**Interview #6 Transcript: Senior Lecturer (25.01.18) (University A)**

Interviewer (I): Okay, so as a senior lecturer, what would you consider to be your main responsibilities?

Participant (P): Well, it *should* be that my – I’m in a teaching and research role, so technically they say the research should be the primary thing, but I would say that we still end up doing – the bulk of our work if we’re not careful ends up still being teaching, and teaching is really why I’m here. And outside of that, we do an awful lot of service work, or administrative work. Now the good thing is, is that because we really focus on trying to teach what we research, that those two things do overlap. So, I think that that’s beneficial. But, you do have to, you know, most academics, I know so few that don’t, teach outside of their area, and I think that’s the thing that surprises me when I talk to students that are thinking about – that they want to go to Grad School, they want to do a PhD, and I saw this as a Grad School as well, a number of colleagues that I did my PhD with, that realised about a year in how much they didn’t like teaching [laughing], and I think really at that point, you need to know that that’s not – this is not the job for you because you can’t avoid it. It’s really going to be the driving force behind much of your life, for, kind of, 8, 9 months of the year, even though you are supposed to be – if you’re in a research stream, you’re still responsible for a certain amount of outputs. You know, the bread and butter of the system is working in the classroom, so that ends up being the bulk of what we do for a large portion of the time, and then all of the administrative responsibilities that are *tied* to that work and connected to the overall research and teaching community in your School, or in the faculty or in the college, and the university as well. So, it’s, you know, they say the one thing is the most important, but in reality, it ends up being the other.

I: [laughing] Okay, how many undergraduate students do you teach in a term, roughly?

P: Oh, that can vary wildly. So, right now, let me see. It depends on how you *calculate* it, okay? Because, and this is where I think there’s a big difference between the [removed for confidentiality] system and the British system. So, *here* I participate in a number of modules that I would give lectures to, and some of them I don’t have seminar groups in, and some of them I do. So, I might just go in and do one or two lectures, or I might have seminars, and so if I’m giving the lecture, especially in the first-year, it could be, you know, 150 students, anywhere between 110 and 150 students, depending on the intake that year. And then the seminar groups are usually about 18 students each so, last semester I had two first-year seminars in Drama, Theatre and Performance, so about 36 students, but I still gave a lecture to – did one of the lectures to the whole lot, and to communicate it with the whole lot and then, that tends to be for all of our core modules, a similar structure. We team teach and then we run seminars out of the teams or they’ll be a group of people that are the core people for the seminar. So last year I did [removed for confidentiality]. So, those groups are quite big, but you may only be directly responsible for a small portion of that large group. Then you have your own modules or your area specialties at the second, or say, third year. This year I have – last semester I had [removed for confidentiality] and I had 20 students in that, and then this semester I’m doing [removed for confidentiality] and I have 40 students in that. So, that’s quite a bit, and then I’m also teaching a Grad class this semester. So, this semester, two seminars in [removed for confidentiality], so that’s 36 students plus the 40, so that’s 76, plus about 8 students, so I have about 80, you know, roughly 83, 84 students, I think is how it adds up. When I was in [removed for confidentiality], you would be responsible, primarily, for *all* of your students and I had – may have had some help with some tutorials, but one year for instance, I had a lecture of 200 students, and then I also had other classes on top of that, that were in the range of anywhere from 40 to 70 students. So, it’s *variable* and each semester – so, my teaching semester, last semester, was *lighter* than this semester, because I didn’t have as big a class in my area, and I didn’t have a Grad class, so it – I think it’s not like we get a *set* number each semester that’s always fixed, it *fluctuates*, and I think that’s the hardest part is, I’m very fortunate I’m in a team where we share our teaching assignment, we, kind of, get together and we establish it, and we talk about, you know, who’s taking how many sections of that, and capping groups and I think in terms of that, kind of, environment, this is the most open place I’ve worked where everybody is actually talking about their teaching load *together*, and so there’s a real sense of trying to *balance* everyone’s work, and make sure that everybody gets an equal share. Whereas that doesn’t happen – that didn’t happen at my job elsewhere. Whereas you have people in the department, some people had almost no teaching, or did only upper level teaching, which is all small classes, and then there was always the same people getting the first-year teaching, which are the big classes, so it was really *inequitable*. So, I know that’s a really long answer [laughing], and it’s not a *specific* answer, but I think it’s important to recognise that there’s no – there’s no consistency, or no, kind of, fixed number that we’re required, or have to, teach, other than it depends on our numbers. So, we could end up – so last year I was only supposed to have one group of poetry, but we had more enrolments than we anticipated, so I had to take a second, so it can change at the last minute too, or you can have students drop and things like that, but generally, it will vary semester to semester, and it can *be* based on those kinds of changes.

I: Yeah, okay. What meaning does the word engagement have for you?

P: [pause] It means using your head, using your brain, using your faculties. So, I like the word engagement over, say, something like participation, because participation means did you *talk* during class? And you can get students that talk all the time, put their hand up for every question or, always want to contribute, and that contribution can be useful, but sometimes it can be just, kind of, they think out loud, they work through something, and that’s okay. But, engagement means that the contribution that’s made has actually given serious thought to the question and to the text. So, you may have a student that is much shyer, that may not *speak* as often as the person sitting next to them, but their level of engagement can actually be higher than the person that talks all the time. So, to me that’s the big difference, is that engagement means that they have done the reading and thought about the content of the text in advance, and that they’ve really given it serious consideration about, especially as you get further into the semester, the more they know, the more detailed their engagement should be. First week or so, you tend to be, you know, “Just tell me what you think”, a lot of loose stuff, but when you get, you know, by the middle of the semester you’re looking for them to be looking back at all the conversations we’ve had previously, finding connections and those little – the things that we look at that are nuanced each week, and then pulling them out of the text *initially*, rather than being *led*. So, the engagement should also *increase* over the semester, if they’re doing the work and coming to class and being part of that conversation as it builds. So, I think that that’s why engagement is such a better word because it does represent the *quality*, not necessarily the *quantity* of the thought and contribution.

I: Yeah, okay. So, using what you’ve just said, how do you attempt to engage your undergraduate students in your teaching?

P: Well, it depends on the *level* of undergraduate student. So, at the first-year especially, I do an awful lot of group work. First year, first *semester* can be also very *intimidating* for them, so giving them activities, it could be even as simple as giving them a set of questions about a text and – so, I did that today with my first-years. It was the first day we’d met, we’d looked at a short story, I had posted it in advance for them, but I also brought copies because I figured a lot of them might not actually read it in advance, so designing a text that will also, at the *beginning*, be a little bit easier for them to access. It was a short story, not even a full page, it had some very obvious things about it, for the points that I wanted to draw out. So, giving them *that*, putting them into groups and then, putting some questions up and then going around talking to them while they’re working on it, and then opening up the conversation to a larger group, and that, I think, allows those people that are a little bit on the shyer side, they might be more comfortable talking in the small group, but maybe not the person that’s going to speak up in the larger class discussion. Then over the semester, hopefully they’ll get to know more people and feel more comfortable and so that will shift for them. And then I might do other activities so, another activity I’ve done is, I’ve given students things where I ask them to *create* something or give them an activity that could be an active learning thing so, [removed for confidentiality] so it’s, kind of, the reverse of getting them to analyse, it’s getting them to *create* but getting them to think about all of those things connected to narrative, that I want them to *learn*, but by actually doing it, even if they don’t know they’re doing it [removed for confidentiality] they will be doing it. So, that, kind of, *active* learning, where it’s not just sit and talk, it’s actually something that they create or do, and I’ve done that with other kinds of things, so, for instance, whenever I teach a Drama text, I think it’s important that they not just read it, but they do something with it. It’s meant to be played, not read. So, if I was teaching a first-year group and I was teaching something like Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, I might assign each group in the class a different thing to do, I might ask one group to do a 5-minute Shakespeare, take this narrative and sum it up in 5 minutes, how would you do this? Or, modernise this narrative, so take this scene and re-write it in modern English and modern cultural setting and things like that. Or, for another group I might say, “Okay, being up on the stage is not just about what you say, it’s about what you *do*, so I want you to mime this scene”, so giving them activities that are going to get them to think of the material, but the genre of the material or the things connected with it, so that they’re not just, kind of, sitting and *receiving* knowledge all the time, that they’re actually *doing* something to create their own knowledge.

