

Hello, and welcome. I am your host, Neil Ward, and I'm grateful that you are taking time out of your day to learn more about design educators' paths to Tenure. I truly appreciate it.

On this episode of Tell It To Neil, we're chatting with Assistant Professor of Digital Media, Brytton Bjorngaard, from the University of Illinois Springfield, in Springfield, Illinois. Let's listen in.

Neil: Hi Brytton, how are you?

Brytton: I'm good; how are you?

Neil: Doing well, doing well. Thank you for joining us today.

Brytton: Yeah, happy to be here.

Neil: Awesome. So, how did you get into the world of Design?

Brytton: I think it started when I was a kid; I was that kid who preferred to stay indoors and play with Legos and color in a coloring book as opposed to running around outside. Not that I didn't do my fair share of that, but I was definitely that curled up in the corner of a room by myself and it started sort of a love of things design, whether that was Fine Art, Architecture, Interior and Graphics and I was really, really blessed to go to a High School that had an option for me to take a course in each one of those, so I was able to take Interior Design, Graphic Design, Drafting, and just regular Fine Arts and sort of figure out and find out which one I liked the most before I went to College.

Neil: Where did you go to High School? Because from my experience, that's not typical that you have all of those art courses available/

Brytton: So, I'm originally from Rochester, Minnesota and it's in South Eastern Minnesota; it's about the only town of significant size after Minneapolis St Paul in the State and then followed by Duluth, of course, but it happens to be the home of IBM and Mayo Clinic and as a result there's just a lot of really great opportunities for the kids that are enrolled in the school district.

Neil: Lucky you!

Brytton: Yeah!

Neil: So you graduated High School, and then?

Brytton: I had already applied for Colleges that specifically had Graphic Design programs. I think I was that kid that declared the Major with their acceptance into College; picked Graphic Design. I went down to Saint Mary's University of Minnesota which was not far from home; it was about forty-five minute drive from where I'd gone to High School, but my family lived about another thirty minutes from there, so it was about an hour and a half from home. It was, you know, interested in small classes and the intimate experience in College and it was a Liberal Arts private school that was going to give me just that and Majored in Graphic Design. I think I started Double-Majoring, one in Media Communications and Graphic Design and realized I did not have the skill for these interviews!

Neil: And here you are!

Brytton: And here I am! And...but I did get a Minor in that. And then I continued onto Grad School from there.

Neil: So after you graduated with your BFA, right?

Brytton: Just a Bachelor of Arts, not a BFA.

Neil: OK, so did you go out and work for a few years or did you go right onto a Masters or MFA degree?

Brytton: I went straight on to my MFA. I...my senior year of College I was sort of always in the Design Lab and would help out some of the younger students and I really enjoyed that. My dad had been a K12 Art Teacher for a few years when I was growing up. He didn't do it very long, he found he had other passions; he's one of those people that changes his career about every five to ten years! But yeah, so I knew I didn't really want to do elementary education from his experience and from doing camps in the summer with him but I really enjoyed the aspect of helping another student and I thought well, if I want to explore the idea of teaching, I need to get an MFA. I felt like I wasn't ready to go into the real world with my portfolio from Under-graduate. I was good but I knew that there were people that had gone to



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very competitive Art Schools and had this really awesome, stellar portfolio and I thought, well, if I end up designing and I go to Grad School first, I'll have a better portfolio and I just really liked learning and I thought, I'm not ready to be done and so I just sort of took all of that and jumped right into the MFA without a pause.

Neil: So, was it more about building your portfolio or was it more about learning how to teach?

Brytton: I think it was both. I think it was literally a fifty:fifty split of interest in both. I could teach, I could go into Design; either way, I'm not ready to be done learning, so...and I actually picked my Graduate School, I went to Iowa State University because they had the opportunity to teach while going to School and so I knew that there was a possibility if I showed up and was a strong student that I could have the chance to teach whilst still in School so I could figure out whether that was the right place for me or not.

(05:09)

Neil: So, talk to me a little bit about your experience at Iowa State? That's just right up the road from me.

Brytton: Yeah, it is! I loved it. They offered me a Teaching Assistantship, so I was...I helped out in an Art History classroom for a year; one of those big lectures of two hundred and fifty students, I and another Grad student split the discussion boards and helping answer questions and grading of tasks and so I got an experience of that the workload of being a Professor for a class is kind of like, and then my second year there I got the opportunity to teach the Sophomore Design Studio, sort of the intro to the Technology courses and so I did that for my second and third year of Graduate School. I was really blessed that I got a mentor at the University who had an interest that sort of lied with what my interests were in design and where I kind of thought my thesis might end up. And so I had somebody who was really kind of versed in the same world that I was interested in to mentor me.

