# Transcript

Teresa Valais

Hi, I'm Teresa Valais, senior instructional designer, with the Faculty Academic Center of Excellence at Towson University, FACET

The purpose of the faculty Success Higher Ed Conversations podcast is to engage faculty in conversations to support professional growth with the aim of enhancing faculty and student success.

In our podcast today, we'll discuss two faculty perspectives on the use of generative AI for course, writing assignments, and learn a little about students attitudes towards the use of generative AI tools to complete their academic coursework.

Let me introduce you to our guest. Terry Ewell joined Towson University in the summer of 2000 as chairperson of the Department of Music. He has been at the forefront of digital education with online publications in the 1990s and teaching online music courses in the mid 2000. He is known as the best Bassoon digital professor with well over a million views of his YouTube videos.

Luis Engelke has been professor of music at Towson University since 1999 and holds the position of Principal Trumpet with the Lancaster, Kennett and mid-Atlantic Symphony Orchestras, Baltimore Chamber Orchestra and the Shippensburg Music Festival. He has over 300 publications that include books, articles, recordings and compositions. Luis is also a FACET Scholarship Fellow.

Welcome. It's great to have you both here today.

Luis Engelke

Thank you.

Terry Ewell

Thank you.

Teresa Valais

All right. Okay. So let's get started.

So last semester, you each taught a section of the same course, “Music 355 Ethical Issues and Perspectives in Music.”

Is that right?

Terry Ewell

Yes.

Luis Engelke

Yeah.

Teresa Valais

Okay. Can you share a little background information about the course and include how long you've been teaching Music 355 and a little about the course format?

Luis Engelke

So around 2011, Terry came to me with the idea to develop this course,

He saw a need in the Core 14 area, and we received a one-unit release that we shared. And it took about a semester to develop the course. And the biggest hurdle actually was getting through a department.

Once we got through there, then it's been offered ever since. And I've taught it every semester and many summers as well.

I think Terry has as well. I have as well. And I just want to share what a delight it's been to work with Luis all of these years.

Terry Ewell

When when I was thinking of developing the course, I decided I wouldn't do it on my own because I really needed to have his expertise and as a union officer, as an active musician and things.

We just had a wonderful time developing the materials, and I had no online training, so Terry provided that.

Teresa Valais

Terrific. So that's interesting. You're each teaching a section of the same course. Do you have the same philosophy or same way of going about that? For example, what do you do similarly, or what would you do differently?

Well, we share the same videos and the same reading assignments, but our I think our philosophies differ in many ways. I am very attuned to the fact that I want to prepare my students with skills that they will have when they leave Towson University. And for this reason, I use Blackboard very little because my students won't use Blackboard when they leave this place.

So instead, I use materials and software and the sharing of items that they can all develop. For instance, they develop skills in using Dropbox, in file, naming, in using different, ah different types of technology in my courses.

Teresa Valais

That kind of mimics the digital component of the course.

Terry Ewell

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Luis Engelke

Yeah. I'll actually add that I haven't used it for that much.

I'll just use it for the exams and a few resources. But I'm actually moving this semester to put more of the course on Blackboard Ultra.

And that's in response to a few student evaluations that wanted the content in one location exclusively.

Teresa Valais

So in the past 12 to 15 months, there's been a lot of talk of AI and generative AI tools. Do you have the same approach to using AI?

Terry Ewell

Well, I think both of us over the summer felt that I was intruding upon our course in many, many different ways. And it just so happens that at a faculty retreat in music, we were both at the same table. And I don't know if we'd chosen that.

And then we started talking about AI in our course, and Luis said, I'm just forbidding it altogether.

And I said, Oh, isn't that interesting? I'm actually encouraging it in my course. And so it became this interesting experiment because we both teach the same material and have relatively similar students, I would guess, coming to the course.

Luis Engelke

Yes.

And in spring 23, I didn't include a statement on the I and my syllabus, but two of the papers I received were disjunct and non-focused.

And I can speak with, at least in my opinion, 100% certainty that they were each generated. And I wanted to avoid that because I felt the students didn't delve into the topic themselves.

Terry Ewell

Fascinating.

Teresa Valais

So that was very interesting. You notice that students were already adopting the use of AI to complete coursework, and so having that experience in 2023. What did you decide to do in fall of 2023?

