

3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning

Episode 7 - How do we teach and learn in a crisis?

Guest: Morgan Vanek

Description:

The most challenging years of COVID lockdowns found Dr. Morgan Vanek inhabiting the role of student more often than she might have expected. As she learned to parent, drive, and cook—all during a pandemic—Dr. Vanek found herself reflecting deeply on those core values that were guiding her teaching and learning practice, while simultaneously rediscovering the value of the Humanities for helping us survive and make sense of global crises. Join us as Dr. Vanek outlines the many ways she transformed her classrooms in light of these experiences: from the implementation of “ungrading” techniques like contract and labour-based grading, to strategies for demystifying the “hidden architecture” of university courses, to centering social justice in a course focused on the traditional canon of English literature.

Bio:

Morgan Vanek is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. Her research and teaching interests include writing about weather and climate in British literature of the long eighteenth century, early Canadian literature, and the history and philosophy of science. In 2022, she received a University of Calgary Teaching Award for Full-Time Academic Staff (Assistant Professor) as well as a Faculty of Arts Teaching Award for an Emerging Teacher.

Resources:

Blum, S. 2020. Why rating undermines student learning (and what to do instead). <https://wvupressonline.com/ungrading>

Kohn, A. 2011. “The case against grades.” *Educational Leadership* 69(3): 28-33. <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/>

La, H., Dyjur, P., & Bair, H. 2018. “Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education”. Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Educational Design Unit - Guide series. [https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/sites/default/files/UDL-guide_2018_05_04-final%20\(1\).pdf](https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/sites/default/files/UDL-guide_2018_05_04-final%20(1).pdf)

Lang, J.M., Dujardin, G., & Staunton, J.A. 2018. Teaching the Literature Survey Course: New Strategies for College Faculty. <https://www.ubcpres.ca/teaching-the-literature-survey-course>

University of Toronto. (2023, June 29). Universal Design for Learning. Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation. <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/resources/universal-design-for-learning/>

Sound clips:

Orchestral Music:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/98b7317b159080c32797035fb6c92e98ddacd33c1abf677f95884c0c247891cf/->

War1: <https://freesound.org/people/YleArkisto/sounds/242598/>

War2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHkzOPADTXg&t=240s>

War3: <https://freesound.org/people/Dragout/sounds/150305/>

Netflix opener: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASKfyZ3ePII>

Tiger:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/a1a538de18916877a6c3f59ebedd3a0dd9127c835ae99e24c11a8f211c4edfb3/->

Animal Crossing Theme: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWKdsawDSvU>

Egg frying: <https://freesound.org/people/solifer/sounds/569759/>

Car ambience: <https://freesound.org/people/mattbronka/sounds/48045/>

Car keys: <https://freesound.org/people/GeorgeHopkins/sounds/537239/>

Car Driving:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/55955be00f411580a89326ef6cb542e914f23224687f5f7fbb09c466d09cc745/->

Car honks:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/4a6e68ec775cee18f9a7d8d16d1cdbcf9b60b25a614cd1dcb602b4cf80880c01/->

Clock:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/a95999e79850b18b8adcbb3fb4a49e21937a973b5afb15c4c3414602d0d431d4/->

Transcription:

MORGAN VANEK: [00:00:12] It felt especially as the pandemic wore on, that we actually have a lot of important information in both the canon and the undiscovered canons—in English literature—about how to survive this kind of cataclysmic shocks. We could actually give them something they really needed to get through this time.

[Theme music in]

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:31] Hello, I'm Derritt Mason. Welcome to "3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning." This season, we're in conversation with post-secondary faculty from across disciplines, and our three questions focus on how the COVID 19 pandemic has reshaped values and transformed classrooms, challenging faculty and students in extraordinary ways, while also sparking innovation. Our guest today is Dr. Morgan Vanek. An associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary, and my colleague, Dr. Vanek is also a two-time teaching award winner. In 2022, she received both the University of Calgary Teaching Award for Full-Time Academic Staff, and the Faculty of Arts Award for Emerging Teacher. Dr. Vanek has been doing remarkable work with teaching and learning, particularly when it comes to what literature can illuminate about our everyday lives. It might seem counterintuitive during a pandemic, when most of our efforts are focused on survival, to think about what we can learn from 18th century English literature. However, Dr. Vanek might help us see things a little differently. Welcome Dr. Vanek. I'm so excited to have you here with us today. Could I please ask you to introduce yourself to our listeners?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:01:57] Thank you so much for having me. My name is Morgan Vanek. I'm an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. My area of research specialization is in 18th-century literature. I work on how writing about the weather changed during the 18th century, and specifically how writing about the weather was both prepared and received as a political statement during that time.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:21] Could you tell us a bit about the classes you teach at the university?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:02:24] Yeah! I teach across the undergrad program in English. This year, for instance, I'm teaching a general class for majors and a general class for non-majors. So, both of those are focused on contemporary literature. But next semester I will be teaching an upper-level class on 18th-century poetry and a cross-posted grad seminar/undergraduate honors seminar that will look at how 18th-century literature can help us understand what feminist and Marxist theorists now describe as capitalism's crisis of care.

