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NICKI MONAHAN: Hello, everyone and welcome to Xchange, a podcast by faculty for faculty. I'm Nikki Monahan, faculty facilitator and coach with the TLX. If you're a regular Xchange podcast listener, you'll know that usually Michael Avis and I engage in conversations about the teaching topics that are top of mind. This episode launches the first of our speakers' series where will invite faculty members to share their interests and expertise on a range of teaching topics. So today, I'm here with Dr. Margrit Talpalaru, professor in the Department of English and Communications.

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NICKI MONAHAN: How are you today Margrit?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: I'm doing great Nikki. Thank you for having me on your podcast.

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, thanks for joining us today, Margrit to talk about how to foster a culture of academic integrity at George Brown College. Margrit, how did you come to be interested in this issue of academic integrity anyways?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: I came at this two ways actually. One is culture and it has to do with the different understandings of plagiarism there are in the world. And the other one has to do with George Brown. I get to teach in a variety of programs because I'm in the Department of English and Communication and we teach, you know, COMM1007 College English and I noticed that there are different understandings of integrity and plagiarism we have in our college. So I thought, I'd really like to get everyone around the table and discuss how to foster a culture of academic integrity here with a little bit more uniformity and a clear understanding of how to do that.

NICKI MONAHAN: Fantastic. I know that when I taught the Child and Youth Care program, there were some assignments where I felt like I was battling plagiarism all the time and it's a-- it's a hard slog. But faculty have been talking about academic integrity for a very long time in higher education. And when you and I had an informal conversation to get ready for this podcast, you said that the nature of the conversation is shifting. So how do you see that shifting?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: It's basically like many other areas of education where we are going from a, you know, a traditional sort of punitive or sage on the stage kind of method of teaching into empowering students. So, in terms of academic integrity, we just want students to embrace an ethical attitude toward their work so instead of the threats of plagiarism, we want to foster of culture of academic integrity. That means providing students with tools and skills.

NICKI MONAHAN: Right. So even the language that we're using here suggests a shift away from, you know, preventing cheating or policing students to embracing this new culture of academic integrity. And we know that cheating has its own pandemic. I was reading an article in *The Guardian* this past week about chess masters and at the highest level of competitive chess right now, they're finding that chess players are cheating online. And so there's, there's lots in popular culture, you know, we know that athletes cheat and who knew the chess masters cheated? But, but this has been the language that we've talked about for a while. So I am interested in this shift away from cheating and a shift towards thinking about academic integrity. What suggestions would you have about how faculty can make their own personal shift from thinking about how to prevent cheating to thinking about building this culture of academic integrity themselves?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: Oh, absolutely. There, there are many areas we can talk about and there's a lot of literature that talks about that and I think you're absolutely right. At this moment, since we are all online, cheating is top of mind and trying to replicate the, the classroom situation becomes sort of this imperative and that there are very few ways in which we can do it. So, if we tackle it the other way around, how do we foster the culture of academic integrity? We will have better results, I think, so we have to keep in mind the big picture. A culture of academic integrity supports students both in school as well as in their professional careers. So for example, the, the Centre-- International Centre for Academic Integrity defines it as a commitment even in the face of adversity to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. Right? We are quite in the face of adversity right now as we are recording this during a COVID-19 pandemic.

NICKI MONAHAN: M'hmm.

MARGRIT TALPALARU: So we are being tested, absolutely. But we have to remember that these values will benefit our students, their future employers and society at large. And here at George Brown we've always made a point to connect these dots and empower the students with career-ready skills and we have to remember that academic integrity leads directly into professional ethics.

NICKI MONAHAN: I like the way that you've connected the dots there because yes, often we, we do think about the work that we do at George Brown College as preparing our learners for, for the real world, for the workforce, for industry but also for being global citizens and those fundamental values-- and I especially like the last three: respect, responsibility and courage. Boy, those are values we need for our global citizens today, especially in this time of global pandemic. So, you've really well-defined this notion of, of a shift in thinking. I'm wondering who's responsible? Who do you think is responsible now for ensuring these high standards of academic integrity here at George Brown College?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: I think as always, when it comes to high standards and upholding them, it's all of us, right? From Academic Excellence who have issued the Academic Integrity policy in 2019 to Student Services who have been doing such a wonderful job [inaudible] academic integrity in the online orientation to the libraries and, and the Tutoring and Learning Centre and faculty as well. So we're all working together to allow students to take ownership and

co-create this culture of academic integrity. And I, I like to think of academic integrity when it comes to getting student buy-in as making your voice heard. Student come to George Brown to gain knowledge, training skills and in today's job market, making one 's voice heard and one's contributions noted are a real advantage in getting that coveted job, right? So the more we can emphasize this to our students that it's about standing out from all of the very well-qualified individuals on the job market, the more successful we will be at fostering the positive culture of academic integrity.