Terry Ewell

Well, part of this had to do with the fact that my spring semester iteration of the course was a total disaster. And so it caused me to really rethink this course.

And I had an epiphany over the summer that I'm really not so much a music professor as really I thought it was more important to be a life skills and academic competencies Professor using music as the forum.

Teresa Valais

Well, isn't that interesting because the topic of your course ethics, right? One might take a look at that and then say, Well, what does that have to do with music? And so your strong background as a chair, a music professor.

Terry Ewell

This is a very interesting point you bring up. Well, in a big part of it was. I was finding that students are not turning assignments on time,

that they're not completing these assignments these are all life skills that need to be underpinned in all of our courses. And then the writing skills became so awful. And frankly, in fall, this is fall of 22, they were poor and going into spring 23 they became worse.

And this in spite of the fact that I included more directions, that I made more videos. It seemed like everything I was doing was not having a change.

And so by understanding this and making a rather radical change with the way my content's delivered with my requirement of journals during a weekly and this assignment and things like that, it was a remarkable transformation in the fall semester.

Luis Engelke

I just want to say how my approach in the fall to of last question,

and I really want emphasize seeking out the original or best sources.

And that's why I feel when the students use the AI that they will not first find the best sources and secondly, they will create the synthesis themselves. So I would really want them to write their papers and build the writing skills. And once that's established, then they could use it.

And I think it's also great that they can have professors with completely different approaches and experience these vast teaching styles at Towson. And it's very beneficial that the students are able to find professors with different approaches to improve their writing and other skills.

Terry Ewell

Part of my summer epiphany was I came to the conclusion that my students were having a problem with language,

and at that time I was reminded of a book I read by Malcolm Gladwell called "Outliers".

And one of the chapters is devoted to the problem with Korean Airlines,

where they were having all this a decade or so ago, a number of crashes of their airlines. It wasn't due to mechanical failure. It wasn't necessarily due to weather conditions.

And as they began reviewing the cockpit logs, they discovered that the subordinate pilot was not able to assert themselves strongly enough with the senior pilot in order to make changes and corrections.

And this was due to the fact that Korean language is honorific, that as in a subordinate, you cannot assert yourself on an equal level as the senior pilot.

So Korean Airlines underwent a language program in which all pilots speak in English in the cockpit. And as I was thinking about it, I had far too many plane crashes in my spring semester going on here. And as I was beginning to examine this, my students I find, nowadays, and this is particularly the case with the Gen Z students, and different than the millennial students, is most of their content, most of what they read, most of what they produce is through social media.

And as a result, everything is focused on themselves. Everything is an internal, what should we say, viewing of the world? Very little external. And the way in which they read, the way in which they write is so different than the way that I do.

Print media is a big part of my life. I read five Bible chapters this morning. I returned six library books. Today. I read, you know, weekly newspaper. All of that is in print media. And as I came to this, I decided, okay, we've got to make a change here.

And in my course, I require non-personal academic writing, which they work on every week. And the changes were just astounding. I'll just I'll just share with you some of the grade.

So in spring of 23, I had three A papers, three B papers, five C papers, two D papers, and then some didn't turn it in. In fall semester of 23,

eight A papers, six B papers and one C paper, No D's. And my grading requirements were higher in the fall semester this last semester than in the spring.

And I just attribute this to a change in language, and AI is going to actually be a part of this change in language, interestingly enough,

because I think I can be used as a language coach as a way of helping them break away from the non-personal language.

The documents I've looked at don't tend to come back as phrased in I, my, you know statements. Instead, there is there's a disconnect. There's a part of I that I think can be a tutoring help for my students. So I'm looking at it this way.

Teresa Valais

So it's interesting how you've picked up language here, Terry, and that is something that I found interesting in the very first part that.

Luis brought into the conversation, which was he didn't put a language statement in his syllabus.

And I want to connect language here for a second, because given the opportunity to use AI

You put that statement in your syllabus?

Terry Ewell

Yes.

Teresa Valais

But what's the student choice? What was the student attitude towards using AI to complete their coursework?

