

Christopher Richmann: Welcome to Professors Talk Pedagogy, a podcast from the Academy for Teaching and Learning that Baylor University. I'm your host, Christopher Richmann. Professors Talk Pedagogy presents discussions with great professors about pedagogy, curriculum and learning in order to propel the virtuous cycle of teaching. As we frankly and critically investigate our teaching, we open new lines of inquiry. We engage in conversation with colleagues and we attune to students' experiences--all of which not only improves our teaching, but enriches and motivates ongoing investigation. And so the cycle continues.

Today our guest is Dr. Gaynor Yancey, Lake Family endowed chair in Congregational and Community Health, Director of the Center for Church and Community Impact, and professor of social work teaching in both the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work and Truett Seminary at Baylor University. Dr. Yancey has won several teaching awards, including outstanding professor in 2006, the Cornelia Marshall Smith award in 2019. And she was also named a Baylor Master teacher, the highest honor awarded by the university. We are delighted to have Dr. Yancey on the show to discuss teaching as vocation, changes in students over the last generation, seeking continual improvement in our teaching, and so much more.

Well, Gaynor Yancey, thank you so much for joining our show today.

Gaynor Yancey: Thank you for having me, Chris. I appreciate it.

CR: I would like to start just by hearing from you, in your own words, describe your experience in higher ed. What positions have you had? What roles have you, have you been in throughout your time in Higher Ed?

GY: Well, it's interesting. I started in higher ed when I was in Philadelphia doing mission work there for the 30 years that I was there. I was actually a part of doing Christian work there. At the same time, I was teaching adjunctively at Eastern College, which now is Eastern University. So I taught their policy classes and I also taught their diversity classes. And so I did that alongside the other work that I was called there to do. And in the process of doing that, I got redirected back to my original call of God, which was to be a teacher. So I was trained as a teacher early on in undergrad and graduated from East Texas Baptist with my undergrad, and then got my seminary degree because I was going to be doing some kind of denominational work. And then when I was there in Philadelphia, doing that denominational work, is when I started to teach adjunctively. So then at the same time I started back to school, got another master's degree. So not only did I have the one out of seminary, but then I got one from Temple. Actually changed direction totally and went towards social work. So I've got my master's degree in social work and then went right on to the University of Pennsylvania and then got my doctorate in social welfare policy. So all of that was being done as I also was transitioning out of the church work that I had been there in Philadelphia doing all those years. And as that changed then I also went full-time on the faculty at Eastern. And so I was there, and while I was there before coming to Baylor, then I also became the moderator of the Faculty Senate there. I was there on full-time faculty for two years before I came to Baylor. And so when I came to Baylor then I came, I was recruited to come, because we had in the school of social work, they were starting the MSW program. And so they wanted to have somebody who would be able to talk about faith and practice. And I had done that as far as the full circle of integrating faith and practice in both Social Work and also in faith context. And then also to be the replacement for the person who had retired from teaching policy for all the years that had their undergrad program and social work. So I started that with the MSW program.

Gradually through the years have moved from of course assistant professor, getting tenure up to associate professor and then full professor, I have had the real privilege of being the ombudsman for the faculty. I've also been on the Board of Regions, as a faculty rep, and just have been so blessed quite frankly, with the opportunities for service that I have both to my colleagues as well as with the students as well as the administration. So, just really feel that higher ed has been one of those places where I have been thriving, quite frankly. And I loved every minute of that for sure.

CR: And it sounds like you've gotten to see institution from many different perspectives as Ombudsperson and as faculty reagent. So what's that like when you sort of crossover the management-labor divide as it were?

GY: It's been, it's been interesting. My MSW is in administrative practice. And so I love things about boards. I love supervision, I love planning budgets, all those kinds of things. And so that was always a part of who I was anyway, even in my undergrad, I had a double major in English and also business. And so that is carrying me all the way through. I was thinking I was also on the tenure committee. I was actually on the tenure committee for six years and was the only person to be the chair twice of the tenure committee. And that was probably my first foray quite frankly, even before thinking about the ombudsperson and then of course with the regents. And those were the days when we were not doing so well with tenure. Quite frankly, we were having major, major challenges around our documents and just being sure that we were doing all the things we needed [inaudible] units and those kinds of things. But it really was a precursor then for those other things. And it's given me a particular lens of seeing how it is to be on the faculty side. And then to also be on the administrator's side. And then to also be a colleague in so many ways and an advocate for our faculty, especially in the ombudsperson position, where you are the listener to help people when they perhaps need to have somebody to listen and to encourage them about the things that they need to, to do in their jobs as far as teaching. So it's been a, it's been an honor, quite frankly to be of service. And the ways that God has opened up for me as far as [inaudible]. It's been really awesome. For sure.