I: Yeah, okay. What are your thoughts on the concept of student as consumer in higher education?

P: Oh God, *barf*. [laughing] I *hate* it, I *hate* it. [sigh] Yeah, I think it’s a highly problematic term. I know they pay tuition and I know they pay good money, they pay *way* more money than they *should* to be here, and that’s one problem unto itself, right? That’s part of the issue, is that they shouldn’t be paying that, kind of, money, it’s a real *class access* issue, I think everybody should have access. I think it sets the wrong *mind-set* about what to *expect* and what they can *bring* to it. It encourages the view that you’re here to get a *job*, to get a degree or a diploma if, say, you do Cert HE, that it leads to a certain *output* or, *result*. I think we should be encouraging them to think about being here for the sake of education, for the sake of becoming better citizens, for the sake of learning things that *are* transferrable into the workplace once they *leave*, but they’re not necessarily about, “This skill will get me this job. Tick”. I mean we teach them to *be* better *thinkers*, better *writers*, more – hopefully more *compassionate* human beings, and I think *that* should be the focus and so, they are *part* of the system, they’re not here to pay to get a particular grade, or to get that piece of paper, they’re not *buying*, they’re *paying* for the right to be here and it’s a *privilege* to be here and I don’t mean that in the sense that only a select few should *have* it, but the fact that we live in an environment where they – even if it is economically still *fraught*, we live in a world where they have the opportunity to do so, that is itself – I mean that’s part of our, kind of, *Western* privilege. But they – I want them to be thinking about themselves as *learners* and potential researchers, as people that are excited to explore new *things*, as opposed to, “Give me the information, tell me how to write this essay so that I can get the grade I need, to get this, to get that, to get the job” and I think it’s something that we’re struggling with in the *Arts,* but I think it’s still stronger in other disciplines, especially disciplines like Law or Medicine or Business, and it’s certainly not just the UK, I mean it’s happening in Britain, but it’s also happening in North America, and I’ve seen – I’ve been on the receiving end of working – I’ve been in situations where I’ve worked with students that are *very* consumer-minded and view getting that credit as just an impediment to their degree, to getting the job, and the sense of *entitlement* that that creates, and that I think is where the problem is, is that the grade you get is the grade you *earn* and that means *giving* and doing all of these things that being engaged and so [sic], when you have a situation where a student just expects it to be an easy – an easy A [removed for confidentiality] that’s when, you know, you’re starting to get into trouble because it’s *not* easy, and it’s not always comfortable, you’re going to hear things and see things you maybe don’t want to face or think about, our job is to challenge you, it’s not, you know, it’s not meant to be, kind of, a smooth ride through to get your degree and then you get the job, right? Yeah so, I… [shakes head].

I: [laughing] Not a fan?

P [laughing] No! And I mean I used to teach a writing course at – when I was a Grad student, I taught writing through Grad School, and I taught an academic writing course or module to students in Economics and Business and I got that a *lot*, and some of them were really great students, they really wanted to know because they knew the jobs they were going into required writing, and some of them just saw it as a hoop to jump through before they got their degree, and that’s when you get into problems.

I: Okay. Do you consider students to be customers in any sense?

P: No, I just don’t – I don’t think that’s the right word.

I: Okay. Okay, in your opinion, how prevalent, if at all, is the concept of student as consumer in the university’s attempts to engage its undergraduates?

P: I would say – I mean it’s a *spectrum*, I would say certainly I’ve seen evidence of that mentality, both here and at my former institution. It varies, depending on the faculty, again I think that makes a big difference. I have – some of this is confidential, right? [Interviewer nods] So, I *have* seen it here, I’ve seen things that I don’t always agree with. I think one of the biggest difficulties, and this is a nitty gritty thing, I’ve seen it at both institutions, is that we are a public institution and so, we are still bound by certain laws and governance, and we are, of course, impacted by anything done at the state level. So, one of the things that I see, that’s quite difficult, is when we have laws passed or bi-laws passed municipally, county-wise, [removed for confidentiality]. The legislative *language* often refers to, more broadly, customers or consumers, and then we often have to implement some of that legislation in our own environment, and this creates a real problem because it means, then, the language is entrenched in some of the documents that govern how we operate or the things that we change and modify. So, it seeps in, into the way *we* express relationships about students in *our* documents, because we’re echoing the legislative language, and I don’t really know how to *change* that, other than to go and get it changed at the other end. But I think that’s become part of the problem, is that when the language starts to – when the language is *adopted*, it starts to – that mentality is, then, kind of, brought in and it’s co-opted because you *have* to start thinking about them as X because that’s the way they’re described or expressed in the documents that govern how *we* operate. So, that’s a real problem, and I’ve seen that at several institutions, and I don’t know how to avoid it, because it’s *not* that the institution is going out and actively seeking to do it, but then I have also seen it, kind of, at the more base level with faculty, not so much here, but I certainly – when I worked at the university where I taught the writing course for instance, to students in Management and Business, students were *very* much viewed as a consumer, and they were paying for a product, even down to, we didn’t want to upset students if they got a bad grade, or things like that. So, that was really problematic. I don’t really see that with my colleagues here, I’ve seen it at the administrative level, I’ve certainly seen some of the upper admin, or, kind of, upper executive, management – members of the management team make comments about students in that way, and it’s unavoidable with the way the *funding* is currently in place for universities, because so much of most universities’ money comes from tuition, you know, the tuition that students are paying is astronomical but it’s also not just us being greedy, it covers the bulk of our costs, you know, I’ve seen the breakdowns for where *our* budget comes from. So, this again, I think, *lends to* that practice of calling them a consumer because the money they’re paying *us* pays *for*, right, if that makes sense? Pays *for* that service. So, it’s – I don’t have an *answer*, but it certainly is the *present* in the institutions.

I: Okay. Okay, in your opinion, are there elements of the student-consumer concept apparent in your interactions with undergraduates? So, do you ever get a sense of them feeling as though they’re customers?

P: I haven’t had that here, I mean I’ve had them gripe about costs, right? About, just about the fact that it is so expensive to attend. I have had that experience elsewhere, and again, primarily with students of – because I’ve taught students from different disciplines, it tends not to be so much students that I’ve experienced in the Arts, it tends to be students that are in faculties that – I’ve seen it with Science [removed for confidentiality] But I haven’t really experienced it *here*, and I certainly didn’t really experience it in the Arts at the upper levels, right, when I was teaching speciality courses or things like that. It just didn’t happen that often, and I would like to think that part of that is that because we do our job *well*, we don’t think of it that way. I could be wrong, but I think if we’re doing our job well, and enticing them to think about the journey they can be on as academics, right, as part of that culture, then maybe that helps them. But I do know that fiscal realities are always a concern for my students, and, you know, a lot of my students work, and they work part-time and for them it’s the, how do you balance, you know, working enough to pay the bills to *be* here, against the fact that you need to be here to do *well*, right? That, I think, can be difficult for them, but that tends to be the, kind of, conversations I have with my students, not so much about the, you know, “I paid my tuition, why didn’t I get an 80 or a 70?”