Terry Ewell

Well, as we had talked, Teresa, earlier about this course, you encouraged me to do a survey, which I would not have normally done. So I taught two online courses, one in 355, which is the ethics course, another in a a freshman music creativity course 15 people returned the surveys. I was only just I was disappointed.

Finally, one person used AI., only one out of that. Even though I encouraged it in the course, by the way, I will now be requiring it.

So 100% of my students in next semester will use AI. But what I found interesting is the one student. Who did you say I used it for?

Polishing certain text. Totally appropriate use of that, I think in a life skill that they'll need to master.

But other students, it was interesting. They weren't sure how AI worked.

Some of them didn't even know about AI even though I had given an opening address on that.

Others were just uncomfortable about it.

Some felt they were capable of doing the work entirely by themselves and felt that AI use is a cheating device of some sort.

Teresa Valais

So in that polishing, was that centered around organization and also, for example, mechanics, do you think?

Terry Ewell

I suspect it was more on the small scale of grammar and spelling.

Teresa Valais

Wow.

Terry Ewell

But again, I don't know which student did use it as such.

And as you know, there have already been ways around that Grammarly and and spell check. You know, they've been around for years on that. But it's at a new level now.

Teresa Valais

Do you have any idea whether English was their first language?

Terry Ewell

I don't, unfortunately.

Teresa Valais

Because there's strong implications for folks for whom English is not their first language

Using it for this an aid and help for them. Right.

Terry Ewell

Absolutely.

Teresa Valais

Were there any responses that surprised you?

I was surprised how there were actually students that were unaware of AI in its usage that that surprised me. Now, this is a new territory for me and will be for the students.

And I can't say that I have all the answers as to how we will apply AI in my following courses.

But again, because my goal as a teacher is to have students who leave with life skills and academic competencies,

I view AI is somewhere between the two. I think it will be a life skill that everyone's going to be using the future, and I think it can be used to brush up academic papers and as a result of me requiring the use of AI, my standards are going to go up as to what to expect in terms of grammar, spelling organization and the citation of sources and all of that.

Teresa Valais

So you're focus on life skills and academic skills opens up an

opportunity for dialog with your students.

Terry Ewell

Certainly.

Teresa Valais

How do you believe that that perhaps had an impact on students success in the fall term where you recognized more students had higher levels of success?

Terry Ewell

How interesting. We did not have much face to face or back and forth dialog.

I think most of the dialog was through the journals, in fact, that I would be commenting upon their work in the journals, and I think in the future there will actually be comments upon their use of AI and how that's part of it.

I will be requiring every student to indicate through a citation process which AI they used, what are the prompts that they used in there, and the access date and things. And this this will be informative to me because I'm not restricting them and just to which AI model their use.

Right now I'm favoring Bing a little bit more and I'll demonstrate that I like Bing because it provides citations. In ChatGPT, I'm not quite sure what sources they're using. And in fact, it's quite puzzling sometimes what's coming out of it.

Luis Engelke

If I can add, I won't be teaching the course again until Fall 24.

However, I was having discussion with my colleagues and one had gone to the dermatologist and they had done the examination exclusively with the AI and the other one had gone to a different dermatologist and they didn't use. So I would just say that I would rather see the dermatologist that uses AI.

However, I would want them to be able to see and diagnose on their own.

Sure. So I feel in my course I'm developing those skills, and I do want them to use AI.

I also want to add that obviously AI is changing very rapidly, and is becoming more and more embedded in everything, so to say that you cannot use AI may actually be impossible because it's going to be in Word and in everything.

So it's an ongoing process, but I really feel that's important to go to the traditional route of writing, and they understand this before using AI extensively.

Teresa Valais

Thank you, Luis. That's very important.

I wanted to circle back to the 15 responses and the one student who did use AI. For students who were given permission to use but chose not to,

did any students comment on their own capability to create their writing assignments?

Terry Ewell

Yeah. One student, for instance, said, “I'm capable of doing all the work myself. I don't feel the need to use AI It makes me uncomfortable to start using it.”

And I think there will be an uncomfortable period. And in some ways, I think as my role as a professor is to put students into those uncomfortable areas that they will be using the skills later.

Yes, many of my students are uncomfortable using Dropbox and having to file locations. Many of my students don't know how files are names and what are the suffixes on files.