NICKI MONAHAN: And I'm wondering if you can say a little bit more about how you, you know, encourage your students to think about that importance of their own voice when-- you know, sometimes in in teaching and learning our students think, 'well, the experts say this'; or 'how I show what I know is by telling back to the teacher what they told me to be true'; or 'to show that I've read about these topics or this content in, you know, in articles'; or 'well, I've read these resources'. So, how do you encourage students to think about finding their own voice in an academic context?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: That's a great question and, and I think we have to do it in multiple ways. The first one is having conversations early and having conversations often. And so drawing those connections, connecting those dots as we said earlier is really important and we have to do it all the time. The other thing is building authentic assessments that are scaffolded. So-- and, and, and taking the pressure off. So the more we can demonstrate to students that the work that we're doing right now in the course, whether we're learning online or whether we're learning face to face, connects directly to this assessment which enables them to build the skill that they're here for, the more they will be encouraged to, to showcase their own voice. And having more types of exercises where it's not necessarily high pressure. It's not 40 percent.

NICKI MONAHAN: Right.

MARGRIT TALPALARU: You know, five percent to ten percent and that allows students to take risks to actually develop their skills rather than feel like, 'there's nothing I can do here and it's too important for me to just try. I just have to go elsewhere'. So step by step, which we always do in teaching, making sure that the assessment is authentic and connected to the type of learning that we're doing in class and giving students opportunities to use their voice in class just to practice.

NICKI MONAHAN: Right. You know, with any important enterprise at the college, I think it's always important for faculty members to realize we're not alone. So I'm glad that you referenced the support from the Library Learning Centre, etc. Some faculty members might need more information themselves about where to find our college's policy on academic integrity. Where, where would you suggest they look for that?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: Very good question and they've made it really handy for us. It's accessible through Blackboard at the right-- top right-hand side, there's a tab called 'academic policy' and the four new policies that came into effect in September, 2019 are all linked there, the ones that have to do with, with teaching and academic integrity is one of them. And it's

actually broken down. There's the original policy but it's also, you know, there's a checklist and there's many other things that faculty can access right there.

NICKI MONAHAN: You know, that's great that it's close and it's easy to access and right there on the Blackboard tab on you already mentioned. You've already mentioned a little bit about building authentic assessments but do you have any tips for, for faculty about, you know, how do we teach and how do we support learning with academic integrity in mind?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: It's crucial right, that we build that into our thinking from the very beginning. I remember taking object-- ah, sorry outcomes based learning courses with you, Nikki and talking about going-- when you're building your course outline, build it backwards, right?

NICKI MONAHAN: Right.

MARGRIT TALPALARU: Think about your outcomes and go from there. I think that's the primary tip that I can give. What would you like your students to demonstrate or to achieve in this course but broke-- break it down. In this class, in this assessment. So really answer that question for yourself and move from there. Whenever possible, scaffold the assessment. So do a little tiny thing first and then allow students to build on that-- on the feedback that you've given them for that tiny five percent, ten percent assessment and then build all of that into a, you know, a larger assessment. So for example, in College English, what a lot of-- a lot of the people in my department, a lot of the faculty in my department do is we start with, you know, an outline. Students can brainstorm ideas, then we get feedback from both-- from the professor but also peer to peer. And so that helps them not only see what it takes to give feedback but what-- how other people write as well. So that enriches their own-- their own knowledge and skills but also allows them to be empowered. You know, that student said that and their writing is compatible to mine so maybe I can say it too. Then build it into, you know, gather research, do an annotated bibliography, get feedback at every step so students feel like they're connected and like, their voices heard and like, what they say matters. So scaffolding is really, really important.