I: Okay. Do you think the introduction of fees has given students a greater sense of entitlement?

P: No, I think it’s put them *off*. Yeah, I think if anything it makes life more stressful for them. I think some of them second guess whether they should be here *because* of it, they get stuck, like I said, in this, kind of, cycle of working enough to pay the bills – they might get a certain amount of loans, but the one thing I can say that I don’t think has shifted from when *I* was a student, is the way they assess loans, based on need is not always as accurate as it *can* be. So, you have students that economically, according to the system, they’re told, “You don’t qualify for more than *this*”, and yet, because of their age and their – you know, they’re viewed as dependents on their parents and the way their parents are assessed, their parents might actually *not* be giving them any support or help, so they’re often in a short fall situation. Yeah, I think most of them are just concerned about the *cost*, and might be put *off*, the stress – it creates stress for them. Many of them take on jobs so it makes it harder for them to balance all of those responsibilities, so they’re work sometimes does suffer because they’re working so hard to pay the bills. I think that’s where I see the most *commentary* coming from my students, and I would say that that is across the board, not just here but in [removed for confidentiality]. I mean that’s certainly something that I’ve seen on both sides and that’s the part that I find very frustrating, is that [pause] I know we have to support the institutions fiscally somehow in order for us to all *be* here, but I think the amount that they pay in tuition is *horrendous*, and I think it’s caused them *more* stress than *not*, and I think it’s probably put off a lot of people, especially people from lower income families that just simply cannot afford, or single parents or people that are in more precarious situations that perhaps would do very well here and really enjoy it, and would *benefit* from it, and, you know, would end up at the other end of it being in a much *better* position, it prevents them from being here.

I: Okay. Okay, moving on to learning. In your opinion, are lectures useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: *Yes*, they can be. I think they have their place. I think they’re a lot – sometimes, especially at the *beginning* of their education, so I think the further you get down the line the *less* you need to rely on the lecture per se, but I do think in any environment when you’re introducing students to something new, there are definitely times that doing a lecture to give them the historical background, terminology, the context *can* be extremely useful for them. And it might be matched with, “Read this chapter in this book” but sometimes you want them to pay attention to certain things, and they’re still learning at that stage, *how* to read and how to pick things out, so I think that guidance can be useful. I don’t think it should be a lecture just unto itself. I think our system of doing lectures with seminars is probably the most productive use of that, so that they get a lecture and they get some information, terminology, you know, the *theory* behind everything, but then in the seminar they *apply* it, and they can see it at work, and then as you go into second year or third year, you might be in seminars without a lecture, but you do group work or you might have – so if I have a group – so my [removed for confidentiality] seminar last year was a two-hour chunk and so, some days I would go in and I would do, like, a 10, 15 minute mini lecture at the beginning to give them some information about something, and then we would go into the text and apply some of that. Some days we would just go right in and do stuff with the text, it would depend on the topic and what we were doing, and their level of *knowledge* as well. So, as a new staff member last year to [University A], and there’s never been a [removed for confidentiality] in the English department before, a lot of the students coming in have very little *background* information so there’s definitely places where I need to fill in gaps for them. Whereas, for instance, if you look at – we have a very established thread in our programmes for, say, Edwardian and Victorian so, they’re getting it from day one, so by the time they get to Year 3, they’ve got *so much* of it under their belt, they already, kind of, know the period. So, I think it can be a useful tool. I don’t think it should be the only thing you use, and I don’t think it should be *all* of what you do, but I think it has its place.

I: Okay. Okay, in the same vein, are seminars useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: *Yes*, yeah because I think they go half – it’s the half and half, right? They go together, and I think especially at the first year, you have to have – you have to have the mix. The other thing I would say is, the students learn in different ways, right? So, one student might thrive in a seminar setting, another student might thrive in a lecture setting, and being able to give them a little bit of everything, I think then also means you’re going to hit – somebody’s going to get something out of each *thing* and hopefully you’ll get – they’ll all get a little bit of something, rather than just if it was all lecture all the time, you might have students that completely disengage.

I: Yeah. Okay. Are one-to-one sessions useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: I think it depends on what it’s about. So, we have personal tutoring sessions, where we meet with the students in groups and then we’re supposed to do one-to-ones with them, and I think when it’s a *forced* one-to-one like *that*, it’s very difficult. Usually in *those* particular groups, a student will come to me when they have a question or a problem. That’s the best thing for that. Where it *can* be useful is for assessments. So, giving feedback or talking about the next stage of their *work*, so I did that with my Arthur module, they all submitted proposals, and I gave them a lot of feedback, but then I met with them and delivered the feedback *orally*. I’d written it down and they got to take that with them, but we had a conversation about, “Okay, this is everything you’ve done, and this is where the project needs to go” or, you know, “You’re trying to do too much, you need to narrow it down”. So, I think those types of one-to-ones can be very productive.

I: Okay. Is there anything you think is particularly good about the style of learning that takes place at university, compared to compulsory education?

P: Yeah. I mean that’s – nine times out of ten, the students I teach all want to be here, and if you’re interested in something, you’re going to be more enthusiastic about it more often, right? So, it might not be as evident at the first-year level because some of them haven’t quite figured out what they want to do module-wise and they all have to take the same modules across the board. But at the second year and the third year, generally speaking if I get students in my modules, it’s because they’ve self-selected to be there, and sometimes that means you get somebody that just doesn’t know what they’re getting themselves into, and then it’s *awful* and they realise, “Oh God, this was not what I wanted” and that’s okay too, right? I mean sometimes you don’t *know*, so you have to try it. But you do tend to see – over the years, what I’ve experienced is students that get *hooked* early, it’s like a drug, they get hooked early and then they keep coming back for more, you know, and then they’re *excited* about it. So, I mean I think that’s – the fun part is that, when you do get to teach these, kind of, specialised upper year levels, the students that want to be there – the students that are there generally have *chosen* to be there, so it changes the dynamic. And I think that that’s the best part for them is that, they get this very broad exposure in the first year and then they can, kind of, experiment beyond that and try new things, and sometimes it may be the thing they didn’t even think they would be interested in, can be the thing that interests them the most. So, I think there’s a real *joy* to that, being able to experiment and try new things, and then *pursue* it, if they are really enjoying it.

I: Okay. From your own experience of teaching, is there anything you would change to improve student learning, so in terms of either your own teaching, the resources you and undergraduates have access to, curriculum and assessment, or anything else?