Neil: And who was that?

Brytton: That was Professor Debra Satterfield and she's now out in Long Beach, California in the California State System out there but while I was there, she was really passionate about healthcare advocacy, whether that was in a healthcare clinic or for kids or children on the autism spectrum or with



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other cognitive disabilities and I really had a passion for what kind of world Design...role Design could play in the world that wasn't just the commercial aspect of it but social justice, social impact; I have an interest in accessibility and HIPAA privacy laws and all of the different ways that Design kind of gets pulled into very different fields and I was able to sort of work under her tutelage with that concept.

Neil: So then, what did your thesis project look like? because that is a very, very rich body of work that you can dive into. It's almost overwhelming.

Brytton: Yeah. So, my thesis ended up going in the direction of environmental design; way-finding systems, as well as just the graphical interactions in a healthcare environment. Not too long before I got to Graduate School, there were new Health Information Privacy Act laws passed, also known as HIPAA, that required hospitals and clinics to do some form of steps, undergo changes to increase patient privacy, for instance at check-in desks and...well you know, getting called back to go to your appointment. There was supposed to be some level of privacy at those desks. But there were no guidelines on how to do that and so if you've been to a hospital or clinic, many of them put up that giant sign that says, "Please wait behind here" and then they have the stanchions with the ropes between them and you feel a little like you're in the airport again and you're being herded through a space and I mean, you don't need a design degree to know that doesn't make you feel particularly human or particularly taken care of. Particularly in a situation where you're sick or someone is sick and you're trying to receive the healthcare. And so I just went into a couple different environment and aims, one, was the University's health system and the other was the McFarlane Clinic and I sort of did an analysis of their space and looked at ways that graphical solutions could help create a more calming, healing and yet create privacy; whether that was color changes in carpet and pulling in some interior design aspects or if that was just the way the signs approached people and the way the...the fonts that were used, the colors of those pieces of paper, just all the different ways that we could create some form of a guideline for maybe some clinics to look at an example of, here's a way that this could be done and not make you feel like you're herding cattle!

Neil: Yes! So, did that ever...was that ever put into use or put into place?

Brytton: So, the health clinic in...at AIMS, I actually changed and moved the space around and then would observe how people moved through it differently and at the end of the project, they just left it at the way that I'd sort of ended at and now I don't know if they're still using that or...in the scheme of...somebody cleaned the floor and moved it all around: I don't know, it's been a few years! My thesis



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was published; people might be reading it. I took a job right out of Grad School as a Lecturer and very full time; I was teaching a four-one-four load and my research really fell off at that stage and I haven't really revisited it because I've not been at a Research One school where it's encouraged to do things where you're getting IRB approval and interacting with patients and getting that and so I've sort of taken some of those aspects with social good and how design can go into other worlds and sort of...more my scholarship has to do with working for Not-For-Profits and helping them find...use design thinking to come up with ways to solve problems they may be having in their organization.

(10:50)

Neil: So, we will come back to that!

Brytton: OK!

Neil: But let's back up a little bit. So, after you graduated from Iowa State University, you mentioned that you had a year contract, right?

Brytton: Yes.

Neil: Where was that and how did you wind up getting that? Did you interview at CAA or did you send résumés out? What was that process like?

Brytton: I did both of those things. I interviewed for a couple of jobs at CAA but I also sent my résumé out to a bunch of people that weren't interviewing at CAA and I got an interview and an on-campus interview at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. It's a private Presbyterian Liberal Arts College and they had an Instructor position in Graphic Design that would teach Internal Technology, Type, Web, History, Photography, the whole sort of gamut of what Graphic Design can be and it was an Instructor one year but renewable position and I really liked the idea of getting my sort of...getting my feet wet without knowing Tenure Track was where I wanted to go and I liked the idea of being in Washington State; mountains, trees...

Neil: Beautiful!



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Brytton: Yeah. No eighty degree weather. At the time, I wouldn't do it now but...and so I loaded up a moving truck a few days after finishing my thesis and drove up to Washington State and took the job. I had it for three years; two years as an Instructor and then my last year there I had an opportunity to step up and be a Visiting Assistant Professor. Another Faculty member had left and I interviewed for a Visiting position that would eventually lead to a Tenure Track position and we hired an Instructor in the area of the other person's expertise.