CR: One of the things that we note in the faculty development world is that so many of our PhDs who come into their, their, their work teaching have little teaching experience and little teaching training. This is getting better as many graduate schools are, are doing more in these realms. But if I heard you right, you said you did some training, as in, in teaching, and you went on to do some teaching. How do you think that that has impacted the way that you approach higher ed teaching?

GY: You know, one of the things that I think is so interesting is that we have, in the last 20 years, we've actually shifted so much in our country, Chris, because it was for the longest time, And of course we could go back historically and look at exactly how long, But we were really so focused on our teaching, right? And so especially if we were a smaller school, it would be, certainly you were going to be the most excellent teacher you could be. And then gradually as we come into the world of grants and funders and then the heavy kind of research, then we expect our folks that come out of education to be quite frankly, the researchers that they, we need for them to be now, but also that carries with it the expectation of money that goes with the research more often than not. And the struggle quite frankly, in terms of how that looks. So that transition of even at Baylor, have we transitioned, we're going to tear one R1 status. And yet we know that in the last 10 years I went almost tell you, Oh, I bet if we went back and tracked and it would be ten years ago when we started to make this shift, maybe 12 to 13 years, we started to make the shift in how our hiring practices started to shift. So we have our folks who've been around for a long, long time who were trained as teachers. And so then at the same time as new positions became available, and then we started to hire, we started to hire from those who perhaps had never practiced in their fields. And they went right from one degree to the other, right into the doctorate and then out and then of course into higher ed. And so there is a benefit to that quite frankly, in terms of what that looks like, but it is a shift. And I think it's in the shifting that we have to pay attention so that those who perhaps have never been trained in the heaviness of the research, that they could still be honored in terms of the, the, the teaching that they had been trained in. But then at the same time for those who've had only the research and that's been a real emphasis of their schools from which they've come, then we, I think have the real benefit at Baylor because we have such excellent teachers. We really do. Over all, we have excellent teachers. And so if we can somehow get that mentoring together, and I know we've done a good job, quite frankly, in terms of mentors with new faculty and those kinds of things that we're doing now, the more that we can bridge that gap in that way, I think that we will start to see that those who come out of research programs and then they're a part of us, that we will see that they also can become very, very competent in their teaching. And comfortable in their teaching. Because quite frankly, if you're trained as a researcher, then you're going to be a researcher. I do think there's wisdom in our having research faculty, that if that is truly where their heart is and where their calling is, there's that tension. There's a strong tension there about, "hey, I'm much more comfortable doing all the research," or "I'm much more comfortable being in the classroom and teaching," as though we have those two pieces that are there. And I don't think it has to be an either-or. I think there is some that is very clearly we can do both-and, but then we do have those that literally would prefer to

teach, those who would prefer to also research. And I think we need to figure out a way to honor that, which I think we're trying to do. Quite frankly, I think we're doing a good job with that so far. But there is a tension around it, right?

CR: Right. And we're, we're learning as we go. A lot of schools are.

GY: That's for sure.

CR: You are known--word on a word on the street and across campus is that you are a sought-after mentor for junior faculty.

GY: Thank you.

CR: So what do you have, how do you usually go about that? Especially when it comes to helping, helping junior faculty with their teaching and to think about their teaching with the context of their careers more, more, more broadly.