P: *Yes*. I think – I think there’s a really big difference here for me, between the [removed for confidentiality] system and the British system, and the British system is far more rigid in terms of how we monitor assessments and double marking requirements for assessments, which unfortunately creates difficulties for the types of assessments that you might do, and the oversight, the detail with which we scrutinise new modules and new assessment options is almost *perverse*. It’s so ridiculous that if I want to – so, for instance, this year we wanted to test out a new module and the new module, we want it to be a module that anybody on the team can teach, about – it’s a single author study, so I could teach it, for instance, and do J.K. Rowling, or [name removed] could do J.K. Rowling and I could do Terry Pratchett. Or, somebody could do, I think one of our team members is doing [removed for confidentiality], but we could run two segments of it, one each semester and they would be *different*. But that also means that the assessments that I might do, or [name removed] might do, or [name removed] might do will be different. So, we needed to set up this module to be very flexible and getting it through the curriculum committee was *painful* beyond belief, because it was new, it was different, it wasn’t *fixed.* They really were not comfortable with that and so we suggested a portfolio exercise, which meant that if it’s a portfolio, and the portfolio is worth 100% but, you know, I might have *four* things that contribute to it, the next person might have *three*. Even *that*, this idea of a portfolio, they were just, they were very uncomfortable with it being fluid or flexible, and so I see things like this as *prohibitive,* right? Especially when there’s so much pressure on us to be innovative, to try new pedagogies, and this was actually the one thing about the [removed for confidentiality] system that I *really* enjoyed was that, I had a huge amount of autonomy over the module design and the assessments. So, if I ran a course on [removed for confidentiality] and I decided that none of the assessments worked, the next year I could just change them and do something completely different. *Here*, you have to submit a module revision, and it has to go through the committee, and it has to go through the team, and it has to go through the School. It’s *just* the *most* ridiculous thing. So, by the time you get to the other end, it could be that – and I’ve had this happen, where I run an assessment, it doesn’t work with that group of students so I try something else, but then in the third year I go back to the first assessment because that didn’t quite work and do what I wanted it to do either, but it got a little bit better, but then I might change it again and that’s the whole thing about teaching is that, you need – I think you need to be able to be a bit flexible with that because no two group of students is ever the same, and so what might work with one group, won’t work with another. And so, there’s – we have this very rigid system that *prevents*, kind of, impromptu creative pedagogies. Also the issue of double marking because – so, for instance, I’ve done things in the past where I have students do presentations in my modules for assessed – for an assessment, and the way we have to work with double marking is that, I can’t have somebody be in my classroom every week so I used to have students, when I would do [removed for confidentiality], I would have students sign up to do historical topics, or if I did [removed for confidentiality] I would do the same thing where I would teach them about the text, but I would make them part of the teachers, so they would pick a topic [removed for confidentiality] because all of these things come up in our *texts,* but it actually makes it a little bit more interesting if they can *own* some of that and *become* the *teachers* and learn that material, and then share it with their classmates. And we would do it for assessment, it would never be a huge portion of the grade, but it would be maybe 20% and it would, you know, be an opportunity for them to work in pairs or groups and they would often have opportunities to do *creative* projects with that as well, and it would be spread out over the semester, so we’d have one a week. So, a portion of our time together would be, kind of, interactive in different ways, and I can’t do that here. I can have them do these presentations, but unless I can guarantee I can have a team member come in and sit in on my class *every* week, I can’t do them for assessment because there’s no way to double mark it. So, I think that’s my biggest gripe is that, I’m so used to having this, kind of, autonomy to try things and then, you know, the one time I see us trying to do something that’s really – that could be quite flexible and innovative, I mean it really was painful to get it through, and it did pass, but we had to fight for it every step of the way and, you know, they kept saying, “Well, what if this happens and it doesn’t work?” It’s like, “Well, if you don’t let us try it, we don’t know if it will work, right? You have to actually trust us”. I mean, and everybody on that committee is a *teaching* member of faculty so it’s not like we all know we’re all good at this, right? There has to be a degree of trust and I do think the British system with the strictures that are in place – the structures that are in place makes it prohibitive. So that – if I could change *anything*, that would be it, because then it would allow me in those moments, if I think of something very last minute that, “Oh my God, this might work with this group, I need to change it”, it would give me that freedom that I could, kind of, mince things a bit, and speak to my students’ needs in a way that you can’t just change an assessment like that. So yeah, that’s really my only gripe – the tuition thing for students, it’s, you know, it’s a pet peeve.

I: Okay.

P: But I think it’s an important one.

I: Okay, I sent you the teaching and learning strategy. So, how does this strategy impact, if at all, on your interactions with undergraduates?

P: Well, I think, we don’t have anything such as a work placement in our programme, right now, so, I can’t really speak to that. We do an awful lot of research-engaged teaching. I’ve also done – I’ve done stuff elsewhere and I’m also putting together something right now, that links these together but also has public engagement elements of it. So, I try, again this has to do with that pedagogy thing, right? It’s much easier to do – it was much easier for me to do this, kind of, thing in [removed for confidentiality] and just *try* it, and so I’m doing something similar this year and, I’m putting together something this year and I’m, kind of – I’m going to fudge it a bit. So, I have a module that has an assessment and the assessment is worth 100%, or it’s not worth 100%, but the *essay* is worth a large portion, and I’m going to create a couple of alternative essay *topics* that won’t be traditional, because I was like, “Okay, I need to try and do something, so I’m going to work within what they’ve given me”, but when I was at my old institution, [removed for confidentiality] So, very much that active learning framework, and then a lot of the stuff I teach is also based to the more standard research that I’m doing, and so I think there are ways to *be* creative and innovative. But again, sometimes those things that are in place make it difficult for us *here* to *find* these ways, and so right now, the struggle for me is, how can I manipulate the system to *make* it what I need it to be for *me*, without quote, unquote breaking the rules that are in place? So, I’m trying to navigate that and I’m working on something for this year, which will be [removed for confidentiality]. So, it’s a way of getting them out of the classroom and trying something different, thinking about their material in a different way, trying different activities, and then also thinking about the *space* that they’re *learning* in, that doesn’t just have to be a seminar room, [removed for confidentiality] you can bring that experience back and think about what’s being done in the text and how that is trying to emulate a feeling or an image that you’ve seen in a different context. So, yeah again, trying to find ways to *do* all of that, but still do it in, you know, in a way that is within the parameters that we’re given, right?

I: Okay. Do you think this strategy is a successful one for engaging undergraduates?

P: Well, based on what I did at my former institution, *yes*. I mean, the students that were in my module there, they were given a choice, it wasn’t imposed on them, so it was a self-opt in and it will be again for some of this, right? And some of the stuff we do will be, kind of, imposed on them, right? [removed for confidentiality] based on anything I’ve ever done, yeah, I mean, everything I’ve ever done in this way, whether it be something that *I’ve* run, or something that a *colleague* has run, that we’ve all participated in, it’s always been successful. The students that *do* it always end up – they may be hesitant or a bit nervous at the *beginning*, but at the end of it, they generally come out of it feeling, “Wow I wouldn’t – I would do that *again* in a heartbeat because it was such a good experience”, and I think that it gives them more of a *tangible*, *real life,* kind of, connection for them, that they can see how it impacts their daily life. And so, I – I mean for instance, [removed for confidentiality] you don’t necessarily get the same response and *feeling* when you’re, kind of, just sitting, analysing it in a classroom setting. So, I think that should make it more *poignant* for them.

I: Okay. I also sent you the document that refers to the Student Collaboration Policy [policy name changed]. How would you say you implement the aims of this approach, if you do at all, in your interactions with students?