Neil: Gotcha. So, when you were in that role you mentioned it was a four-one-four load. That's a lot of teaching!

Brytton: Yes! And it could have been technically three-one-three, but I had stacked courses where I would have, for instance, Typography One and Typography Two in the same semester, technically meeting at the same time and so I had two separate preps and I had two separate sort of content levels to go over but I may only have the meeting time of the one course. But we also had a Jan term, so we had a January one month condensed course, that was the One in the load. Yeah, it was really kind of great in that I did get to teach everything that I had a passion for as well as the gamut of Graphic Design; it wasn't, here, you're starting in a place with fifteen Graphic Design Faculty and you're teaching Sophomore Studio for sections of it. Not that there's anything wrong with that kind of a situation, but I knew it wasn't what I wanted to do; I knew teaching the same material endlessly over and over wasn't going to fuel my creative soul. And so I got the opportunity to teach Web Design, to teach Typography, to teach Print, to teach Photography of a couple of different levels and really dive in with all of that different content and sort of structure of the curriculum.

Neil: It's new stuff every single day!

Brytton: Yes!

Neil: So, how did you bring your...how did you bring your thesis work into that? So that was work that you were really passionate about, so how did you kind of wrangle that into these courses that are Web Design that are very technical and I'm guessing they were Lower Level courses, or were they Upper Level?

Brytton: They were Upper Level, so we had an Intro Technology and sort of a General Education options but once the student declared their Major, the rest of those studios were upper division for



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both Graphic Design Majors or Visual Art Graphic Design-focused Majors or Marketing and Communication Majors who might be taking them as electives for their degree.

(15:00)

Neil: Gotcha. So, how did your thesis work...mesh into those courses?

Brytton: Yeah. Well, one thing that I did was, very early on, try to find ways to take design out of a traditional setting and maybe have a client that doesn't know what their problem is or doesn't really know what they need and let students and us in the classroom kind of come up with a solution to the problem or a way to...so, sometimes there was an open-ended project of, hey I found a client: they're coming in. I have no idea what we're making for this project, so just hold on for the ride a little bit!

Neil: Oh my gosh, I love it!

Brytton: You'll turn something in! Not to say that that always was successful or went well because there's a lot of anxiety on the client, you and the students' parts in knowing, we don't know what the outcome's going to be or the timeline. But I have to give them a grade. I also tried really hard to incorporate my way-finding and the environmental component and some of the outside fields that had an influence on me that if you're making a poster, it's not existing just on the computer screen or as the print-out but it's living in a hallway or it's living on a bulletin board and you've got to be aware of that visual noise or its presence and so sometimes we'd print it out and we'd go hang it up on a billboard full of other things and be like, well how does it read now? How does that read differently than it did hanging up on the nice white wall in the classroom? And so it was taking some of those ideas like that rather than directly, let's make environmental design, which we do...I do projects in that in all of my...and anyway, I can because I have a passion for it, particularly we can do it in Typography classes really successfully, learning about the accessibility and the sizes and printing out signs and hanging them up and seeing how they really work.

Neil: How has the student response been to those projects? Did you meet with any resistance or were they kind of all in?

Brytton: Oh, there's always resistance when you're like, I have no idea what you're turning in for a project but we're doing a project! But you know, if you're passionate about it and you can show them



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that this is going to be a positive outcome and you're exposing them to what it might be like when they're out there in the real world, they may not love it in that moment but the feedback later on is really what I'm looking for, that student who graduated and was like, I had no idea that everything we did in the classroom was exactly what it would be like working in a design firm where my boss would be like: here's your client. Go. Do. And I was like, do what? And then I'd flash back to that moment in class where I was like, oh gosh, I don't have a project assignment statement. That's what I want. I don't necessarily need to create a completely comfortable space in the classroom to get results; I need to create that space that prepares them for something great afterwards.

Neil: So, after you were...after your year was up, or after your three years were up, excuse me; then what? What happened?