GY: Chris, I think that's a great question. It is. For me, teaching ends up being all about relationships. And, and actually research is the same thing. It's about relationships even though we're looking at things with a different lens and for a different purpose sometimes. But it's still about the relationship of whatever is happening in people's lives or our studies, our samples, no matter what. In the classroom, it's about what happens between the teacher, if you will, and then also poor students. I have a difficult time calling our students, students. I really prefer to refer to them as learners. One of the first things that I really try and do when I'm mentoring anybody is to really talk about the learning environment. It's not just a classroom. For us, the learning environment, it can be outside, it can be in a community, it can be anywhere. It doesn't have to be within the four walls. And so, if we can start to think in terms of the learning environment, and then we think about the players in that learning environment. Well, most of the time that's going to be all of us together, quite frankly, as we're learning together. So it's that relational piece that I think becomes very important that if we as teachers can learn how to become not only good communicators--because teaching is about good communication skills, no matter what. For some of us it may be about performance. There's, there's a certain sense that we have to be performers in some way. Some of us are stronger the performance and others might be if you will. But then others, I remember 20 years ago, one of the things that I found so interesting was Baylor students much preferred to have lectures than they did anything else. And that was different for me--a lecture is a lecture, is a lecture, but yet a good, well-placed lecture is really, really good. And so, so it's around the whole issue of how is it that we when we're inter-related with students for a period of time, whether that's a semester or two semesters, whether it's four years, five years. It's really trying to think about how do junior faculty get comfortable in their skin? Quite frankly, and how do we all get comfortable in our skin? We understand that we're all human beings, that we've been called to do this together. And so if we're called to do it together-- and I do think there's something about that is crucial for our understanding--which is that, and again, without being too theological here, I strongly believe that God has is in the places where we are with the students that we have at that point in time. And it's just a wonderful experience when you when you realize that this could be, it could be all or four months, it could be two years, it could be the four years I just referred to. But if faculty can learn most of all how to treat each other and our students as, as human beings, I think that one of the things that we'll find is that the learning environment gets greatly enhanced with that.

There's things like this, practical things, that I would say to you, that I say to people. One of them is I tell students very clearly about their care of thinking about how they care for their faculty. And so, you know, part of the challenge of that is, well, why are you doing that? Are you doing it for a bigger grade to make that A or whatever it is? But, but how you look at your faculty as a human being and realize that the person who's teaching you in this particular class may have things going on in his or her life quite frankly, that impacts how they might be in the classroom, how you might interact with that person. But also to periodically do what I call "managing up." Which is, how do you do the care and feeding of your faculty? And then at the same time, I talk to faculty about the same thing with our students. How do we show our care without becoming therapists,

without becoming--because we're educators and so we're not supposed to be on the role of therapists and other things unless that's a role that we're in. And so, but how do we just reach out and cross over and be able to show our care for people? I think we're able to do that more now, quite frankly, in the pandemic, which is interesting, that this pandemic would also lead us back to our care. But that care becomes so important to how people hear us. So that if, if we literally can show that care as a human being to another human being and not because of status or role, but realize that we're in this learning environment together, I think that everybody gets enhanced from that. So, so part of the, the real encouragement to younger faculty is not to be afraid of crossing a line. Because I think we're all very clear about our role and purpose. Don't want to get too close to anybody. We understand our role and purpose. But again, not to be afraid to reach out to show our care. Because that becomes extremely important. And quite frankly, if our students know that we care, I had found that they're going to be really much more [inaudible] to listen to what we say. If they know that we care. And the carrying counts with simple things like, I will always try and send an e-mail at some point right before I have a class. So if I had a Wednesday class, I would send [inaudible]. If I have a Monday class, I'll send it on a Sunday. And I usually do and I'll call the day before. And I will encourage junior faculty to do the same thing, which is what I call the touch. How many touches can a student have during the week from us? It's not how many, as far as meaning 10 or 15 or 20. But what's the meaningfulness of that touch? So it's not just sending an e-mail or a text, just to say I've sent it, but rather it's to show our concern and our care for them.

Most of the time it's also going to be around the point of encouragement. So the encouragement piece, which is one of the gifts that I truly believe that I have, which is to encourage people. So, you know, at five weeks when we hit five weeks of the semester, it's like okay, every faculty member I know just about was wilting. And then almost every, every student that I know was wilting. And so it's like okay, we're all wilting here together. And so, you know, sometimes some of the most encouraging and spiritual things we can do is just to know that we have taken time to drop somebody a note, a class a note, and just say "we're on week 5. I know this has been a tough week. Just know that I've been thinking about you this week." And it doesn't have to be long, it doesn't have to be detailed, it doesn't have to be any of those things. But junior faculty need to be encouraged also in terms of knowing that if they haven't succeeded at something in their eyes, that if they're moving toward that goal of what that looks like, sounds like, in the midst of the tension of trying to get tenure, quite frankly, of those six years, then in that comes that there's a, a humanness in all of us. And that humanness will follow all the way through the DNA that we have as far as Baylor, is that we are carrying faculty to our students probably more than most schools are. And that doesn't just happen, Chris. It really does happen because we've developed those skills and that care and not to be afraid to show it. So I'll just offer that as just a couple of things.

