center or office hours that are available this week. Did you know you have now 30 plus hours by your graduate students available to come and ask questions. You can go to any of them. What time are you going to go stop by this week?

Brenda: [00:32:25] Just motivating them to maybe think about that behavior of coming to office hours because that's perfectly good to do. Not just struggling students, but every student should come. And these are things you can send

through announcements and your course management tool or whatever it might be.

Bonni: [00:32:41] One of the things I'm really enjoying hearing from you, Brenda, is not just your passion for motivating students but I can't imagine that that passion could be there without you also doing some thinking about your own motivation. Before we transition into the recommendations segment would you to share a little bit about what, if anything you do, to try to keep your own motivation where you would like it to be.

Brenda: [00:33:08] That is a good question. I mean I'm always looking for one new thing one new idea to try in an upcoming term. And so that's one thing I do always want to make sure that my class isn't exactly the same from one semester next. But I'm always going to be reading over my student evaluations or I ask my students in my exam one, last questions are to provide for me a wish and a plus.

Brenda: [00:33:38] A plus is something that they really already enjoy in the course. It's working well for them. They would like to see continue for sure. Something that's useful for them, and then also a wish, something that maybe is a possibility of changing up in the course or providing more of. Something that would help them.

Brenda: [00:33:56] And I read those and be able to say what is something I can change in that class to be able to make that experience the better for these students right now. Or what is something that they recommend that maybe I can think about incorporating course in that next semester that comes from their voices.

Brenda: [00:34:12] So the fact, that it's not always the thing. There is always something new to learn, something new to try, something new to be open to into the course that can make the learning experience better for them. I also think it's important that I keep learning and it's not just learning in my own discipline but learning outside my discipline because it's been a long time since I've been a student.

Brenda: [00:34:35] And when you don't have that view from the student and learning we sometimes forget what you go through. Last semester - last year I got asked to participate in "Dancing with the Professors" I first-

Bonni: [00:34:50] Did you say dancing?

Brenda: [00:34:54] Yes I said dancing and I don't dance. Exactly.

Bonni: [00:34:57] I thought that's what you said but I had to check.

Brenda: [00:35:01] The U of M ballroom dance team invited some professors to learn a dance and perform it in front of a group. First time doing it. And when someone asked me, I thought, "OK. I'm going to say yes." And it was very much a learning experience, learning outside my comfort zone. Just like a student who comes in and says I'm not a numbers person and they're trying to take statistics in here. I'm not a dancing person and I'm trying to learn how to dance.

Brenda: [00:35:27] So it was very opening for me to go through that experience and have that anxiety and that nervousness and maybe not quite as much confidence and gain that confidence but that practice that had to happen. That was very important to me to go through that to keep motivating me to connect with my students and see what they're going through from that student perspective. And it ended up being really fun too.

Bonni: [00:35:54] Oh thank you so much for sharing that experience and I'm just going to be going to see what videos I can find online, with your permission of course. It looks like I did a quick Google search. I'll at least be able to find something if not a video of you actually participating, of someone participating. It looks like a great fun thing.

Bonni: [00:36:12] And you're so inspiring just in terms of taking those risks and being vulnerable and continuing your own learning so that you can have more empathy and expertise in helping to facilitate learning for others.

Bonni: [00:36:25] This is the point in the show where we each get to give a couple of recommendations. And I think I'll just start by saying, one recommendation I would have is that we could all take inspiration from Brenda and try something new. Do something a little bit new. Maybe we don't have to go quite as far as being in Dancing with the Professors but learning a new skill, learning a new - exploring a new area of content that's not part of our normal discipline.

Bonni: [00:36:54] And the second recommendation I wanted to make is that there's a wonderful book that I bought for our kids some years ago but for some reason, it must have come in with a whole collection of books because I hadn't read it until today. But it's Rosie Revere Engineer.

