Ben:	Welcome to the UP Tech Talk podcast. Coming to you from the academic multimedia studio. On the University of Portland campus. Produced by academic technology services.
	Welcome to another episode of the UP Tech Talk podcast. This is Ben Kahn, I'm the academic technology specialist, and trainer at University of Portland. Today I'm joined by Maria Herb. Hello, Maria.
Maria:	Hey Ben.
Ben:	How's it going?
Maria:	Good.
Ben:	Awesome.
Maria:	Welcome back.
Ben:	Today we're happy to have joining us again in the studio professor David Turnbloom. Who's a theology professor here at the University. David, how's it going?
David:	It is going quite well thank you.
Ben:	Very good. David, we are just having you in here today. You're a repeat guest, but we just chatting with you. I heard that you were working on a project for your theology 105, which is one of our core courses at the University, involving a [subreddit 00:01:05]. Tell me a little bit about that.
David:	Yeah, so talking to a lot of colleges, not just in theology, but across disciplines; One of the worries is that we all have our cultural capital. Our examples from pop culture that we like to go to to get a point across to students.
	The older you get you go to that movie, and you just look at them have confused looks on their faces going, "I'm sorry that was 10 years before I was born Professor." I'm like, "What, no. Oh, you don't know that one?" I was thinking how do I maintain my awareness of what the students are interested in? You know the things that are important to them culturally.
	One of the things that I'm regularly wasting my time on is Reddit. Which is this great website that is basically a place to post links from anywhere on the website. About any topic. Within Reddit there are subreddits as you said. That could be devoted to a particular topic. Whether there's one on just Catholicism, or one on House of Cards television show. Anything.
Ben:	These would be Reddit/R/Catholicism, or something like that?

David: Yes, and they can be public, and they can be private, invite only. They can be modified in whatever way you want. What I did was I started one for THE 105. Right now I'm doing it for the first time this semester. It's basically a way of getting the students to post things that they are reminded of during lectures, or during readings.

Recently we spend a day reading Genesis chapters 1-3. Anything that pops into their mind as I'm describing these books, or they're reading them. Whether it's a clip from a television show, a song, a poem, a picture of a sculpture, anything they can then go on to the subbreddit, and post a link.

When I say that in the comment section, because with every like there's a comment section. Then you have to write at me, 100 words minimum, describing how what you've posted relates to the topic. The amazing thing is I've gotten about 120 postings so far this semester. The amazing thing is almost every single time they're writing 200, 400 words where they really get into.

It's something that they came up originally, and they want to tell me about, and their other classmates about. It's been a great way to see what's interesting to them. The flip side of it, that's really what I want to get at, is it also teaches them to see their world through a theological lens.

When they're saying, "Okay this is an assignment that I'm going to be doing throughout the semester," because I say you have to make 5 postings to have fulfilled the extra credit assignment. You can only do 1 per week. It's something they have to do over the course of the semester. They are developing the skill to say, "How do I see the world through the lens of what I just read? How do I see the world through the eyes of somebody who's trying to think about human nature from the context of Genesis 1 through 3.

Maria: What are some of the things that they posted?

David: It's a lot of musical stuff, because I'm also using a lot of music in my class. As far as examples, and I talk about music a lot. For instance, we had one of the very first classes I do is on; What is a tradition, and how do you participate in tradition? Having them look at their history, and their families history, and what that means to them now.

Somebody posted one of the songs from the musical Hamilton. About who lives, who dies, who tells their story, is one of the lines in there about; You don't get to control exactly what your legacy is going to be. When we look back at traditions we are reading our current concerns into that as well as a way of updating it. Making that past the truth, that was there speak to now, in an authentic way. She brilliantly looked at that song, and related that. That's a really good example of it.

Then little videos here, and there. Somebody posted a video of, I believe it was, Carl Sagan talking about the universe. After having a lecture on mysterium tremendum fascinans. Which is this concept of the religious experience of the mystery under-girding life, and how that leaves us in awe, and at once terrified. It's a description by Rudolf

Otto of what is at the heart of all religions, and religious experience.