CR: Well, I think you're so right to frame what we do in terms of vocation, in terms of calling. And what I think that that does is it, it turns our attention to what we owe to each other and it becomes, it becomes much more relational. And if you think about vocations in a theological context, it really is about service to, to the neighbor, right?

GY: That's exactly right. And I like the way you say that because it really is about service. And so when we think about how does that serve as look for me, it is, most of all, teaching for me is as a servant. And that's one of the things that we don't often think about. Quite frankly, we don't use those words around that. But it is that when you really get down to the bottom line of everything, it's about "how can I serve you?" And that sounds so reversed, right? Because more often than not it's just the opposite. Sometimes people will go into it thinking, well, the students should serve us because we're the faculty, or whatever their thoughts might be around that. I think it's just the opposite. I think the more that we are in service to the students, quite frankly, the more that we're going to have from them, the learning environment that's going to help them to thrive and to flourish. In the end, that's what we want. We want it for ourselves as faculty. I certainly want it for the people who are coming behind me, who will be the people who are then going to be sitting with you again at some point in time. And the bottom line is, you know, how in the world does that look for them and what will that look like for them?

Same thing for our students. You know, it's like okay, we know that our students are already service-oriented. But then that, that whole piece around even serving each other and not being in competition with each other. I think one of the greatest things COVID has done for all of us is to neutralize us around competition. So one of the things I've loved about being at Baylor, is that from the very beginning since I walked in the door in 1999, I've never felt a sense of any competitiveness among the faculty. I'm not saying it doesn't exist. I'm sure it does in certain places, but it's more of a supportive environment than it is otherwise. And so the more that we can help people to be in that mindset of that DNA, that we're in this together, and this is a wonderful opportunity that we have of being in this together, it's not just about the Baylor family, it's about our Baylor DNA. It's about what is our lifeblood around this? And that does start back to our faith. Quite frankly, it's back to how we see people, that relational ministry that we have with each other is just, just an opportunity beyond measure that we would not have somewhere else, quite frankly.

CR: I love that phrase neutralizing the competitiveness. That's a good one. I was thinking too about competitiveness among students and how we, as teachers, we have a lot of control over how students view that environment. I was reminded recently that in, in Ken Bain's book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, he says that they overwhelmingly do not grade on a curve.

GY: That's right.

CR: You know, and because for those very reasons, I mean, it fosters competitiveness and extra anxiety and all these sorts of extra unhealthy social attitudes too. So it's a faculty thing and it's a student thing too.

GY: Yeah. I know one the things that I've tried to do in my classes over the years is I really love for them to work in groups and teams. And so whether we call them pods, whether we call them teams, groups, no matter what we might call them, but, but they're doing more work together than they are apart. And so I find that the smaller groups, I actually foster the participation in class. So when you go back and you start to think, okay, they've got a class participation grade. If somebody has that for their syllabus, it's like if they're working in those small groups, I find that they are participating all the time and they don't have a problem talking. If there's three or four of them together, they don't have a problem talking together, but bring them back into the hole again as far as the big group, and that is more difficult for many of our students.

And so part of our learning again comes with, if that is how they best function, then what would keep us from doing that, quite frankly? And so learning how to be comfortable in our skin or about that is another question because I think, again, it takes us back to are we more prone to do a lecture which is fine by itself. Are we more prone to do perhaps some lecturing and then some Q&A and testing and all the kinds of things that we have as options? But, but the group work really does foster this whole thing about "No, it's not about just you by yourself, it's about the team." And so the team, literally then, what that means for us as a teacher is how do we assess that teamwork? And what is that? Because students overall don't like to work in groups. Overall, they just don't like to work in groups because they have somebody that might fall down and just not carry their weight.