DERRITT MASON: [00:03:00] So, let's jump in. As you know, there are three questions featured on this podcast, the first of which is: what were the values that

guided your teaching and learning practice before COVID, and how, if at all, did these values shift during the pandemic?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:03:15] I think if I had answered this question before COVID, it would have felt really easy to say that the core value shaping my teaching and learning practice was a commitment to expanding equitable access to post-secondary education. Throughout my own undergrad program, and then, especially in grad school, I felt like I could master my coursework, but often felt like I had no idea what was going on. It was only when I got into the Ph.D. program that I finally felt like I understood what I needed to do to be in university. And so, when I could start teaching my own classes, it was really important to me to like lift that veil, to say, “okay, there are all of these things that actually shape your access to the course material and your ability to communicate what you’ve learned back to your instructors or teaching assistants.” Like, how do I make that all very clear to students who are coming to university through a bunch of different pathways. So, when I started teaching, the tool that I found that helps me do that most was Universal Design for Learning. It just made sense to me. Once I learned about this, it’s sort of, the logic is that instead of requiring students to come to you with requests for various accommodations to participate in your course, you’ve anticipated those requests for accommodation when you were designing the course and then created alternative pathways, successful pathways through it. Before the pandemic, that was really important to me when I was designing my classes and thinking about how I could be delivering them better. And the pandemic felt like it sharpened the need for that. If we’re thinking back to those early days of the pandemic, the pivot to online teaching was so difficult for so many reasons. But one of the things that happened was that it was no longer possible to forget that students are coming to class from all kinds of different working and learning conditions. And so, when I was designing the first course that I would deliver during the pandemic, I was really grateful that I was already familiar with Universal Design for Learning. But I was really surprised that one thing that came out of pandemic teaching for me was new faith in why we have English classes; new faith in the Humanities, and specifically in literary criticism. I was really invested in thinking about good course design and good course delivery. But I didn’t feel super invested before the pandemic in the debates about, like, what we should be teaching or even critical method, which often sparks a lot of controversy within English. It felt, especially as the pandemic wore on, that we actually have a lot of important information in both the canon and the undiscovered canons, in English literature, about how to survive these kind of cataclysmic shocks. Like, that we could actually offer students, with the texts that we’re offering them and the tools that we give them to read them well, that we could actually give them something they really needed to get through this time. And so, I found, especially now that we’re coming back together, I really feel the urgency of our project.

DERRITT MASON: [00:06:19] Are there any texts that you’ve used in the classroom that you find do this particularly well?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:06:26] Right now, in my first-year class, which is focused on contemporary literature, I'm assigning a number of texts that are written after the Second World War and responding to that shock. One of the things that they're trying to deal with is how the disaster that we've all just lived through has changed what it means to be a person, what we think it means to be alive. I'm teaching Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy*. And one of the questions that that play asks is, what is the relationship between self-preservation, like literal preservation of the self, and preservation of a deeper other, like 'soul' kind of self? As I've been working out how to take the students through that text, like that is also a question that the pandemic put a lot of pressure on, right? If we had so many people having to choose between literal self-preservation and going to work, and literal self-preservation and being in community with others, I'm finding those kinds of texts really helpful to say, if you've been trying to put this feeling into words, if this has felt like a crisis to you, we've done that before. And here are some ways that other people have thought about it.