Brytton: So, I was going to have to apply for the Tenure Track position that was opening up during the third year while I was the Assistant Professor and there's always that chance: what if I don't get a job here? What if I don't get offered and so I started looking at other positions. I started looking at other Tenure Track jobs. I by now knew, OK, obviously three years I'm loving it, I want to keep teaching; it's probably time to start looking for that security that Tenure brings and with that came a realization of, can I afford to live in Washington State? Is that a location that I can be happy at, living in an apartment, living on a shoestring budget? At the time, I mean now, San Francisco is certainly sky-rocketing as the place you can't afford to live, but at the time, Washington State was really the Number One area of high rent, high grocery bill. We don't have Income Tax but that doesn't account for thirty per cent of your...you only have thirty per cent of your income to work with because the rest goes to pay your rent! And it wasn't that bad but it definitely felt like I won't ever be able to have a house here on my own, and I don't ever want to not be able to survive on my own and my family was in the Mid-West, my best friend from College was living in Illinois and there happened to be a job and it had a potentially, it sounded a lot like the job I had at the time, it was in a public institution, Tenure Track and I thought, well I'll throw in my résumé and I got a call and I came and interviewed and I loved the people, I loved all of the resources that were available; I loved the idea of driving to see my family rather than flying. Now I kind of take that back; eight hours of driving, three hours of flying, but...that's a whole 'nother story. And I just...and right now, Illinois is very affordable. Even five years ago when I moved here, it was very affordable. I spend less on mortgage, taxes and insurance for my home than I spent on rent for an apartment and that was appealing. And it's a sad commentary on the status of pay and education but it was a feeling!

(20:21)

Neil: Well, no, living in Washington sounds a lot like being in Graduate School; you have a very small amount of income that you have to make spread and after you graduate, you want to have a larger income! So you don't have to live that way!

Brytton: Yeah, I got sick of saying, hey for Christmas could you buy my flight home?

Neil: So you interviewed, got the job and then you had to move.

Brytton: Yes.

Neil: And how long have you been at the University of Illinois?

Brytton: I've been teaching here for five years and I'm about to start my sixth year.

Neil: (sharp intake of breath) That sounds like a Tenure packet to me.

Brytton: It is! It is indeed. My Tenure packet is due second to last week in September, so about a month from now.

Neil: Oooh, so...can you walk us through the Tenure process there? So, have there been any check-points up until this time and then what does your Tenure packet or your Tenure and Promotion packet, what does that look like or what does that consist of?

Brytton: Yeah, so there has been two check-points along the way. Major check-points. We have a two-year and a four-year review prior to applying for Tenure in your sixth year, as well as every year we turn in an Annual Performance Review, which is essentially like a fancy annotated CV. If for any reason that Annual Performance Review shows that you're not...haven't done anything, you'll get feedback in a letter saying, instead of getting your normal raise next year, we're a little worried. I've never gotten one, but I imagine that's what it says!

Neil: I am glad you have not gotten one of those!



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Brytton: Yeah! And so you go through the two and the four and along the way you get of course letters from...it goes to review at your Department level, the College level, there's a University Committee as well as the Dean of the College, the Provost and then finally the Chancellor letter which is more of the formality of you've gone through every letter positive or negative or here's what they've said: please take note. And those letters are both, the things you're doing great, the things they want you to continue, but it also gives you constructive feedback on, here's some areas we have of concern; here's some things that we think you should focus on; here's some things we think you should clarify a little bit more for those of us that aren't versed in your field. I'm the only Professor of Digital Media or Graphic Design at the University, so I'm the only one qualified to say, this is what I do, and so I have to be really clear because everyone else reviewing my packet is coming from very different fields than my own.

Neil: That is some really helpful feedback though?

Brytton: Yes! Yes.

Neil: So, your Tenure packet, so thankfully you've gotten through all those check-points with flying colors, definitely.

Brytton: Yes!

Neil: And now you have to put your packet together, so what does that look like? Is it digital? Is it analogue? What's the process there?

Brytton: So, it's a physical packet.

Neil: Oooff!

Brytton: Yeah! You write, essentially you're limited to thirty pages every step along the way, so the two-year was ten, four-year was twenty; Tenure is a thirty-page Narrative, is what it's called, that outlines your Teaching, Scholarship and Service, your sort of statements of philosophies on each of those and how they are reflective of one another as well as sort of the products, methodologies and outcomes for each category and your future both short and long term goals in those areas. Along with that, you turn in your updated CV and what we call here a Portfolio; it's a fancy word for a three-ring binder full of all



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of the things that you're talking about in that Narrative, that sort of serve as proof but also illustrative of those concepts that you're talking about. So if you're talking about how you've taken a course, for instance with Teaching and taken feedback from the Student Evaluations to sort of help them understand a concept that maybe they weren't getting, or they gave you feedback every year that it was...the project's too long and you finally listened and made some changes, you can include those changes in that format. Or you had an exhibition or you presented a paper or you wrote a book, you put the sort of components of that. Both so that those colleagues can see, read, visualize what it is you've done but also that yes, I did this and here's the actual proof I've done that, and that Portfolio is not supposed to actually include the book, if you have a book, but rather some component of the book. It was a way to prevent someone walking in with a cedar trunk full of things to review or a milk-crate or something; it has to fit in a three-ring binder. So, for instance, I have been the Editor, the Graphics Editor, on a text book that's releasing this fall with the Women and Gender Studies Professor here at our University and I won't put my actual book into my binder but I have a copy of the final proof of the cover and examples of some of the graphics that I worked on throughout the book that'll just go into the binder itself so that they can see that.