And my thing is, then that's part of the skill that we have to learn is how do we encourage that person to carry their weight? So therefore we're not over here complaining about that person saying, "Okay, our group didn't do well because so and so didn't carry their weight." They never met, they didn't talk, they didn't do any of those things. And that to me, puts it back on us as a teacher to say, but there are ways for us to deal with that. And so I actually have students actually go back and assess themselves in a group setting and then also assess their teams so that everybody does that two or three times in a semester. So therefore, what I think I see is what I think I understand also from what they're telling back to me in terms of their own assessment. So I found that that has worked well, quite frankly, over the years. So, I will be a person that will much prefer that the learning environment to be a shared environment very clearly, for sure.

CR: So you teach in what we might call professional programs in social work and in the seminary--Truett

Seminary. Do you have any thoughts about how students in professional programs learn differently or are motivated differently than students not in those kinds of programs?

GY: You know, it's interesting. In social work there is the practice of social work, just like there is in education, there is in nursing. And so those practice areas are so important and they get the have the heaviness, if you will, of the opportunity around the practicums, which could be internships or whatever they happen to be called in their units. At the seminary, It's called mentoring. So they still x-hundred hours as far as mentoring. But trying to be under the tutelage of somebody who is the professional out there, meaning out in society who has that degree, that's considered the terminal degree and sometimes that will be the masters and whatever that is. I have not found quite frankly, and I've taught English, I've taught business, I've settled in social work and certainly at the seminary now, and I've not found that students are, are any different.

It's interesting. I find that if they're compelled and propelled to do the academic work, they're going to do overall the best work that they can because that's what they want to do. And so even in business, when I taught in business, which I dearly loved is that those students wanted to do their best and it wasn't because perhaps they might be coming out with the possibility of a job where they would make more money than somebody else. But it's because they really do want to do their best. And I think that's the other thing that we're seeing differently now, the cost of an education is so important with the amount that, and our students, which I think says something about our students, which is that overall they're sensitive to the amount of debt that, that puts their families in. And so I hear more and more students talk about that quite frankly is that they, they are not going to really not take advantage of this opportunity because they feel like they'll be wasting their parents money. And so there's some things that go on around that.

But as far as students are concerned, the professions are known as helping professions for sure. But even if you're looking at something like, I don't even want to call out a particular title, but one of the more content areas for me, it was in English. If I want to teach English for instance, or I want to be doing something with that background, I want to be able to do the best that I can. And I find that students are still going to do their best no matter what. And they're going to do it so that they can be the best that they can be, so that they can meet what the Lord has placed on their hearts, what their desire is, what their passion is for changing the world if that's where it is, and that's where most of our students are. How can they change the world? They want to be changemakers, and they intend to do that in some way. And it may not look the same. It could be in the professions, but it could be something else too. So I haven't found them to be that much different, quite frankly, if they're called to what they're doing.

So to think about it though, being "Okay, I think I'll just go major in this," they may go through four or five or six different majors before that's over, and that's, that's hard until they find what their passion is and what their calling is, and then they're all in--100%. And that makes all the difference in the world for sure.

CR: You mentioned the growing, perhaps growing, I think, concerns among students about the cost of education and debt. I think you've been teaching long enough to have maybe seen some of that change. Are there other things that you've seen just amongst the undergraduate population that have changed the way that you interact with students over the years?

GY: Text [laughs]. Texting is one of the major [inaudible]. I was telling students the other day--they've done their first papers, actually both of my classes this semester, they both just done major papers, and so when I was grading them, I thought "My goodness, nobody knows how to put together a whole sentence anymore." Fragments are everywhere. And of course that's my English teacher background coming out. And I thought, "Oh my goodness, I don't want to blame it on anything, but I do think that texting has not helped us quite frankly." And then we've also come through a time where things like grammar and punctuation are, are not necessarily taught, but rather how do we express ourselves in writing? And so, so those things have been major, major shifts, I think over the last twenty years that I have noticed for sure. I've also noticed, Chris, I was

thinking about that the other day as far as just the difference of the students. I think that the...I go back to even the fact that you and I are talking today on Zoom for instance, and we can see each other. Twenty years ago, you know, even in the School of Social Work, we were trying to figure out how could we take social work to other countries. How can we do that? And students have an experience in another country.

I can remember, and this has only been the last twenty years, I mean, you know, I've been at Baylor twenty years. And yet what we would find is that our students would have to go to the internet café--and now we don't even talk about those words--but they'd have to go to the internet cafe. And for instance, if they were an African country, we had one student that was an African country and she would have to go at midnight in order to be able to get on to class then the next morning. We couldn't see her. We couldn't do a whole lot of stuff. All we could do is hear--and the crackling--I mean everything connected was just horrible. And so that's the way we've kind of developed over these last 20 years. And now we find ourselves being able to see each other on, on a platform like Zoom.