DERRITT MASON: [00:07:30] I really appreciate you sharing this. And as a colleague and fellow literature scholar, I appreciate the way you're characterizing literature and art as really valuable resources and even companions during an otherwise lonely and alienating time. It makes me think about how, especially early on during COVID, you know, spring/summer 2020, people seemed to be turning to both escapist texts--I'm thinking of, you know, that time when everyone was watching the *Tiger King* documentary, and playing the video game *Animal Crossing* on their Nintendo switches, and there was this kind of collective conversation about these two texts that were very much disconnected from the current point in time--but people were also turning to disaster narratives. I'm thinking of the pandemic TV series, and movies about pandemics, and the pandemic board game, which saw a kind of resurgence during that time. And this might seem to be an unlikely choice, given that we were actually living through a disaster, like, why would you want to read about other disasters when you're experiencing one? But I think what you're really clarifying is how these texts, as you say, so beautifully put a feeling into words, and might offer some comfort in the fact that folks have made art about the kind of experiences we're undergoing, and this art can help us deal and understand with the moment. I'm wondering if there anything else you'd like to say about how your values have shifted? Or have we covered that already?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:08:59] I think there were a lot of things that we lost during the pandemic. And one of them was, of course, the ability to gather in a room together. In English, we have had a debate for a long time about why participation is important in our classes, what it is that we are expecting from students, and why we ask them to do that, like how it supports their learning, and we all adapt it the best that we could during the pandemic. But when I look back, I think my effort to recreate in-person participation in an online setting really did not work. I was like, I know all of these active learning exercises, I'm going to find ways to adapt them to

an online setting. I hired a research assistant to help me do that. And it just didn't work. But it did make me think more about the role of participation in the English class. And so, in terms of how I will change going forward, finding ways to create assignments that prioritize participation, listening to each other, learning from each other, identifying things that your classmates said as an important object of inquiry in the class, that feels more important to me now.

DERRITT MASON: [00:10:22] So now that you're starting to describe your experience with this class during COVID, this might be a good time to ask our second question, which is, I'm wondering what best supported and what hindered your teaching and learning practice during COVID.

MORGAN VANEK: [00:10:36] In terms of best supported... For context, I was on maternity leave during the first year of the pandemic. So, I think actually, a lot of my feelings about what the Humanities had to offer were coming from an outsider perspective on what was happening because I wasn't through the first year of the pandemic, trying to pivot my own courses. I was doing a very different personal challenge. But I was watching and saying, we have the information in our books and in our critical methods that could help us all get through this terrible time. Why aren't we redirecting our courses to do that? Because I was on mat leave for the first year of the pandemic, I got to benefit from my colleagues' knowledge and experience. So, when I was preparing my fall 2021 courses for online delivery, a colleague said she had taken a continuing [education] course on the experience of being a student in an online class. And she recommended that I take it and I did, and it was so incredibly helpful. I have been working at the University of Calgary for six years. I feel like I understand our course management software. But as an online student, looking at D2L felt completely overwhelming. I was like, which piece of information am I supposed to read? When did I miss something? Even trying to meet with students working in different time zones, with our different childcare, eldercare, personal schedules, it was impossible and so frustrating. That was the other thing. I was highly motivated. I was excited to be there. But I was like, bored and frustrated and felt, like, distant from the course material. It was really helpful to have all of those experiences before I built my course that I then asked 125 students to walk through with me. It made concrete changes. Like, I removed all of the group work assignments and found different ways to value participation. They did a lot of peer review in that class. And there was time set aside during class hours or during our synchronous meetings for the peer review, to get rid of the time zone situation. I changed the structure of any kind of partner or peer work dramatically. I hired another [research assistant] to help in terms of the D2L confusion, to help make detailed instruction sheets for every piece of software that students had to interact with for the course, and did a lot of unveiling pieces of D2L just in time. Also, inspired by my brilliant colleague, Dr. Mason, in the English department, I had a rolling FAQ document for the class, which also really helped. I built into a lot of their assignments, questions that ask them to reiterate for themselves their learning objectives, the values that had brought them to the course so that my hope was

that, if you're doing it in your car, between appointments or something, you at least are refocused on why you at some point wanted to be there.

DERRITT MASON: [00:13:18] So, it sounds like this experience of actually taking an online class prior to designing one, really supported your teaching and learning practice, as did the ways that you clarified and streamlined how you communicate with students, for example, the rolling FAQ. So, updating frequently asked questions on the learning management system, D2L, throughout the course of the term. And also the ways you invited students to communicate with each other through learning objectives and these peer review exercises. What did you find hindered your teaching?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:13:51] The thing that did not support me was the lack of time to do the teaching that would live out all of the values that I just described. The return to in-person teaching has brought with it lots of reminders about things that take time that we did not spend when we were working from home, like commuting takes time. And figuring out how to use a photocopier takes time. And of course, having spontaneous interactions with people in the hallway takes time. But the pivot to online learning took so much time, in part, because there was so much trial and error and just having to figure things out. It took so much time and it never felt like I either had enough of it, full stop, or that I could justify spending that time on teaching.