(25:50)

Neil: Congratulations on that work too!

Brytton: Oh, thank you!

Neil: So, have you had a mentor this whole time there or have you been kinda navigating this on your own?

Brytton: So, my University's been pretty great. I get a Department mentor, a Faculty mentor in...they try to match you with somebody that has some sort of area of similarity to you that's at the University level as well as we have a program called Peer Review of Teaching and they assign you with somebody that will come into your classroom, observe and give you feedback; it doesn't go in your file, it's not on permanent record, it's just meant to be helpful to you as to what you might not notice in the classroom that they do. So I've had three different people essentially helping me along the way. My Department mentor is also my former Department Chair; he's no longer as of this year, rotational changes and so it was nice, the person who was in charge of making big decisions and helping me through the process was also my mentor and so that was really easy to have those conversations. The outside Faculty



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member, Dr Kathy Novak in Communications here at the University, has a background in Photography, Photo-Journalism and teaches Advertising, so definitely have so many things we can talk about and have in common and I've been very blessed, we've worked together recently on a paper...well a conference presentation and then a published paper in Exposure magazine talking about the changing future of Photography Education, because I teach Photography One and Two and she teaches a Photo-Journalism class and how that's changing in our digital culture, so I have a mentor who I now can collaborate on research with, which has been really nice. And then for peer review of teaching, I just happened to get paired with somebody that's in my Department and so I have a close working relationship with them and so I can ask them kind of nonchalantly like, hey, we forgot to schedule that peer review of teaching. How's next week? And they're like, yeah, let's do it. And she's been at the University Tenured...I want to say she's been here for ten, maybe fifteen years, so she's very versed in the system and she has great feedback and she teaches in the Theater Department so she's also sort of a non-traditional classroom setting and so she can really understand that I'm not going to be standing up in the front of the class lecturing from a text book. That's not what Design education typically looks like.

Neil: Or should be. So, kind of going a little bit off-track, the Photography courses that you teach, do you find that students are really involved in that? I mean, since we have smart-phones now, we can just open our camera app and then just take some pictures and there's a pretty little grid in there and if we just hit just right then yay, we have a photograph. What are your students' expectations when they go into that course?

Brytton: I think that their expectation when they go into the course is that they're going to do that and get graded on it; they're just going to be able to walk around Campus snapping photos on their iPhone and be able to turn it in for points, right?

Neil: Oh my gosh, I love it!

Brytton: But my expectations for the course is that by the time that they've finished the class, they're going to be an expert in manual mode in a digital SLR.

Neil: Whoa!



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Brytton: And so we actually have the resources, that's one of the reasons I like this job; we have cameras available for checkout through the Department, so every student can be outfitted with a digital SLR. We have a photography studio for portraiture with lighting and backdrops; we have another for objects so that we can do product photography. We have a darkroom and so they have at least one project in film, when working in the darkroom.

Neil: In film?

Brytton: Yeah! And I teach Photography Two and we work in alternative processes so whether we're using film or we're using digital, we print on alternative materials, so for instance a ceramics student might take that photography class and they might make ceramic tiles and we print their photographs onto ceramic tiles using liquid light.

Neil: I want to do that!

Brytton: Yeah! It's really fun; it's experimental, you get dirty but also stay digital. You kinda sort of...branching into where contemporary Fine Art is, mixing of the medias rather than just staying traditional. And then we move through genres and we do fun things. I think Photography should be fun. I think education should be fun but particularly Photography because it is so ubiquitous and it is in all of our hands in our phones. Why not teach students how to pop, to catch popping a water balloon on a digital SLR? Something that's almost impossible to do on your camera, that moment when the balloon peels off but the water stays perfectly...they can't see that on their phone but we can do that with a digital SLR, we can do that in a lighting studio, we can look at macro and take a lens off a camera and reverse it and play with what the objects do when you do that. Just get really playful and fun and expose them to a new world.

(30:45)

Neil: Experimental. Experiential learning; it's so fun! It's so fun and I think that helps them, or I would assume that it would help them in problem-solving and pushing a little further with what if we do this, what if we do that, which is a really good, really good skill to have.