P: Well it depends on the level that they’re at. What you ask of them will vary, but for instance, some of the stuff that I’ve just been talking about means that these students opt in to doing research that is not traditional, or doing projects that are non-traditional and so, in a way, that is them *becoming* the Student Collaborator [policy name changed]. I mean anything – technically any research assignment we give them is Student Collaboration [policy name changed], but there are ways of making them more *aware*, and more *engaged*, in doing something that isn’t, “I gave you a list of questions, and answer one of these questions”. So, any of these types of things that I’ve talked about are opportunities for them to take the project in different ways that speaks to them. So, for instance, when I did [removed for confidentiality]. This year, in my module, the one that has just finished, or I’m just doing the marking for, and I’ve not really done – I’ve not really finished the marking so I can’t tell you what the end results are like, but [removed for confidentiality] my approach to letting them do research was that they got to create their *own* and in some ways, that can be tricky, especially at the second year because they’re still learning a lot about research techniques, but they had an awful lot of guidance and so, they did in-class writing based on it, they did some assessments of sources, they did proposals, they did – and they’re also doing a reflective writing piece on the *process*, to talk about the end *product* that they come up with and how they get there. So, this is very much them, even though it’s not their third-year dissertation, before they even get to third year, they’re actually being faced with, “This is your research project, make it *yours*” and – with my *guidance*, but, you know, they’ve already grappled with some of the issues that they will have to face next year when they’re doing their dissertation, and they might have complained and moaned and been stressed out about doing it, but I think the end result of it is, the essays they write will be essays they *pick* and choose to pursue topics on themselves, so they are – already, Student Collaborators [policy name changed], right? They are pursuing and finding the material and finding things to write on themselves, but it means that when they do their dissertation, they may not realise it yet, but they’re all actually going to be in a better place *because* of it, because they’ll have done something similar at the second-year level, in preparation for third year. So, that means I think, when they do the *dissertation*, it will be less terrifying to them, and maybe that will also free them up, as they’ll see the possibilities of what they can do at that level, differently, right? That there is more freedom. So, I *think* those types of things, and then engaging them in all of these other connections and giving them the opportunity to explore it, you know, you’re still going to get students that write horrendous papers, that no matter what feedback you give them, they don’t *get* it or they just don’t listen or they can’t *grasp*, but in that group, if you have 20 students, you know, if I have 60% of them end up writing, you know, solid papers, they may not all be Firsts but they’re an *effort,* there was a real effort with a real result, that to me is a good thing, right? You know, but I say that not having finished the marking [laughing]. So, come back next week and if I’m under my desk in the foetal position, you’ll know it was *not* a good thing [laughing].

I: [laughing] Okay, in your opinion, should undergraduate students have greater control over, or input in, the curriculum and/or assessment design of their chosen courses?

P: Maybe not at the first year so much. I think it’s *really* overwhelming for them and they don’t – they *don’t* know what’s expected, and how – they don’t even know how they’re assessed or understand that process. So, I think the first year should be very structured and I would say that then*, incrementally*, a little bit more freedom could be given. I like the idea of giving students *options* with assessments, but I think we always have to remember that our goal is that – because we’re an English programme, so I think it’s also discipline specific, so I often do creative assignments, again I have to figure out a way to do this *here*, but in [removed for confidentiality], for instance, I would do an assignment in my modules where I would give them the option to do creative assignments where they could create something and then they would still have to write an essay *on* it, and so, because we are in the business of reading and writing and analysis, that never disappeared. But, if they did a creative project, they could do things like pick a genre and re-work a text, or something like that, and so I had some really interesting projects come out of that. [removed for confidentiality] So, it’s almost like they create their own primary source and then they critique it. I had students do other things. [removed for confidentiality] So, for them it, you know, doing those kinds of things can actually be *fruitful*, but not every student *wants* to do that or feels secure doing that, so I would have *options*. So, you know, some students I would be like, “Here’s a list of options, you can just do a standard essay if that’s what you’re comfortable with”. So, I think it’s a good, at the upper years, to give them some flexibility and to figure out different ways that they can express their ideas. You also get students that might have skills or knowledge that they’re really – they know *way* more than we do about certain things, [removed for confidentiality]. So, I think if, like I said earlier, if they’re interested and they’re passionate and enthusiastic, they tend to do better *work*, even in their writing, because they *know* what they want to *say*, right? And so, when you give them the space to bring the thing that *they’re* really good at *in* and marry it with the thing they’re just *learning* to be good at, you can get some really interesting results. And from a marking perspective, a really *fun*, you know, I mean sometimes the reports that they write have varying degrees of success and you do have to teach them how to do it, but if you give them that flexible, kind of, space, they *own* their projects and they own their work *differently*. Not necessarily better or *worse*, because you do get students that do phenomenally just with a standard essay, but they own it differently and they might – for the students that might *not* be as engaged, it sometimes can make the difference between a really good essay or an average essay, right? In terms of how they then discuss the thing that they’ve done. So that’s – I mean that to me is where the flexibility, I think, could be very, *very* fruitful for students.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, in recent government policy on higher education, students have been placed at the heart of the system. In your opinion, to what extent are undergraduates positioned centrally within this university?

P: They’re the reason we’re here. Yeah, I mean I think – I think [University A] is shifting a little, you know, we’re becoming more research-focussed. It certainly, I think, was one of the reasons *I* was hired, for some of the work that I do, even though I’m also very teaching-oriented. But, you know, broadening out our, kind of, historical period for instance, we’re growing the Masters programmes, the PGT’s and the MRes’s, we’re growing the PhD’s. The difficulty of that is that we do have to find balance between becoming that research institution and not *losing* what makes us so good as an undergraduate institution, and Grad programmes are expensive to *run*, right? In terms of faculty time and energy and administrative costs, you don’t – you have far less students for – and that sucks up a lot of time and far more supervision and even the marking, I mean marking, you know, an MA dissertation versus an undergraduate dissertation, the amount of work and time. So, the further up you get, the more work it *is* on an individual basis rather than a group basis for students, and I think we do both – I think we do the undergraduate extremely well here, things could improve, I mean we – you’re never – like I said, teaching is fluid, right? It’s never – it’s like Yoga, it’s a *practice*, it’s not a perfect, right? You have to keep doing it and it’s never the same each – from day to day, or from year to year, group of students, group of students. I think there’s a definite move in this university, to move towards more research and that, I mean that has – I don’t think that’s impacted the *teaching* so much in terms of the experience of the undergraduates, I think it’s impacted staff and so *our* workloads are going up, without reprieve, you know, that we’re not necessarily getting *less*, we’re getting more, in terms of what our expectations are. So, the downside of that, then, is *we’re* the ones that are exhausted or burnt out, or struggling because we have increasing, you know, numbers – an increasing number of administrative tasks that we have to deal with, that *eat* into the research time that is supposed to be the thing we’re doing, right? So, that first question you asked me, why are we here, right? Well, they say you’re here to do research but, you know, during term time, 95% of your time is not research-based, it’s teaching or admin so, it’s a really *hard* thing for a university to make that shift and to do it *well*, and to find the sweet spot between those two, and I don’t know anywhere that has ever *done* it perfectly. So, yeah, we’ll see what happens.

I: [laughing] Okay, do you think positioning students centrally works to separate them at all from other members of the university, such as the academics? Because some people have said that, you know, this divide between research and teaching, sometimes universities put students right at the front and forget about the academics a little bit. So, what are your thoughts –?