This allows us, quite frankly to be all over the world. And when I think about that, that's a very emotional thing, quite frankly. It ends up being very emotional because we can still, even, even though we could say, "Wow, we still prefer to be in person," and I think without a doubt, we would all say that. I mean, we, we have to love people to be in the teaching profession, number one, okay. We have to love people because we're going to be on all the time no matter what. And so in that, in that relationship, again, it comes back to how in the world does this kind of platform help us do that?

If I had a student in my office, for instance, a student would walk out usually with a hug from me--and I'd ask them first if I could hug them, could I give you a hug before you go? "Yes" And so, you know, we do the Baylor hug, you know, the side-by-side. And so out of that comes that if I were sitting there on my tables in my office and we were talking together, it would never be unusual for me to just pat their shoulder, their arm, just depending on how we are--even touching, but not for that to be inappropriate in anyway, but just again for connection. And now we don't have the ability of that while we're on the screen. So we talk about the virtual hugs, we talk about those kinds of things. To be able to see that and to be able to laugh and to be able to see each other becomes extremely important. Because the days of just using, quite frankly, the cell phone or whatever we can connect with the thumb and not seeing each other's face. And we can still read body language. We can still see our smiles. We can see when we're not happy, when we're sad, we could still experience that and hopefully the empathy and the care will come out even in that. Even as we follow with a call like this, quite frankly [inaudible] we can still show that. So, so the texting is one thing that I would tell you that while it's great for communication of emergencies, also it becomes the way of the world. Then the other thing is how it has impacted us as far as the presentation of ourselves in written form and what that begins to look like. And then what do we hold onto and what do we let go of? Things like our students and the kinds of things that we still have all around whether we were twenty years ago, ten years ago, one year ago. I just love college students. I just love the freedom that there is in the college environment, quite frankly, to both discover yourself and to be yourself, hopefully without fear of hurting yourself or anybody else in that process. And just, just that whole sense of discovery is just awesome to be a part of all of this, quite frankly.

CR: One of the things that's so inspiring about you as a teacher is that I know you keep, you keep trying things and you keep wanting to improve. I think it was not this most recent summer, but last summer you attended and participated in our course make-over workshop. And I was just so nervous that we were going to have a master teacher in our class and of course you were a fantastic conversation partner. It's just so inspiring to see someone who has won awards and been named master teacher. And you still have the same fundamental questions and desires as junior faculty: "Well, how do I keep my student's attention? How do I write this in the syllabus in a way that they'll understand?" So what do you think helps you to stay motivated to seek that constant improvement?

GY: They do. They do. It's all about them. If I can't communicate with them, then they're not going to learn, quite frankly. And if I don't do it in the way that they prefer, then they're not going to learn. And so it means

that I've got to be able to adjust, quite frankly, instead of expecting them to adjust to me, I need to be able to adjust to them, quite frankly. And again, that goes back, I think Chris, to that that sense of service because I really am here to serve them. I can't be and I would not have gotten some of these awards that I've gotten, which is so [inaudible] to even think about, but it's really about them. It's so much about them. They, our students at Baylor, have taught me the ways that they want me to be a teacher to them. If I were not flexible and I said "No, you have to learn it like this," I doubt I'd have any of these awards, quite frankly. And I don't mean that in a negative way at all, but it is that there's a constancy and a fluidity of teaching that then I think over the years, one of the things we find is that we, we can get into a rut for sure. I think teaching can definitely give us a rut.

At the same time we can also break out of that all the time. And one of the things that I know that I carry over with me as far as my teaching is concerned, you asked a question about, you know, where have I perhaps failed or not been so successful, I would tell you probably a thousand times over, but the hard thing is, is because one of my gifts is that of the developer. And so the developer is about people, it's about things, it's about organizations, it's about myself. So that means though what comes with that is that I could do something 20 times and I'd fail at it every time, but the 21st time it looks like it's wonderful, right? And so it would show up in the paper and show up in some news article or something else, but it doesn't show up all the other times that there is some iteration of that, that it didn't work. So, so again, it's back to the teachability. Am I still teachable having done this for so long now, am I still teachable? I think that I really am. I want to be more teachable even all the time that I have left to keep teaching. And so even out of that comes, and if I lose that teachability, if I lose that fluidity, being open to other ideas, that I think that that's not a good thing. It certainly won't be good for me. I don't think it's good for any of us if we get stuck in time and then we don't pay attention to what the, not just the new style, but what is the learning style of the students that we presently have? And I think that's, that's what makes teaching so exciting because it could change every year, it could change every semester, it could change from week to week. But we've got to be able to go with that, quite frankly.