Brytton: And then of course I also...we're talking about ethics and we're talking about what does it mean to look at a photo and just recreate it? What does that add to the value of the world of



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photography? So I make them question their choices on their Instagrams, on their Facebook photos and make them think a little bit more about that photo they're going to throw out there. And I say all of this, telling them, I have a very active Instagram full of my face and food. I'm not judging you if that's all you get out of this class, those look a little bit better, but I'm saying I want you to be conscientious of that you've made that choice!

Neil: Love it! Along with the ethics, do you talk with them about copyright? I mean I guess that would go hand in hand>

Brytton: Yes, certainly. Copyright comes into play in all of my courses. There's not a single course where I don't take at least one project and make it all about...I mean not all about: it's about making a piece of graphic design or making a photograph but it's all about learning copyright while doing that. I think we're in such a...Fine Art and Graphic Design and Photography, we're in such an area of sharing that we sometimes forget that sharing can be illegal or sharing and manipulating can be illegal or just copying is illegal and I'm not trying to teach students how to see something and recreate it; I'm trying to teach students how to see something in their mind they've never seen before and execute that idea. And copyright, learning about copyright and what you can and can't do with it is the best way to kind of get to that point. And I have a lot of students who may take only one class with me; they might just be a Fine Art Major and taking Intro to Digital Media so that they learn how to use Photoshop. Or I have a Comm Major who takes Intro and Print but doesn't take the rest of them and so if I limit copyright and talking about it, particularly how Creative Commons licenses work and all of those nuances to just one class or just one project in one class, I may miss some of the students, so I try to incorporate it in all of the classes.

Neil: So, how do you feel about sharing and re-mixing and Creative Commons because as Designers and Artists and Photographers, you want to make a living doing what we do and you can't exactly do that when you're taking photos and putting it up to Creative Commons but you kind of need Creative Commons to make money when you're designing. So, how do you feel about all that?

Brytton: Oh, I mean, it's definitely that double-edged sword. I do work where I'll put stuff up or I'll make it public or I'll have an experience photographing something that I'm like, maybe nobody else will ever get to this particular setting or scene or thing that I've done; I'm happy to share that. But I definitely have works where it's like, this is my own freedom, this is...or my own individual and I don't want someone else to have access to that. I think it's a balance in your own personal work of finding



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that and yeah, you're right, most of my work would not be possible without Creative Commons, both...not necessarily from the professional side but definitely I do exhibition work as well. I'm very interested in how our modern forms of communication, whether that be texting or sharing photos or SnapChat; I'm really interested in how that changes what we say, unintentionally. How AutoCorrect or...

Neil: The Devil! AutoCorrect!

Brytton: Or mis-translations of, I don't know, I use text to talk a lot and for instance, it changed somebody's name to Koran...

Neil: Oh!

Brytton: And I sent it without looking at it because I just thought it would get her name right and I was like, that is not what I tried to say! And so I'm really interested in that and so I make kind of funny playful commentary exhibition works. But most of it uses found imagery and found other people's texts that I find and are funny and I'm playing with that, so my own exhibition work is almost reliant on that Creative Commons license, sure. Yet, I don't want to do a logo for a client and then have somebody else recreate it but put a different text below, right?

(35:27)

Neil: It's quite a web, isn't it?

Brytton: Yes!

Neil: So, with your exhibition work, I mean that can be defined as your Scholarship or your Creative Activity for your Tenure packet?

Brytton: Yes.

Neil: So, how does the University of Illinois define peer review within all of that work? And when you talk to your colleagues, do they consider that Research or do they consider that just some Creative Activity?



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Brytton: Yeah, so we at the University of Illinois Springfield use the Boyer Model of Scholarship, which emphasizes four different areas. It's the Scholarship of Discovery, the Scholarship of...I'm not going to remember all four categories!

Neil: It's OK!

Brytton: But if you're a Tenure or a Tenure Track Faculty member looking to apply for Tenure and you don't have a set, set of guidelines, read Boyer Scholarship Reconsidered and use it as your guidelines because it's amazing! And essentially one of them is about creating new things, so it includes works of art as a form of Scholarship. Another has to do with reflection on your teaching and making changes in the classroom and presenting about your educational experiences as a form of Scholarship, which is as you're aware, something I'm definitely interested in. I've presented at UCDA in the past at the Design Education Summit on, here's what I've done in the classroom; here's ways you can incorporate this in your own; here's ways that we can work together to sort of incorporate this. It's certainly something I'm interested in. It has traditional Research, Scholarship of Discovery: you're in a science lab and you find a new molecule. I don't know if that's a thing but I make stuff up!