NICKI MONAHAN: I think those are great ideas and certainly as we're working primarily in online settings, we have to get a little bit creative and a little bit thoughtful about how we align our assessments with outcomes? And I know lots of faculty-- our contract faculty, simply inherit course outlines and there's a-- there's a test mid-term test and a final exam and we do know that, you know, traditional testing does lend itself more to students trying to cheat but your, your ideas about building scaffolded assessments that are aligned with outcomes is, is really, really precious. That's gold. So, we only have a few minutes left. I'm wondering if you could just re-emphasize a little bit when and how do you think faculty should begin to address the issue of academic integrity with their students?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: So academic integrity can be built into your curriculum and it's actually in your course, in the course outlines. All course outlines have language about academic integrity on them so we discuss it in the first class. Involve students by co-creating a class integrity document, right? We do that with the class rules a lot of the [inaudible]. We can do that online as well. You know, put up a white board on your sync session or put a Wiki up on Blackboard and say, 'what does integrity mean to you?' So-- and then bring it up with each

assignment. Explain citation and referencing from the point of view of how you differentiate your own voice as a student from the expert conversation, right? Show examples. So demonstrate academic integrity is not an abstract concept but it's a practical part of our learning. It's embedded in all of our activities.

NICKI MONAHAN: Those are great ideas. So the key message, bring it up early and bring it up often.

[laughing]

NICKI MONAHAN: You know, one of the issues that I know that you're interested in 'cause you mentioned culture is that in our teaching, how do we account for differing international perspectives on academic integrity?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: I think this is really important especially because we have students from so many backgrounds at George Brown. So we really have to make sure that when we teach academic integrity and these notions that we have around ethics and plagiarism, we discuss it from a culturally specific point of view. This is the way that it applies to North American, Canadian educational context. Different countries have different understandings of it. So, I'm, I'm from Romania and in Romania, people put a lot of value on personal cultural knowledge. So we do things like, you know, we reference a very well-known quote and if we were to say, you know, 'as so and so said', it would basically amount to insulting your audience's intelligence, right? So we have such different understandings of what it means so it's really important to situate this and say, you know, things are different in other places but this is how we need to do here. And especially for a lot of immigrants, being an immigrant myself, we value knowledge that is culturally specific because we want to make sure that we succeed in Canada. So placing it in the cultural context really helps with that.

NICKI MONAHAN: Great. I guess my final question then, you know, one of the biggest concerns I hear from faculty especially since we've moved to online learning is the problem of students cheating on online tests and the limitations of technology to address this cheating. It almost feels like this, you know, arms race, you know, students are cheating; faculty are figuring out ways to stop them from cheating. What would you suggest to faculty members who are concerned about student cheating on tests?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: So first question that I would ask that we've been discussing a lot of Department of English and Communication is, 'are timed assessments actually a course outcome for you?' And if they're not, how can you make the assessment that is uniquely suited to the course learning outcome and tailored to each class and each cohort? And I know that is way more work than just, you know, using up an exam that we use to in the face to face learning environment but this is the way that we can make our lives easier and actually ensure that our students are demonstrating the skills that they do. Another tip is to, if possible, incorporate students' interests and current developments to make them relevant. If students see the relevance both for their professional careers as well as for the lives they lead right now, they're way more likely to actually put in the work there. And make it explicit every single time how the assessment contributes to their skill development, right? How this is, is-- how this, you know,

test is working with their content knowledge that they need to demonstrate in the field when they'll be tasked with actually working and getting money and getting a job, right?

NICKI MONAHAN: Right. Exactly.

MARGRIT TALPALARU: The more buy-in we can get, the more students are going to be actually working on those assessments.

NICKI MONAHAN: So you're working early on and often to get buy-in from students but even when you talk to our students, sometimes they need extra support. Where can students go to get extra support to learn more about academic integrity?

MARGRIT TALPALARU: We're so lucky at George Brown. We have the Library Learning Commons. All of the librarians that I know and I've, I've had occasion to meet a lot of them, are just so open and happy to talk to students. They're always in our library sessions, inviting students to chat with them. They can do it online now through the online chat function on the library website. The Tutoring and Learning Centre equally. This is a really good idea if you're a faculty who's teaching a course, just invite a TLC tutor into your online synchronous environment. They will take five to ten minutes of the class time but it puts a human face to the service and it really encourages students to take advantage of, of this really precious resource that we have. Peerconnect is another student-driven service at our college that students can really see and it brings value to them to not just hear it from the faculty but to hear it from one another as well.

NICKI MONAHAN: You're so right Margaret that were so lucky to have so many supports in our college to help us with our work. Margaret, thanks so much for joining me today on Xchange and for having this really interesting discussion where I learned a lot about the important topic of creating a culture of academic integrity in our online classrooms.

MARGRIT TALPALARU: Thank you so much for this opportunity.

NICKI MONAHAN: My pleasure and stay tuned for our next episode of Xchange, a podcast by the TLX for faculty, by faculty. Have a great day.

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