Bonni: [00:37:09] And I remember reading about it on a number of book lists that were good for having really good strong female characters and also thinking about females getting into engineering and other kinds of stem professions. And it's just a delight and it's a delight of course because just watching Rosie go through and she's trying to create something that will help her Aunt Rose be able to fly and she has a complete failure. Her first attempt is an absolute abysmal failure and her aunt just both laughs at, slash with her and also celebrates that.

Bonni: [00:37:51] And it's just a wonderful celebration of failure being such a good thing. And I guess that was another part of the message I wasn't really expecting would be so positive for my kids of course. As a feminist I wanted the powerful you know engineering thing to come out and I went, wait a minute, this is also just a great book about the importance of failure and how we could celebrate failure.

Bonni: [00:38:12] And what Brenda taught us is just that if we're going to go out and we're going to do cartwheels that maybe aren't always as graceful as the one that we captured on video, and we're going to go out and try new things and challenge ourselves in those way and be on Dancing with the Professors that we're going to fail. And it's not always going to look as elegant as we might like it to but it's transformative. And so I would recommend Rosie Revere Engineer. I'd recommend trying something new and was kind of along the lines of what Brenda shared with us. I'm going to pass it over now Brenda to you to give your recommendations.

Brenda: [00:38:46] Oh those are great ones. Thank you indeed. One of the things that I've been sort of connecting with more recently is reading sort of how to be more mindful while "blank". How to be more mindful while taking a shower, which is sometimes where I will come up with some idea of a good way to assess that idea in an exam or how to handle a situation with a student issue or being mindful while driving to work. Every morning, my short commute, that is my time that I will think a little bit about the day ahead. It is my little time to connect maybe my little prayer type time and I will be thankful for whatever opportunities are said that day, regardless of what they are. I will be asking for guidance in how I dialogue with my students that day. Get me to form my words well when I work with my colleagues. And probably a little bit of saying with my children two of you wishing them up for what's in their mind.

Brenda: [00:39:49] So that's a great way to start the day, to kind of take those few minutes to think about what they had and to be welcoming those opportunities that are going to come knocking at your door. There was one that was said, "How to be mindful while eating chocolate". That one I liked a lot. And that is because I do always have some treats on my office desk and my students know, when they come to office hours or when a graduate student stops by to say hello, they just have to say hello and they can come in and have a treat.

Brenda: [00:40:20] There's some healthy ones and some not so healthy ones, but I do have articles in some of my homeworks about the benefits of chocolate. Have treats. Be looking for those little times during the day that you need to just kind of focus and be mindful.

Brenda: [00:40:36] And I will also say that it is indeed, tying in with your idea, Bonni, about it's OK to be nervous. It's OK to still have those nerves on that first day of the new term teaching a new group of students or to have those nerves before you do an interview that you're excited about, but a little nervous about. That there will be lots of firsts ahead in all of our minds. And to be ok with that nervousness that can motivate us also to just get excited and be there to do your personal best.

Bonni: [00:41:06] I'm so glad to have been introduced to you by the people over at ACUE and had so much fun watching your video and by the way that's a - I guess I should add a third recommendation that we all need to go over and watch that cartwheel on the video that they have on their site, which I will post to in the show notes that teachinginhighered.com/160. I'm so inspired by you I'm so glad to have been connected with you and just appreciate your generosity and your being willing to get over the nerves and come on this show because it's just been so nice talking to you and getting to pass some of this on to our listeners.

Brenda: [00:41:41] Thank you again Bonni for the invitation. I really appreciate it too.

Bonni: [00:41:46] What a pleasure it was to get to talk to Brenda Gunderson on today's episode of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast. She is truly an inspiration and is going to make me think about so many things I want to do in my classes. Although, as always it's best to just think about one thing and try to implement just one thing and all have to make a list of all the things that I'm being motivated to try and just give a little experiment with one of them.

Bonni: [00:42:11] Thanks so much to all of you for listening and for your continued participation in this community whether it's by listening by writing in with feedback getting in touch on Twitter or whatever way it is that you get engaged with Teaching in Higher Ed and I'm going to look forward to seeing you on the next episode. We've got lots of great guests coming up. And thanks again for listening. We'll see you next time.

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