And so I see that discomfort, but I think those are vital life skills and academic skills that they need to learn in order to move into the workplace, to be successful and to move, move beyond.

In so many ways, they play in sandboxes. I mean, there really are technological sandboxes. Our students come and they think, Oh yeah, I'm so technologically proficient.

I use Facebook. I, you know, I use, you know, all of these little tools.

But no, those are all set up for you.

You're not required to generate a video and then place it in a location other than the sandbox you created it in. You're not, you know, share that with others to modify that content. That's very different than what they're doing now.

Teresa Valais

What I hear you talking to is the role of a digital professor.

Terry Ewell

Yes. Can you tell us more about that? Well, this is a term I've developed myself. We've had correspondence teaching for, I don't know, 50 years, a hundred years?

You think about the Correspondence Institute, where it was all done by email. Then I even remember when I was a student at the University of Washington in the seventies and eighties, when they used to have TV lectures. And then you would you would have you would, you know, take a course of a thousand, and they would mail in their responses.

Now we have online and professors and using blackboard and things like that and but I moved to digital professors and I'm a digital professor

because I see a difference between online where the content is mostly textual and the tools used for it is mostly limited to maybe PowerPoint,

maybe Word and things like that where digital products or music using different tools are producing all my courses.

They produce videos which I critique. I critique them in videos, I produce videos, I critique their, you know, their online recordings with their digital audio workstations and produce videos from that. So it's a different level of critique. It is more direct and media driven,

Teresa Valais

I can say digital products for digital learning.

Terry Ewell

Exactly.

Teresa Valais

Okay. You certainly have given us a lot to think about in the use of AI for academic coursework.

I wanted to ask you both if you have takeaways or advice for faculty listening.

Luis Engelke

I would just say that this has been a very beneficial experience for me teaching this course.

We actually have publications that are risen. Yes. Topics that we that we derived for the course.

And I learned from my students and their positions and how that's changed over ten years.

So we address some of the same topics and the preponderance of viewpoints for a particular position has changed in some, some indeed.

So I learn from my students and it's been a wonderful experience teaching the course.

Terry Ewell

Yeah, and I want to echo it again. My colleague Luis Engelke, it's been a phenomenal one to work with, not only for this course, but our research has extended beyond that which we've enjoyed.

And just seeing the way the students have changed. I feel so energized this semester to have found that epiphany over the summer in that key to unlock a way for me to teach and to continue to work with my students.

So part of that key that emanated from the epiphany is to focus on non-personal academic writing.

Teresa Valais

Yes. How do you focus on non-personal academic writing in your course?

Terry Ewell

I have to emphasize that every week in I must see products from students every week that evidence that so step by step they learn how to do that.

It's interesting to see the progress of their journals through those first five or six weeks and it takes a while.

And by mid-semester, wow, things are really improving. And by the end of the course, I'm just so incredibly delighted. I couldn't believe the change that had gone about with my students.

Teresa Valais

That's terrific.

Luis Engelke

And I'll just say that's actually something that I emphasize as well to avoid first person and have some writing recommendations that I forward to the students often.

And perhaps my move to Blackboard Ultra will provide that weekly reinforcement that's been there but not been observed as much as I would like.

Teresa Valais

Well, this has been quite a discussion on faculty and student perspectives on the use of generative AI for writing assignments in your online "Ethical Issues and Perspectives in Music" course.

I wanted to give you the final word.

Terry Ewell

Well, we so appreciate Teresa having this opportunity to speak to you.

And we're hopeful that the information we've had here and shared can be helpful to others.

We just want to iterate that our use of AI is ongoing and we are just discovering it right along with the students.

Luis Engelke

Yes. Thank you for Terry for the mentoring and teaching online and Teresa for all the help with FACET and putting my course on Blackboard until this semester.

Teresa Valais

You're quite welcome. Okay.

Well, we want to thank our podcast guests, Department of Music professors Terry Ewell and Luis Engelke for contributing to this episode.

Your contributions embody the FACET tagline “by faculty, for faculty” and to our audience, we would like to thank you for tapping into our Faculty Success Higher Ed Conversations Podcast Series. The FACET Podcast Series generates conversations on important topics that support faculty professional growth and student success at Towson University.