P: Yeah, no I mean *definitely*. I mean I’ve seen some things, so please don’t use this in your final product, okay? But, I’ve seen some decisions made here by members of the senior management team in the [removed for confidentiality], that purport to be about students and ultimately, all they are, are increased workloads for staff. They don’t actually *change* the student experience, and, in fact, I think one of the decisions will make the student experience *less* than what it was but it’s a shitload of – sorry, it’s way more work for us, it’s *petty*, little administrative tasks that are going to suck up a huge amount of our time and energy and in the end, will not make the students’ lives better and I say this based on our NSS scores and our external examiners, that this is about something that we have been – we have received *extremely* good feedback from both elements, that this is something we do *very well* and the change will – the change that is, the thing that we’re being asked to *do*, is to undo that, because of something that is quote, unquote, based on a student needs decision, [removed for confidentiality] this is a decision that was made that was touted as being *student-facing, student-centred*, and I think it’s malarkey, and I can certainly say that based on what we saw with the first semester, [removed for confidentiality] and the end result is that, that *will* impact our NSS scores because it changes the student experience, right? [removed for confidentiality] So, there are definitely times when I see a real distance between those things, right, and, the *impact* or the potential outcome of those decisions. Doesn’t mean that every decision will be like that, but this is just the most recent one for me, [removed for confidentiality]. And, you know, sometimes decisions *are* good, sometimes there are things that are done that make sense, that make the students’ lives – students’ lives better, I just think this is not one of them.

I: Okay. What meaning does the word relationship have for you, in the context of interacting with undergraduates?

P: That’s *my* rapport with them. Depends on the type of student you have. I have varying types of relationships with my students, some of them are, these are the students that come to my seminar, I never really see them except for *in* that setting. There might be students that I see at extracurricular events that are more engaged, that will come and talk to me during my office hours or seek additional help. And then there are students that you might – there’s two other aspects. I mean one is the mentoring aspect, that the longer you know a student, the more you *get* to know them. I mean I have students that I taught 10 years ago that I still talk to, that, you know, even though I’m no longer teaching them and they’ve done other things, we’re still in touch and so, to me, that’s the best part about teaching is, kind of, seeing my students grow and go on and do other things, whether it’s go on to a Grad programme or get the job they wanted or just become better people and do good things with their lives. So, that’s the really *rewarding* part of it, and then there’s the tough part about it too, because sometimes that can also mean you learn about your students in a way that you hadn’t anticipated, such as the student that was [removed for confidentiality]. On the other hand, that was very difficult to do, was a very difficult process for *her,* but it actually, in the long run, benefitted me as a *teacher* because it made me more sensitive to those issues. It’s become something that I am more aware of, and I really advocate for, more than I used to, and now I’m teaching a Grad class, one of the sessions I do with Grad students is based on [removed for confidentiality]. So, sometimes those relationships with students can be meaningful to the things that *we* do as well. So, it depends. I mean, I have students that – I call them the ghost students, you see their name on the register and then they show up the day they write the exam, I’m like, “I’m sorry, *who* are you?” [laughing] You know, those are the non-existent student relationships, you know, and sometimes you can have fraught relationships with students, you can have students that really resist and really struggle against you, and it’s difficult to get through to them and then, you know, if you do *manage* to somehow break that down and figure out what’s going on, and then see a success for them, that can be really wonderful. You have students that – yeah, you just get everything, right? It’s – it varies. I would say that the one thing that is *consistent* about every institution that I’ve worked in, is that dynamic, in the sense that probably one of the best things about everywhere I have worked, has been those relationships, is that working *with* the students ends up being, and my colleagues as well, but it keeps me doing what I’m doing, I guess is the best way to put it.

I: Okay. What do you consider to be the main purpose for building a relationship with undergraduates?

P: To foster their learning and to encourage *them* to challenge themselves. I think they need to trust you and that’s really hard at the first-year level and it’s an important way of opening up the space in the classroom for conversations, because you *are* going to have difficult conversations at some point in your academic career, and you’re going to read texts that make you uncomfortable, or that challenge your assumptions, and, you know, this is something that I’ve seen debates about, in terms of, some people say, “Well, there’s no such thing as a safe space on a university campus”, but what they *mean* is that there’s no space – there’s no way that your classroom can never engage with those difficult topics, and yet, I would argue that it *should* be a safe space, but it’s a different interpretation of that expression. So, for me, it’s you build that trust with them, you create a – I teach – I treat every seminar group I have, whether it’s 20 students or 50 students or 5, as a community unto itself, as a microcosm, that what we do in that space, we get to know each other, it’s not just me and *you*, it’s me and *all* of us, right? And so, what *happens* in there can be challenging, but if we learn to respect each other and to share without criticising and build *trust* then that means, even if you have ideas and, you know, they could be so way *off*, but I want students to get to that point where they will *feel* comfortable enough to speak up and to share their opinions and thoughts, or to *question* each other, not just question me or the text, but to be able to interact with each other, and this builds over time, I mean it’s rare that you see it happen at the first-year level. You do *sometimes*, if it’s a small enough group, and the right mix of students, but usually it’s something that builds until, you know, by the time you get to third year, it’s much more readily, kind of, coming together, because they’ve known each other longer, they’ve known you longer, and I think that’s where you can have really fruitful conversations but, *without* it, the level of – so to go back to that question about engagement, the level of engagement will not be the same, right? Because students might not be comfortable to engage and so – or, you know, they might not trust *you*, in the sense that if they say something that’s a bit of a risk for them, they might not trust that, you know, that they won’t be insulted or shut down or – I mean I’ve worked with people that have said horrendous things to students, not everybody should be doing this [laughing], and certainly the worst thing you can say to a student in front of other students is, oh, you know, something like, “You’re just wrong. That’s a stupid comment” or, you know, not everything they say will be the right thing to say, but you have to find a way to *make* it meaningful, or to bring them *back* to the path they need to be on. We spend, I think we spend a lot of time *coaching*, right? That’s maybe a better way of putting it, especially at the upper level, we’re not necessarily doing the direct teaching, we’re coaching *them* about, you know, it’s a shepherding almost. I don’t know how else to explain it, but I think that that relationship is crucial, and the dynamic will be different with each group, so some groups will be more open, and some groups will, you know, but if you can get to a point where there’s a mutual amount of respect and trust, then you generally, I think, do have good dialogue.

I: Okay. Okay, can you describe to me a typical, or common, face-to-face encounter with a student? So, if they come and meet you to discuss an assessment or something, how does that actually play out?

