

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 Graphic Design Professor, Shannon McCarthy, from the Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, Kentucky. Let's listen in.

Neil: Hi Shannon; how are you?

Shannon: I'm good. How are you, Neil?

Neil: Doing well, thank you for joining us on Tell It To Neil.

Shannon: No problem. Thanks for inviting me.

Neil: Of course. So, how did you get into Design?

Shannon: It was actually in High School; we had a really good Art program. I took a lot of Fine Art classes but then I was introduced to Photoshop, and me being very naïve in High School I thought that was all Design ever was and will be. I was never introduced to anything else but that's OK, that was a great start to it and so that really wanted me to go into more understanding what Design was overall.

Neil: So what type of work have you done?

Shannon: A lot of different kinds! I try to keep it a little bit more community based, research based, which I'm sure we'll get into a little bit later, but I've also done some just fun projects along the side. For clients I mostly try to work with smaller corporations or just starting out businesses to give them a good leg-up and understanding of what Design is and how important Design can be for their company, so I really try to find them mostly to work with.

Neil: That must be really rewarding then?

Shannon: I find it to be. I hope they do as well. Most of them do!

Neil: I'm sure they do! So, you were interested in Design in High School or you were introduced to it in High School and then I'm assuming you went and got a BFA?

Shannon: Yes, I got a BFA in Applied Media Arts through Edinboro University which is in Erie Pennsylvania and so that's where I sort of had explored it where I was like, why, there's just not Photoshop? There's so much more to this! It was...

Neil: There's a lot more to this!

Shannon: Yes, there's a lot more, so it was a great start to understanding and I also fell in love with printmaking, more so screen-printing and I found out how Design and Print can go so beautifully together, so Print's just never dead, no matter what anybody ever tells you; there's so many ways to bring Print, to keep Print alive and to strive to other techniques for the future for it.

Neil: Absolutely, I'm glad you said that. Print is not dead!

Shannon: No! Never!

Neil: So, then after your BFA degree did you work for a few years or did you go immediately and get an MFA?

Shannon: No, it was about two years that I was working in the field through internships, small jobs, freelancing, so it was a random package so it was sort...understanding with Design, so I had a couple of internships; some were good, some were awful and that's the way it goes and I realized through those experiences that though Edinboro gave me a good start, I needed to know more and I wanted to know more and with me, I love learning, so I knew I wasn't done learning and I knew there was a lot more out there that I wanted to learn and strive for and excel at so I knew it was time to make my way into a Graduate School. And also just where I was, Erie, Pennsylvania, though I loved the city it could be a dry zone at times for Design careers to really flourish if you want to go past a certain degree, so I knew it was just time for a new adventure; I was young enough, I wasn't settled yet so it was my time to go into the torture zone of Graduate School!

Neil: So, where did you go to Graduate School?

Shannon: I went to MCAD, which is Minneapolis College of Art and Design, right in the, almost right in the heart of the city.

Neil: And what made you decide to go there?

Shannon: It was far from my family! And I know that sounds bad but again, it was that time where I was young, I didn't have a lot to tie me down and I wanted an adventure and I wanted to be away from family to make sure that I could do it and succeed at it and it was the worst two years of my life just because it was such a big adventure for me; I've never been away from my family that long; my college was thirty minutes away, I'm very close-knit with my family and it was a whole new experience and a whole new culture with just Design thinking but also the community and it was a culture shock, and a beautiful one at that, and my boyfriend, now husband, he went with me as well so just learning about a new culture, culture shock and living with someone for the first time in a very tiny apartment; it was rough but I made it through, thank God!

(5:04)

Neil: That sounds like a lot of life experience all wrapped up in two years!

Shannon: It was very crammed, yes! But you can do it!

Neil: So, can you talk a little bit about your work during Graduate School since it was only a two year program; that's a really condensed time-frame to get work in.