DERRITT MASON: [00:14:33] You know, I'm also just thinking that building relationships with students takes time and this is something that in an online environment presents a different series of challenges than it does in person. I find there can often be a disconnect, or a kind of alienation between instructor and student in an online environment. There's a kind of challenging anonymity that typically isn't present in person. It takes time and planning to find ways in the course to overcome this. So, I mean, after all of these experiences you had with online course design, what changed for you?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:15:06] I really try to build courses from a space of generosity and compassion and thinking about the complexity of adult learners' lives. And it feels so frustrating when you've tried to design really thoughtful assignments. And then you get students who are clearly frustrated because they didn't feel like they got a fair shot. And again, in my own teaching, I really tried to anticipate all of those complaints beforehand, but sometimes that also feels really overwhelming. Also, during the pandemic, for reasons unrelated to my job, I learned to cook, and I learned to drive. And in both of those settings, I was very stressed out as a new learner. And what I realized, especially with driving, was that I just didn't know what it was supposed to look like when it was normal. So even when I think of a concrete change that I've already made, in addition to the assignment sheet and all the criteria that are going to be used to assess the assignment, it's also, I've included like a Self-Assessment Checklist, where they can walk through being like, does your

essay have an interesting title? Does your essay have a thesis statement in the first paragraph, have you included quotations from your primary texts? So that they can be like “check, check, check. These things are happening, we are in a normal driving scenario.” In conventional assessment, we do have a secret hierarchy of things that you can do wrong, and it will matter or not matter. If you forget a thesis statement, you are going to get a bad grade on your paper, whereas if you forget a comma or colon in your citation, we don’t care, but they don’t actually know where the mistakes fall on the hierarchy before they’ve arrived in our class. And we often forget to make that kind of thing explicit. When I think of equitable access to post-secondary education, it’s that there’s the content of the course that you want students to engage with and the assignments you’ve set so that they can express to you their engagement with that content. But then there’s all these secret other things, like did you understand where to find the assignment sheet and how to read it and how to put those pieces of information in order and regulate yourself to get it done on time? And it remains really important to me to figure out how to remove all that stuff so that everybody in their own way can just do the course.

DERRITT MASON: [00:17:17] Absolutely. I think there’s so much about the --you could say— “hidden architecture” [M.V.: Yeah] of courses or assignments that we take for granted after 8, 9, 10, plus years in post-secondary education that we forget how students approach these things if they haven’t approached a university level assignment before.

MORGAN VANEK: [00:17:37] I mean, a thing that I find often really depressing is that in talking to my upper-level students, the main skill for academic success that it often feels they’ve cultivated is, like, figuring out what your instructor wanted. We all, running an institution here, could have done better at taking out that effort. First of all, because what a weird thing for you to put your energy into during this rare and precious time that you were in post-secondary.

DERRITT MASON: [00:18:19] So, is there anything that you tried or learned in your classes during COVID that you’re going to bring forward in your teaching, that you’re going to continue doing into the future?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:18:29] I introduced a new assessment scheme in my big historical survey course that I taught in the fall 2021, something called contract-grading, sometimes also called labour-based grading. It takes the focus off of using assessment to communicate to a student how well they’re meeting an externally defined standard relative to other people. That is one of the things that grades can do. But it shifts the focus from how well that student is meeting an externally defined standard to how much work they have done for the course. And so, the idea is that if they do a certain amount of work for the course, or for the individual assignment, then they get a grade in a particular range. It’s on me as the instructor to make sure that the amount of work required for a grade and each range sort of matches a reasonable expectation of learning for that credit. But what I liked about

this in the context of the pandemic was that, if what you needed from the course was the credit or a passing grade, and you also needed time to focus on your other courses or the many other things that were happening in your life, then you could do that without anxiety. And every student was still getting feedback on the work that they handed in. It was just that the feedback on how well they did was unhooked from their grade. For the students who wanted this, the idea was that that would give them much more freedom to take risks with their writing, to experiment with things that they might not otherwise have done. But also, for the students who were like, I cannot manage this right now, they knew what they needed to do to get a particular grade, and then they would get feedback, and they could sort of do what they wanted with it.