Neil: It could be!

Brytton: And so it allows me the flexibility to do exhibition work, to do client work, to work on a book project with creating graphics and helping work on copyright with graphics; it allows me to take Photography clients on; it allows me to do the whole gamut of what I do and have it count as Scholarship as long as, you're right, as long as it's peer reviewed. So if I'm doing a conference presentation and I had to submit an Abstract and get accepted, that's obviously my form of peer review. If I do client work, I'm able to justify using the College Art Association Guidelines as well as explaining the process that if a client looks at my profile or my website and my portfolio of work and says, I'm interested in doing work with you: I've looked at your work and I think you're in line with what we do, we meet and I give them sort of a preliminary, here's what I would do, here's how much it would cost, here's a sketch of what I'm thinking and they say yes, we want you to execute. How is that any different than any other form of peer review, right? They may not be another Graphic Designer, but they're looking at what I'm doing and saying this is valid, this has merit. On top of that I can in my Tenure application packet have outside people who are experts in my field say, we've looked at her portfolio of work and she's in line with what Graphic Design is. And so I have had, or I'm in the process of having a couple of colleagues that teach at different Universities look at my website or my portfolio



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on my website and just write a letter saying, her work is great, or whatever they want to say about my work: I don't get to control the letter content, but her work is what we would expect of somebody applying for Tenure in Graphic Design. With exhibitions, I do both juried, group and then I've had some solo, where gallery curators have asked me to come in; that's another form of peer review. They're asking me, putting their trust in me to execute a show. But I've had ones where I submit work and it's competitive and I get denied or accepted and again, that's no different than the conference presentations.

Neil: Yes, that phrase, peer review, can be very ambiguous at times!

Brytton: Yes. I think it's the scariest word. I think it might be scarier than applying for Tenure, is peer review, because it's so different, no matter what you do, and you just don't know what one's going to count when you're looking at a University or when you're hearing about it. You're like, peer review, wait: what does that mean? I know what Tenure means; it means you can't just fire me because I called you an idiot!

(40:00)

Neil: Love that! But the Boyer Model of Scholarship and the CAA Guidelines on peer review, those are really, really good nuggets of information. Thank you for sharing those.

Brytton: Oh yes, happy to.

Neil: So, where you are now, not only are you teaching and an educator, but you're a Director. So how did that happen?

Brytton: Yeah, so the year before I started at my University, the Department of Visual Arts and the programs of Theater and Music, which had extra-curricular opportunities such as Band, Orchestra, Choir and Theater Productions and a couple courses that supported the general educational model merged together to become the Department of Art, Music and Theater and to allow Theater and Music sort of a place to exist as while they're working to develop Minors and Majors in those areas. It also added a benefit of more Tenure Track lines to support those programs as they became an actual Department, so it was sort of beneficial for the entire University system that we get to say, not only we a Liberal Arts system but we have courses and Majors and Minors in the Arts, not just Major in Art. So

they merged and we had a Department Chair, like a standard of a Department and then in order to make sure each discipline or each program was staying on track, they had a Director for each of them. Sort of a holdover from when they were their own areas: Music had already had a Director and so had Theater. When that merged, then Art by necessity needed a Director and so our Chair of our Department for the last six years, two different three-year terms and Director of Visual Arts, his term was up as Chair and he asked to also be able to have his Chair be done, or his term be done as Director, so that he could get back to focusing on teaching and scholarship and all those things that meetings stop you from being able to do as efficiently and there's some people that are going on sabbatical; there's some people that weren't interested and I certainly am. I'm always willing to step up to make sure our Department's moving forward correctly, so I take over, yeah, like I think my contract starts tomorrow morning, right? So, five o'clock tonight, the same thing. For the next year at least, possibly two, I will be serving as Director of Visual Arts.

Neil: Congratulations!

Brytton: Thank you.

Neil: And then, what does that position entail? Do you know?

Brytton: Meetings, I'm sure! Yes. I'm essentially the convener of Visual Arts. I make sure we are meeting regularly, we're staying on task. I'll attend some of the meetings with the Dean when it comes to budgetary information for the area; I'll meet with the Department Chair, with the other Directors on a regular basis to talk about budget, to talk about curriculum, if things are changing; to review any new developments. I have a course release, so I'll have one less course throughout the entire school year so that I can accomplish those goals and those tasks. Yeah, it's nice. Maybe it's just me but I got into this to teach; it's the thing I love. Don't take it away from me! But I recognize there'll be enough meetings I will need that one less course, I'm sure!