Shannon: Yes, I'm kind of very special like that and honestly it wasn't the right program for me. I just...I think I needed more time to develop but it did teach me to be strong and that people aren't going to always like your work and people are sometimes going to love your work and that will help you grow, so I've had the nicest and harshest criticism while I was at MCAD, and that just made me grow even stronger as a Designer and as a person, being able to excel, definitely, but yeah, so a lot of more social justice, community-based work, that's really where I started to gather that inspiration, so I was

developing my thesis about plastic consumption and I did take an online class and it was for more Environmental Studies with Design and so it was an MA class and just by reading that I really got into understanding the environment and how production of materials are made and I was always interested in the environment, even when I was young, so that just really sort of sparked for me, but I knew I wanted to stick with an MFA because I wanted to teach that through Design, but that helped for my whole thesis about NO AWAY, an awareness campaign about plastic consumption.

Neil: So, is that campaign still alive?

Shannon: It is. It's very much alive and it really helps now with my Tenure Track process and last semester actually I just got a Fellowship Grant through ECU, Eastern Kentucky University, and what I decided to do with that was to work with High School and Middle Schools around Kentucky so anywhere from Lexington to, all the way up towards Cincinnati, almost to, almost West Virginia and I was able to sort of reinvent it a little bit for Kentucky because it originally started with inner city and lower income teenagers who I really wanted to grab their attention because teenagers are the change-makers, so I wanted to change that slightly for Kentucky and get people interested and besides working with that, I've been doing small workshops with ECU and whoever's really interested in making sort of T-shirt bags; people donate T-shirts they no longer work or don't fit and then we do a no-sew, easy to do, all you need is scissors and a T-shirt and a new product and you can reduce your plastic consumption, so that's been really popular and with that I've been bringing in metal straws, sometimes bamboo toothbrushes, so people can see alternatives to it and I have much more of this information on my website as well, which is noaway.org

Neil: Great. Well, congratulations on all of that.

Shannon: Thank you. It was nice because it was a course release. I didn't die!

Neil: Even better! So, when was the a-ha moment that you thought you wanted to be a Design Educator? Did that happen during your MFA degree or your BFA or somewhere in between?

Shannon: No. It happened in between, so it was when I was done graduating but during my internships and just little freelancing and working for small companies and I just knew there was more to know and you know, ECU was getting a new teacher and she's done a lot for that University and again, I had a

great start there but I just needed more, especially with professional development which has just started there and the class was after I left, but that's OK! I learned on my own from there, but it was during that time that I'm like, I really love to learn and I think I could teach people what maybe I haven't learned and then I'm learning on my way and to have a bigger and broader than just like, this is how we work with image and type on a page, a little more of a life lesson and that's when I went to Graduate School specifically to teach, to want to be a teacher, an educator.

Neil: And I love...I love that story too! Correct me if I'm wrong, but you've done some research on the first few years of teaching?

Shannon: So, what I'm trying to do, and again I have a heavy load just trying to get into Tenure Track, so no NO AWAY takes a good portion of that because I already feel comfortable and I'm progressing that in different manifestations. With Fresh Meat, which can still change its name what I'm trying to do is get the attention of other educators in Graphic Design specifically to help me make an educational series of books or booklets more so, and it's a combination of sort of what already exists but it involves the big names of Designers but also smaller...not smaller Designers but from smaller Universities, because I think everyone has a say; everyone has great ideas for lessons and just life lessons and they need to be shared to I'm really trying to reach out and do like a ground roots...you know what I'm trying to say...

(10:12)

Neil: Grass roots! Grass roots!

Shannon: Thank you, thank you! You can edit that one out there. Woow! But yeah, trying to do a grass roots sort of campaign for that, and I have multiple people interested, you too are interested in that...

Neil: Absolutely!

Shannon: ...and just trying to get essays, different lesson plans and of course I'll be putting some of my stuff and doing small blips of writing but I like to be more of an editing process and really just welcome everyone's advice so people that in Graduate School that are just like, well, I sort of know that I want to be a teacher but what does that really involve, because I had no idea, apparently, and people that had

been Tenured for twenty years, what does that involve? And what type of life lessons do they have to teach people that have only been there for three, four, five years. So, everyone has something to learn, something to teach or something to share and I just think that should be published.