The students say this is what Carl Sagan is doing over here. Connecting it to their love of science, and astronomy you get those really nice examples.

Ben: Really it could be anything that they're posting. It's just wide open it sounds like? It's up to their inspiration.

David: It's completely open. They could post funny little memes, or whatever. I really try to say - Especially right now, because I'm trying it out for the first time. I was like I don't know if this is going to be a massive failure, or if it's going to be amazing? I said just radically open anything you post on their.

The real assignment, I guess, is the 100 words. If you can articulate to me how it relates then I'm not just getting random stuff that they're just throwing up. So far, overwhelmingly I've been very impressed with the responses.

Maria: Any film analysis, or art?

David: Yeah, people have - The art I'm trying to think of a concrete example of - I don't think anybody's posted a painting, or a sculpture, or anything like that yet. Films. People have posted clips from Rick and Morty. I have to go back. You know the cartoons that are very, very popular.

That's one that I learned very, very popular. Everybody's like, "You haven't watched this?" I'm like, "I haven't." Now I'm going to start watching it, and start drawing from that cultural capital. I've learned a lot from it so far about things I wasn't aware of. Now I'm making myself aware.

Ben: Mechanically there's really not a huge difference between Reddit, and a Moodle forum. Other than, I guess, students have the ability to upload things that they like, and things like that. What drew you to using Reddit instead of your standard issue Moodle forum?

David: Great, so the goal if this works, and it is working now. Is starting next semester some of my colleagues, who are also teaching the same course, I'll make them moderators. Then what they can do is put up the same assignment. What we're going to have now, rather than just being my course, is we'll have this multi-section forum. For these students to interact, and post things.

How it works is when the moderator is allowed certain moderating powers then they can have their students create user names. Then they have to take that user name, and approve them. Each moderator would be in charge of approving their students. Now rather than it just being my class I've got a larger group of people. Everyone of us teaches it in a slightly different way. We'll get other interesting things from the way they teach the course, and how that relates to their students.

The biggest thing for me is going to be this doesn't then stop when that student finishes

this class. I want to keep it open, so that as they progress through the next theology core course, through the rest of their education here, and theoretically once they've graduated, and gone beyond; You have this massive community of people who have taken theology 105 at the University of Portland. Who can then come back, and say, "I'm not doing the extra credit assignment anymore, but hey here's something. Here's something." It gives me a way of staying in touch with past students, of past students staying in touch with me, and with one another. That's dedicated to this place where theology-

Again this is intro to theology, so it's very broadly conceived, and how that's affected their world view. They can come back, and show how it's grown, or changed, or whatever. I'm hoping, it's 5 weeks old at this point, but I'm hoping that in 5 years I'm going to have a really, really nice website. That I'm going to have all my colleagues who teach this course moderating, and will have a thriving community of exchange about theology, and the cultures in which all of our students are trying to apply that theology that they learned here.

Ben: I think it's interesting that you use the word community. I think that is the difference in what you're building between a Moodle forum that might be tied to a certain week. Then it's done, it's dead after that. After the course is over forget about it right?

Maria: Yeah, forget about it.

Ben: I'm taking courses right now, and I go into the forums. There's, for one discussion topic, there's forum A, B, C, D. I see my last name next to one, and I'm like okay. I'm siloed into this little online discussion forum with 3 other people. I miss that chance to click with whoever else might be in the course. Whoever else might be in the course next semester. I think the use of Reddit as this long standing community is a really interesting idea.

Maria: Definitely, and just building a community that's got a long shelf life. You know, that's a great endeavor to begin with.

David: Yes, and I'm sure that as time progresses I will learn how to tweak this, or that, and refine a little bit. Right now it is very much an experiment, but I've been very happy with how it's going. The nice thing about it is it's an extra credit assignment. It very much is, at the moment, people self selecting into it.

There's people who are, this interests me, I would like to be here. I don't just get a bunch of people finding whatever they can, and throwing it up there, and making connections. I'm hoping that, because it is those people who want to be there that, that will hopefully pour over into them wanting to continue that conversation. We'll see hopefully that works.