Neil: Absolutely! Well again, congratulations on that position; it's going to be a busy beginning to the semester for you then?

Brytton: Oh yes, certainly!

Neil: So, I want to ask you about Lonely Wolves.

Brytton: Yeah!

Neil: What is that?

Brytton: Yeah, so Lonely Wolves is a monthly FaceTime...no, it's not FaceTime; we use Google Hangout and sort of a support network group that I have formed through connections with other Graphic Design Faculty in my time, my time doing this. We're all women who teach as either the only Designer or the only woman Designer in our Departments; we're all at pretty small Liberal Arts focused Universities where we don't necessarily have another Graphic Designer who might be supporting us in any way and we're at a variety of stages in our careers and it's essentially like a mentoring group, like hey, I want to try this: have any of you done this? Or hey, I've had a really rough week: I need some advice on how to deal with this challenging student situation: has any of you ever dealt with this? Or, hey, I'm really interested in making this project way better: anybody doing anything similar that we can just collaborate and make one project that we can work on together rather than the burden of always developing something on your own, and it's really just been...it started as just that: I need a mentor that's in my field and other people are looking for mentors in their field and I've met these people at various conferences that I think would be great to have these conversations and it's really just turned...it's still that but it's definitely a friendship, it's a camaraderie of like-minded souls at this point!

(45:25)

Neil: And where can people go to find this, or where...how should they get in touch if they find that they want to be a part of that group?

Brytton: Well, if you're a lonely Graphic Designer, or feeling like a lonely Graphic Designer, they could email me: bryttonb@gmail.com. We're pretty impromptu; it's not a formal group. We all have ties to UCDA, the University College Design Association; we've all met at various conferences throughout the years, the Design Education Summit and so we tend to go together now and make sure that we have that support network and we are meeting that face to face once a year but otherwise about once a month we just hang out on Google Hangouts and support one another.

Neil: Much needed, especially during the first couple of years of teaching!

Brytton: Yes!

Neil: So, we're nearing the end of our interview. So, I wanted to see or ask you if you have any parting thoughts or any up-coming projects that you'd like to talk about?

Brytton: Actually I do. I am very, very lucky; I'm being blessed. My University has recognized that while we have Senior Exhibitions that focus on showing Graphic Design work, and while I have had exhibitions that have works of Graphic Design in it, we have never had an actual Graphic Design exhibition in our Gallery and so in the Spring semester, we will be having a Graphic Design Exhibition and I will be spending the next...five months curating and looking for works to include in a show to showcase for our students everything that Graphic Design can do and we're just going to gallery-style pile the walls full is my hope, you know? So yeah, I'm hoping to issue a call, not really in a curatorial or juried fashion; not with a submission fee but just like, I want to get a wide variety and I'm interested in seeing what people are up to in contemporary design, both experimentally and with clients and hoping to get a wide variety to put up on the walls. I'm flexible as far as, if it's a poster but you don't want to ship it to me, we have wide-format printers; you tell me the size dimensions and I can print it out; if it's something physical we can work on covering shipping, get it to and from because I'd love to just...I live in the middle of the State: I live in the middle of Illinois. We're three and a half hours from Chicago, or depending on traffic, two hours from St Louis and so it's really hard sometimes for our students to see an exhibition in a Gallery but also to see contemporary Graphic Design; it's not just going to be littering their environment. Our University's in the middle of a cornfield; we're not even in the heart of the down-town of our city and I want students not just the Fine Artists, not just the Ceramicists and the Painters but the Designers on our campus to see the value of their work and I think elevating it and putting it in an exhibition, putting it on the walls and showing them that it deserves that place of prominence, which is not unprecedented: I went to an amazing show that The Walker did several years ago, I think it was traveling but I happened to hit it up in Minneapolis, of Graphic Design and it was awesome to see that work there, definitely has its place, but my students haven't had that exposure, and so that's what I'm hoping to do.

Neil: Awesome! Well, I can't wait to see it.

Brytton: Yeah, you should come!

Neil: Definitely let us know when it goes...when it's available to the public.

Brytton: Yes, I will.

Neil: All right, well thank you very, very much for being on Tell It To Neil today.

Brytton: Yes, thank you, this was amazing.

Neil: I'm glad you enjoyed your time! And I look forward to seeing you at the next conference.

Brytton: Yes, sounds good.

Neil: And good luck as you go through the Tenure process.

Brytton: Thank you.