P: Can go various ways [laughing]. I’ve had everything from the student that plagiarised and sat in my office *crying* or the student that plagiarised, got caught, and denied it and called me a “Bitch”, and many other words that I will not repeat. So, talking – this is going back to the talking about the entitlement, student as consumer, this was a student that felt like the module was just something he had to do to jump through the hoop to graduate, and if I held him *up*, how dare I, and he didn’t even write his own fucking essay [laughing] and it was plagiarised, [removed for confidentiality] you can have *those* kinds of interactions, and then you can have, you know, more often than not though, they’re very, kind of, amicable interactions where the student just doesn’t understand something. I get – I think this is true of everybody I work with, we deal – and I know this is coming back to the mental health stuff, we deal with a lot of students that have issues and anxieties that aren’t necessarily evident on the surface and won’t come out until they actually do come and see you. So, this is where I think the less we encourage those students with the online marking thing, the less we encourage them to come and sit down with us, the less we are likely to *catch* some of these things, because you *don’t* get to know the student in the same way. But often I will have students come to see me about one thing, and it can end up taking us down a different route, so it can be as simple as, they come in to ask me a question about an assignment, and they sit down and then I, kind of, can gauge, you know, you can *tell* a student that is on the *brink* of emotional or physical collapse, or that is struggling with something, and sometimes all you have to do is look at them and say, “Are you okay?” And then that’s it, the floodgates open! Or, you know, or they shut down. There are different – they respond in different ways, but I think often the conversations I have with students when they make the effort to come and see me, it’s because they need something and that something may not always be specific to the assignment. It might be that they’re struggling with the assignment for a number of reasons, but it’s getting to what they actually need, which is underneath, and more often than not, it’s they need some, kind of, *support* in ways that are not necessarily about the *academics* but *impede* the academics. So, that’s – you get that. You get the students that come to you, and they only come to you *then*, and you see that a lot. And I would say that – I’ve been teaching many years, [removed for confidentiality] and I would say that the number of instances I have each year increases. So, you still get the students that just want to come and talk about the assignment, that that’s what they want, they don’t understand something, they want clarity, I get those. I get students that want feedback on an assessment, but increasingly over – especially over the past, kind of, 5, 6 years, what I’ve really noticed is that, the number of times the student is walking through the door with *a* question that is actually connected to something else, right? And it’s usually something to do with physical or mental health, and so I think that’s becoming more and more common, and I think my colleagues – I can’t speak *for* them blatantly, but I think we all – based on the number of times we talk about what we’re equipped to deal with, versus what we’re not equipped to deal with and what actually is in our job description, right? And I, you know, I joke about, you know, I have two doctor hats, right, so the Dr [name removed] is the academic doctor and then I have the Dr [name removed] that I feel like I’m a *counsellor*, right, or a *parent*. And that’s increasingly type of questions, or things, that end up happening when the students walk through the door, and that’s, I think, all of those other pressures coming out, right? The anxiety about performance, the anxiety about cost, you know, students are struggling as much as we are.

I: Okay.

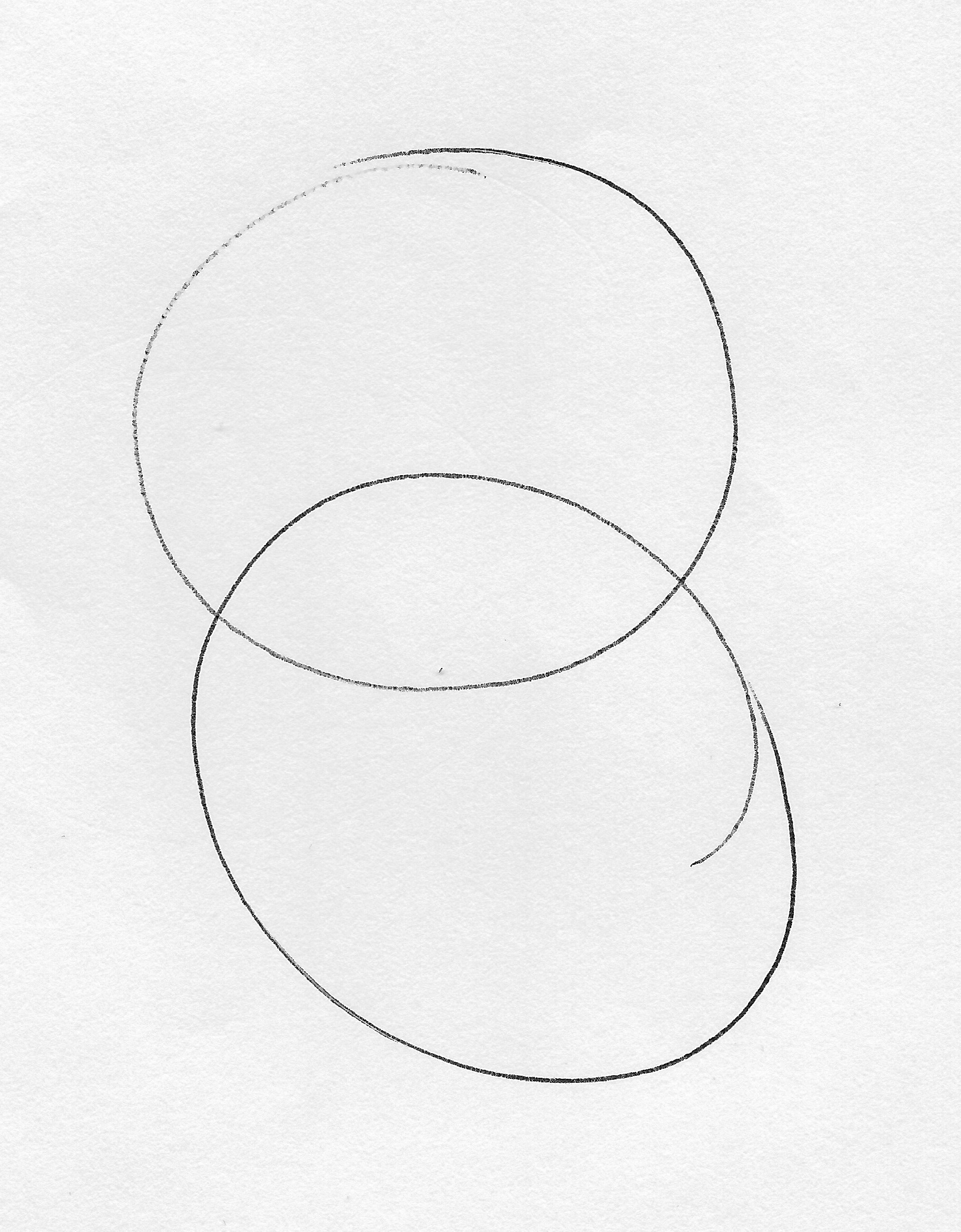
P: How are we doing?

I: Okay.

P: Okay? Sorry, I did warn you that I talk a lot [laughing].

I: [laughing] That’s okay. Okay, so now is a bit of a different part. So, can I ask you to draw your conception of a good relationship with a student? So, it can be anything you want, it can be abstract, it can be people, it can be however you see it.

P: [pause for drawing]. I’m going to cheat, I’m going to use a Venn diagram.



I: Someone else drew a Venn diagram actually! [laughing] Okay, so why have you drawn a Venn diagram?

P: Because I think they’re – a student is still a student. I’m not your parent, I’m not your friend, we can have friendly relation – we can have a friendly relationship, but there’s a certain divide that needs to be maintained for professionalism, and I think that that represents that place where we intersect, where I can be supportive of you, I can give you feedback, I can encourage your learning, encourage other things if they’re somehow connected, and there might be places where it might be a little tangential, but we still need to maintain that difference because there is a power structure in place, there is a level of assessment and authority that needs to be maintained for everybody’s *professionalism*, right? And I think as I’ve gotten older, that’s been *easier*, and yet, harder at the same time, because I think, like I said, I see more instances that need – I feel like I need to *nurture*, and so it’s, where do I draw that line? So, the increase has made it harder, but as I’ve gotten older and less like my students in age, it’s become a bit easier. I think it’s harder when you’re a younger grad, like you’re a recent graduate, and a lot of the students you’re teaching might be the same age as you, can be sometimes really hard to see those divides, and to understand that there is a power dynamic, and no matter how old you are, or how recent, or whether you’re still a PhD, you’re the person in a position of power and that’s a *very* uncomfortable thing, or for me it’s a very uncomfortable thing, for some people they revel in it. But I think we need to be *aware* of that, because we have power in the classroom, we can say and do things that can impact a young student’s career, we can change the course of their studies positively, but we can also say or do things that change the course of their studies, or their life, or the things they do, *negatively*. If you say the wrong *thing*, you can derail a student, and we can’t always know 100% but I think if you are aware of those boundaries or try to maintain a *degree* of separation between those things, so find that happy intersection, then we’re less likely to put ourselves, or them, in a position where we’re vulnerable. I think that’s why the Venn diagram is nice because it represents that crossover, but you still have the separate entities, right?