DERRITT MASON: [00:20:01] Could I invite you to please summarize how you understand contract-grading and labour-based grading for our listeners?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:20:10] I think of it as a form of ungrading. So, just an approach to assessment that shifts the focus off of communicating how well a student is doing at meeting an externally defined standard of evaluation, externally defined standards relative to other students, and focusing instead on the amount of work that they do for the course.

DERRITT MASON: [00:20:30] It makes me think a bit too about something that you mentioned hindered your teaching and learning practice during COVID, which is time [M.V.: Yeah], because labour-based grading also raises the question of time, and how much time is supposed to be invested in particular assignments, how much time it takes to accomplish certain learning goals.

MORGAN VANEK: [00:20:48] One of the things that I that I like about labour-based grading is actually that it addresses the problem that I think many of us will have experienced, where a student who already knows a lot about something or finds that comes easily to them will do better in a course while learning less than a student who did not know a lot about the subject or the critical skill that you're teaching in that class and learned a lot. But very often, with a conventional grading scheme, the student who did not learn as much would still come out with a higher grade. And what I liked about this was that if those students put in the same, similar amount of work, they got a similar grade. And in fact, if one of them put in less work, then they got the lower grade. But they could make that choice. It didn't depend on my assessment of the quality of what they've handed in.

DERRITT MASON: [00:21:30] I know you do a bit of work with your students around helping them discover for the first time in university how long it takes to, for example, read an assigned chapter of a book. Could you say more about what you do?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:21:43] When I'm teaching this first-year class, I introduce these things called "Reading labs" where we just get together for an hour outside of class. And the idea is that they turn off their phones, turn off tabs that are not related to course material, and just read quietly for 40-45 minutes to figure out how many pages they could get through in that time. The purpose is to help them figure out how much time they actually need to allot to their reading. And to sort of model that allotting an hour to it, you actually can get a lot of your coursework done in an hour that you've allotted to it, and then like be free to live the rest of your life.

DERRITT MASON: [00:22:19] So, what I'm hearing is these reading labs tie back into these broader questions that you're interested in of how students are learning to spend their time inside the classroom and outside of the classroom, and what you're trying to accomplish with labour-based grading as a cornerstone of your teaching.

MORGAN VANEK: [00:22:35] What I like about labour-based grading is that it opens for them the choice to say like, I don't want to spend a lot of time on this because I'm doing something else with that time. And I understand already the consequences. In the case of this reading lab, it would be like, what I learned is that I can blow through things pretty quickly if I don't give myself time to wander and muse, and I'll still get this credit. I think part of our job is to invite students to make that decision, and then we support them in the decision that they've made.

DERRITT MASON: [00:23:27] We've been colleagues for a while now in the English Department. And I know of some changes that you introduced in our department's historical survey class, which is essentially a survey of historical literature that spans several centuries. And as a result of these changes that you introduced, you won a teaching award, actually two teaching awards. Congratulations again! I think that these changes to this course, they're relevant to the topic of our podcast because you made a lot of these changes in the context of COVID. And also, during the social uprisings that emerged from the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. I know that contract grading was part of the change, but there were other changes in terms of content. Can you tell us a little bit more about this?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:24:14] It was hard to be away from the department during the pandemic because we were making so many decisions about how we wanted to respond, but also during the Black Lives Matter protests, because we had a number of graduate students write quite movingly about their experience in the English Department. And we're called to respond. And I found it really difficult to be away from the department during those conversations, because I wanted to show up for my colleagues and for the graduate students and to be participating in the conversation about how we were going to reimagine the undergraduate program. So, I guess my changes to this course came out of thinking about that, but this course has a lot of constraints around it. It's supposed to prepare students to participate in upper-level courses that are defined by historical period. So, it does need to introduce them, for instance, to medieval literature, to early modern