CR: Right, and that's why getting feedback from students is so important because what worked last time you taught the class, even if it was last semester, it's a new group students.

GY: That's right all the way around. And that group of students may not see the same thing you did last semester the same way [inaudible]. So taking their feedback and then saying, guys, they didn't like this or they didn't like that. And, you know, it's like, oh man, you know, what do I do now about this? So I have to go back and rework this and then see how that can be better stated. And to know that they have their planners, which is so impressive, they have their planners and, and even things like adjusting our dates on the syllabus and we start to do that. It's like, "oh," it throws them literally off their game so to speak, because they have everything so structured in their lives. So many of them do that. And so I try and do that very sparingly, but also try and do it that if something needs to be adjusted because they are extremely tired. For instance, I'll tell my students that if you need to take an R&R day, please take the R&R day. Please do it. Because if they don't, they will be so tired. They will be ineffective in their learning. They will have tuned out most of the time, if that's how tired they are. And all of us need a mental health day. And if they need it, they need to do it. And now that we have the ability to also do recordings, if we are on Zoom, for instance, again, then somebody could actually not only be sick, but they could be out for another reason and they could still catch up in terms of even knowing what we discussed in class.

So, there are different ways to think through how we can keep on learning, how we have to keep on learning quite frankly, all the way through. There are some things that, you know, that I still haven't given up Chris. One of them is, it's still very important to me that, that our students can represent themselves in writing as effectively as they can, verbally. I think that there's something about our writing that also tells the world where and how we've been educated. And of course, so many people will say out of Baylor, you know, that our students are really some of the best writers they've ever seen when they go on to graduate programs in other universities.

And that's really—we're preparing sometimes our undergrads to be with us, but we're also preparing them for other graduate schools. And I think we have to remember that. So that's one of the things that I still highly, highly value--is how they literally present themselves in the written word as well as the oral work, quite frankly. And how we treat each other. Most of all, how we treat each other will always be the foundation of everything in the learning environment. And I think our students are wonderful examples. When they feel good about themselves and they're confident and they feel like they're thriving and that they can flourish, then they're able to show that to each other. And they can do that so well, and they can show it to everybody else too. But when they don't, then they don't do well with that. And you can understand why: because they just don't feel confident.

So 99 percent of what I feel my job is as a teacher is to put the environment in a place, what I call the environment of empowerment, to where they could actually thrive. And they can choose to be and to do and all they want to do within the structure of the course that we've got and those kinds of things, that expectation of learning. But if they can come out of that in terms of the confidence, then they're going to be some of our best representatives that we'll ever have at Baylor quite frankly.

CR: Well, unfortunately, we are just about at time here. And as you know, I had so many other things that I wanted to discuss with you. So, I might have to have you on again if you'd be so kind.

GY: I would love it.

CR: Did you have any final words for us before we say goodbye?

GY: Thank you for doing this with me today. It's always fun to think back and reflect. I know that for me, and I'm not just saying this because I'm at Baylor, Baylor allows us to be all that we feel that God wants us to be, seriously. And we have, sometimes, opportunities and I don't think that we even realize that we have. And if we can move into that, I think that we're not going to have a problem being tier one R1 before it's all said and done.

CR: Yeah. Well, thank you for talking with us today, Gaynor Yancey, and thanks also for the work that you do here at Baylor and across the academy.

GY: Thank you. Thank you, Chris. I appreciate it so much.

CR: Our thanks to Gaynor Yancey for speaking with us today and seriously Gaynor we want to have you back on to talk about all the stuff we didn't get to in this episode. Our thanks also to Nick Townsend, Baylor music composition student for the wonderful music you hear at the beginning and end of our show. Today's show notes do include a link to Ken Bain's wonderful book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, which has a great discussion about grading on a curve. That's our show. Join us next time for Professors Talk Pedagogy.