Ben: What would you say to the people that might say, Reddit, I think I've heard of that. Isn't that a place that's full of: hatred, and misogyny, and bullying, and pornography? All these things that we'd associate with the dark corners of the internet. Why would you

choose to bring your theology students into that environment?

David: Well, yes it is all of those things. As is the world. If there's one thing that Christianity has struggled with, it's whole existence, is that you are subsisting in a sinful place. Learning to see the fact that it is often out of these places that beauty comes. It's not just an either, or situation with these.

I've chosen this, because it's first off the technology itself is great. It's a great place to have conversations. It's a great place for being somebody who's not very good with technology, who's learning. It's something that's pretty easy for a moderator to do. It's also a place, if you're worried about controlling the content of something as a moderator, it's incredibly easy to control the content within your private subreddit.

I can quickly erase whatever I want. I can quickly stop somebody from posting all of these things. As far as the argument of, "I've heard that's bad." Well show me a technology that hasn't been used for bad things. All of a sudden you're going to be back to, well nothing, because that's just how humans work. Whether it's pen, and paper, or the most advanced electronics. The question is how do we use what is beautiful to perpetuate, and adept to that beauty that's already there?

That's what I'm trying to do with this widely available, very free technology. I haven't heard, in talking to many of my colleagues about this, nobody has said that off the bat. "Oh I've heard that, that's a dangerous place." Everybody at this point, I think, knows the internet is a dangerous place. That is also an incredibly important place, and useful place just like anywhere else.

Ben: It's a place that's very hard to avoid these days. I would say. No matter what your vocation is. I think I kind of set you up for that question, because I'm in complete agreement with you on that. I think it's so important that we recognize the tools that we have. How they're impacting our society. That we willfully, and with forethought make those tools available, and we familiarize ourselves with those tools, and what they can be used for.

Maria: Have you found any [redisent 00:15:15] users among your students?

David: Not really, but at the same time I haven't gone out seeking them. Like I said before it's very much a-

Maria: Extra credit, right?

David: It's an extra credit- You self select into it type of a thing. Certainly not everybody has created a profile, and signed up. I would say, at this point, 60% have done it. Nobody has told me that it's because, "Oh Reddit that's a bad website, and I don't go there." Nobody said that. I think it's just a lot of people are like extra credit. I'm just going to focus on what I have to do, and get these things done. Which is fine.

I think that as time goes on I'll get better at my pitch. You know get better at how do I

encourage this, and make it so that the participation goes up.

Maria: Maybe it will just become a part of your class, and not even be extra credit.

David: Yeah, it might end up going that way. If I see enough real good come out of it working it in somehow would be good. At the same time I do like it being that, I want to do this, kind of thing. There's a depth of participation that is going to be there that I think the second you make something mandatory it's harder to get to. I don't know. I would like it to be everybody's there conversing back, and forth, and having a spontaneous community that way. About ideals that we reach towards.

Ben: Very cool. All right well do we have anything else we want to cover?

Maria: How are we for time?

Ben: We're at about 15 minutes. I think we're good on time.

Maria: I think we're perfect. Right that's good. David that's just great that you took on a project like this, and went for it, and got it out there. I think that's really what it takes. Just even starting with something that's catching your imagination a little bit. Just wanting to see where it goes. Now you put it out there, and somebody else is going to hear about it, and maybe give it a try.

Ben: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's so applicable to any class, any field. Definitely an innovative use of that technology here on campus. Definitely will want to keep tabs on that. If anyone's interested just send David an email.

David: Yes, please. If you have any ideas about how to make it better, things that could happen, things I could add to the assignment [crosstalk 00:17:52]

Ben: I think I can relate Rick and Morty to any academic subject if I try hard enough. I think it's a good- It's a great fit.

David: That's academia [crosstalk 00:18:00]. Make connections to things at all costs.

Ben: All right well David thanks for joining us, and talking about your project today. We love having you. Come back anytime.

David: Thank you so much.

Maria: We'll definitely have you back.

Ben: All right, and we'll see you next time.

David: All right.

Ben: Bye.

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