literature, it can't just become something else entirely. So, instead of marching through the English canon over the thousand years that I used to for that class, I introduced the texts in pairs. So, we had one of the canonical works of English literature like Beowulf or Paradise Lost, paired with a contemporary text that either responded to it or demonstrated its influence because part of what I wanted to engage the students in is like, why are we even having this conversation about what you should be required to read over the course of your undergraduate degree; and because one of the reasons they are required to read these canonical texts is so that they both, understand the underpinnings of the study of English literature, but also can see its influence across the rest of English literature. And so, for instance, with Beowulf, I gave them also a feminist retelling of Beowulf. So that text would not have been especially accessible if they had not read Heaney's translation of Beowulf beforehand. What I wanted them to see was that these canonical texts help us understand what is happening in storytelling later on. I liked that change for a few reasons. It let me work within the constraints of the course as it was already set, and also, introduced more historically marginalized perspectives to the course. I still don't think in hindsight that that's the solution to the survey course. Part of the problem actually, coming back to time, with a survey course is that it's a thousand years of literature; that's just a really long period of time to cover in fourteen weeks, and you can't do an especially good job at putting anything into a meaningful context. There's always space to discuss those problems within the course, but that was the rationale for the changes that I did make.

DERRITT MASON: [00:26:45] Have you received any student feedback about the changes to the course that you made, either in terms of content or assignment design and contract grading and labour-based grading?

MORGAN VANEK: [00:26:55] The responses to the content really surprised me. There's a lot of cultural capital associated with having read these big texts from the English canon, like students come into that class excited to read Paradise Lost, excited to read Beowulf; some students come in intimidated and a little bit nervous. But there is always like a vocal group of students who are excited to read the texts they expect to find on the course. So earlier in the semester, I actually had a number of students frustrated, surprised that so much of the reading was going to be these other contemporary selections. And some students ended up saying that that's great, because I ultimately was very nervous about the texts in older Middle English. But some of the contemporary selections, they found they had to work harder either because they were less canonical or less familiar. I remember one student coming especially said that the contemporary selections made her work harder in groups to understand how other people had read something. And since that was one of the things that I was working through in the context of the pandemic, like how do you make participation meaningful in the context of online teaching, I was really glad that she'd had that experience. With regard to student responses to the contract grading, I was really heartened by their responses. Some students were nervous about it, because it was risky. It's a big course. There's a lot of students, it

was a requirement for our majors. If they hated it, it's not like they could just go to a different course down the hall. And so, I'm very relieved to report that it didn't go as badly as I think we may be nervous about at the beginning. In many other classes, students on their assignments are supposed to recapitulate what they have done in other parts of the course to demonstrate that they've understood the course material that the assignment explicitly asks them or expects them to do that, and that is the route to a good mark. But, in English, we really don't want them to do that, right? We want them to use the critical skill that we're modeling and then say a different thing about the primary text. So that can be really hard to convince them to take a risk and say something other than what we said in class. And so, when I presented contract grading to them, I was like, if you demonstrate a good faith effort to do the assignment, as set, you will get the grade. So, within that, I hope you can take risks and try to follow your interpretive instincts, try readings that you might not otherwise have. And students really did say that they found that freedom in the grading scheme, and that they found a different, more intrinsic motivation for their writing, where I had a few students say things at the end of term that were like, "I used to be really motivated by trying to get an A, but in this case, because I knew that I was already going to get an A"—because of the track that they set themselves on for the course—"that I now was motivated by trying to write a good sentence or do the best job that I could on the assignment." And that was very exciting. And then even the students who were like, "Frankly, I was very busy. And knowing that I didn't have to put as much effort into this class allowed me to deprioritize it," but then they were like, "and now I know that about myself. Now, I know that extrinsic motivation is really important to me," and I found this again, I was sort of moved by these reflections, like "I didn't engage with the course material as closely as I would have. And I view that as a loss." I view that as a choice that came with this consequence. So, that seems like a good reflection. So, the feedback on those changes was really positive.

DERRITT MASON: [00:30:12] Thank you so much for this conversation today, Dr. Vanek. I think you've given us so much to think about when it comes not only to practical teaching and learning strategies like contract grading but also the importance of the arts and humanities as pathways to making sense of our lives and our relationships with each other during incredibly challenging circumstances. I've really enjoyed this conversation. Thank you.

MORGAN VANEK: [00:30:34] Thank you so much for having me.

DERRITT MASON: [00:30:41] 3QTL is recorded at the University of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis nation of Alberta, districts five and six. This episode was produced by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz, edited by Tarini Fernando, and features additional editing and sound design by Eric Xie, who also composed our music. Our consulting producer is Stacey Copeland. Support for 3QTL is provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University

of Calgary and a generous financial gift from the Flanagan Foundation. I'm Derritt Mason, 3QTL's host and executive producer. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you again soon.

[Music out]

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and copyedited by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and Derritt Mason.