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, can I get you to draw the opposite, so what you consider a bad relationship?

A close up of a white background

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P: [pause for drawing] [laughing] *No division*. And, you know, this isn’t just about academics, you’ll see this in professional work environments as well. I’ve worked in and outside of the academy. So, I mean, this is where there are no boundaries, and then you get into serious conflicts of interest [pause]. I’ve not been party to it, but I have seen at certain institutions where you have things like, members of the staff are serial monogamists with students, like, dating your students – like, dating your students is just – you just *don’t,* just *don’t*. But, I’ve seen it happen, and that causes all kinds of issues, ethical issues, and yeah, there are just some things that you just don’t do, and so that to me, is the, kind of, everything you don’t do, that’s what that creates because – and the reason I’ve got one – it’s not just one on top of the other, it’s one slightly *inside* it, and I would say that that is the student *consumed* then by the other, because the student, like I said, is in – there is a power dynamic and the student as the younger, more impressionable [knocking] – and it could be male, female, they are – they’re more likely to be at risk. Give me a sec [answers door]. So, I think that that’s where it’s problematic is that it can become so consuming and [pause] it can be gendered either way, but the power dynamic does mean that the student can be highly vulnerable, and we have a duty of care, I mean most of them are – end up being age of consent, but we still have a duty of care when they’re in our classroom, so to me, that’s the – well, yeah, that’s the opposite of the Venn diagram.

I: Okay. Okay, so –

P: Now, I’m curious, what did people draw for this?

I: Oh, so many, so many variations of things. So, last question. What are your thoughts on the role of the Student’s Union, in terms of engaging undergraduates?

P: I think it has a place, yeah, I think it’s a voice for them. I think it can advocate for them. Sometimes, it’s not going to meet the needs of *every* student, but it can certainly – they need it, they need a voice. They need a voice on campus that is their own, it’s a voice that can dissent from, perhaps, what the administration, meaning the larger university structure, might deem as a priority. They need that autonomy, they need to learn to – it also gives them a space to learn – to figure out how to govern themselves. You know, when I was a student, I wasn’t involved in student politics, but I was involved with the student press, and so that was inherently connected to student politics because of the coverage, and I went through a process – our campus newspaper was initially tied to the university and the Student Union, and we went through a process to uncouple, so use the Gwyneth Paltrow term, but we became an autonomous body, which actually gave us more power as a press to write about the student *politics*. So, I think it’s a good space for them to learn about citizenship in a, kind of, controlled environment, in a different *way*, to *engage* and learn about what it means to be an informed citizen. You know, there are – in *that* space they’re a citizen of the university, of the university environment, it gives them a place to advocate, it gives them a place to *explore* things that might be less open to them as *youth* in the larger community, but might give them a taste for then becoming involved, mostly because each generation that comes through the university system, or each generation that doesn’t, is the next generation of people that run this country, right? That run any country, if it’s a democracy, even if it’s a *flawed* democracy, this is where, you know, the future comes from, and so, I think the Student Union, it has good and bad aspects of it, but I think it’s *essential* to have it on campus and to give them a space that is their own, that is controlled by them, run by them, that is *for* them, you know, advocates for them. And that can be reshaped each year, right, that it’s not a static thing either.

I: Okay. Okay, well that was the last question, so thank you very much. Is there anything you want to add that we haven’t covered, about interactions with students?

P: I’d like to see the finished product.

I: Yeah, no, of course, yeah.

P: Yeah, I’m curious about, you know, when you get all of this together.

I: Yeah, absolutely, I can send you a draft of analysis if you’re interested –

P: Yeah, because I’m curious about, you know, seeing what other people say, and is my experience akin to others, or do I just live in this little bubble? [laughing] Right? But, I’m also really curious to see how the students respond to the questions. I’m assuming you’re giving them some of the same questions?

I: Yeah, similar questions yeah.

P: Right, and so that, to me, I think is really interesting is how – am I completely off in, like, freaking la-la land [laughing] in terms of what *I* view is valuable for them, or for me, and, you know, are their perceptions completely different? Or, where are those places where we overlap, and we actually see the same priorities. So, I’m very curious to see the work when it’s together.

I: Yeah, well I’ll keep you in the loop, don’t worry about that! Also, the thing you said about not keep – not putting in the final draft, the university is anonymous as well, so do you still not want it to be included?

P: I think – yeah, I think I would like to keep everything…

I: Oh no, everything you say is completely anonymous anyway, completely confidential, but obviously I’ll quote from your interview, so can I use what you said there, in quotation about the change to the online marking system?

P: Please don’t name the university.

I: Oh no, no, nothing’s named –

P: Yeah, but you can certainly, you know, use that data, use that information, just as long as the School itself is not identified.

I: Yeah, absolutely not, no.

P: But I do think it’s an important thing because it’s something that I know I have colleagues elsewhere that are struggling with, or have had it imposed, and there are just sometimes where doing it the old-fashioned way is actually better, and maybe I’m archaic, and even in my own School we have differences, but I think they’re also disciplinary differences. I have some colleagues that are in Creative Writing and Journalism that think online marking is the bee’s knees and I’m like, “Yeah, but you’re marking, you know, multiple *little* assignments, I’m marking, like, 3,000, 5,000 words in one go” and I think there’s a huge difference, you know…

I: It has a big impact on interacting with students as well because you don’t interact with them in the same way.

P: Yeah, no, and I think from our perspective, one of the things we’ve talked about as a team is that the individual that has imposed this on us, if the results – if our NSS results drop, and this becomes a targeted thing, he wouldn’t hesitate to just switch it back, right? So – regardless of the quote, unquote cost to students for printing essays, so, I mean we all just, kind of, roll our eyes at this because it’s such a *lame* excuse, it’s such a lame justification, and there’s been no engagement, there was no *consultation* with *us* about what happened and how it happened, we were just told at the beginning of September, “You’re going to do this, and this is why” and so that to me, you know, it’s – and I’m not going to get up and *leave*, but from the perspective of somebody that’s working within that system, you’ve just made my life a lot harder, and you’re going to make the experience for the students a lot worse, and this is an individual that hasn’t sat in a classroom in a long time, and…

I: Yeah, it’s always the way isn’t it!

P: Well, yeah, I mean the, you know, the people at the top that aren’t doing the work on the ground that make those decisions, because they think it’s good for this reason, and, you know, we were the last School in the College of Arts, we were the last foothold, so to speak. [School removed] had been forced to do this a couple of years ago, and they don’t like it any more than we do, we got away with it because nobody *noticed*. I think that’s where [name removed], our Head of School, was actually really tip-toeing around the issue, because he knew if he brought it up, it would be noticed that we weren’t *doing* it, right? So, you know, but it’s just [sigh] – I like technology but I also think there are things that are just done – doing it the old-fashioned way is sometimes the best way, right? There’s part of me – there are a number of studies and books out there that talk about – one of them is called the *Slow Movement*, and one of them is called – there’s a book called the *Slow Professor*, and it’s about slowing down and *not* thinking about things being high-tech and advanced and really doing it the old-fashioned way, or the *slow* way, for those better results and I think that, you know, this is *one* of them. But, you know, it’s just me, that’s my gripe for the day [laughing].

I: [laughing] Okay, well thank you very much.

P: Oh, it was a pleasure.

**[End of Recording]**