Neil: Oh my gosh, that sounds really similar to what I'm doing here!

Shannon: Exactly! And that's why we should be partners!

Neil: Absolutely! So, how did you get to where you are right now? Because you're at Eastern Kentucky University, correct?

Shannon: Yes, I am.

Neil: So, how did you...what was your path, so from graduating with your MFA degree from MCAD to Eastern Kentucky University; what happened between those two points?

Shannon: Sure, so I actually went to South Dakota State University first, that was my first teaching job, and it's about four hours away from Minneapolis, so it was kind of nice because I could go back to the city if I wanted to. It was educational because I learned how much I actually did learn from MCAD and didn't learn but also on my own too, because MCAD is more about learning the craft, the art and the design behind everything and they had an amazing education class and I had a wonderful teacher, it was just very short and I just needed more development on that and that's what teaching is; you develop throughout the years, you get a little push. Some people get a little bit more with a three year degree: mine was two, so it was a little short but I had some teaching experience, Assistant Teaching experiences; I taught too and that was great but I just needed more. So, South Dakota was a big learning curve for me and it was as you would say, in the middle of nowhere, for me, and it was very cold.

Neil: It was...Brookings is a little remote!

Shannon: Yes. Wonderful people, just very remote. The campus is lovely but yeah, it was forty degree or minus forty degrees for about a month straight, so that gets a little daunting on the soul from time to time, when you live by yourself!

Neil: I just had a shiver!

Shannon: Yeah! So it's the first time I'd lived by myself, in a new State, not really knowing what I was doing, trying my best and living in a very cold climate, so it was an experience!

Neil: And I want to say that's where we first met; there was a UCDA Conference up there?

Shannon: Yes, so that was the year after I left, I was actually in West Virginia at that point and...yeah, I came back...

Neil: Sorry: we're skipping ahead!

Shannon: No, that's fine! And I came back for that. Again, I had some great colleagues. I had a great person who was there for three years and she really helped me; she's actually now in the industry working in California but yeah, I had some great colleagues who really helped inspire me.

Neil: So, you were working there and then...was your contract up, or?

Shannon: Yes, it was a one year visiting position; someone was on sabbatical and they needed extra bodies to teach, so I was happily employed for a nice year there. And they make their own ice cream there and it's really yummy, so stop by South Dakota just for the ice cream! But not in the winter, because you won't want it! Anyways, and then I went to West Virginia, and I went to Shepherdstown, West Virginia and it was the most beautiful place in the world to me. It was a small town, it was around four thousand students, the whole campus, which was great. And then it was an hour and a half from DC in Baltimore so it was sort of like my little dreamland, but that was only a visiting position as well, so that was two years.

Neil: Comparing those two experiences, so South Dakota, that was a State School that had how many students? Do you remember?

Shannon: Oh...I don't, but it was, you know, because it's in South Dakota it was much smaller so, someone's going to hate me and you're going to have to fact-check this. I'm going to say twelve thousand, maybe? Yeah.

Neil: OK, we'll go with that! But, so that's kinda like a medium-sized school, small-medium. And then you went to a school that had four thousand students.

Shannon: Yes.

Neil: Can you compare or contrast those two experiences?

(14:53)

Shannon: Yes, I can! Yeah...no, I mean, South Dakota, and I might be like pegging people too much but you know, a lot of them came from hard-working families, a lot were also first generation, you know, but there's a lot of farms there, there's a lot of hard workers and in South Dakota, they really push themselves; they were up for the challenge. And again, I was still getting my sea-legs or teaching-legs or whatever you want to call them but they went with me and I had to teach both anywhere from drawing to Type 2 so you could see I favored some classes over the other, perhaps! Like drawing I'm like, OK, I'm going to get this done, we're going to learn something but I don't like it! But, so they went with me and they were super hard workers, especially the Designers who were upper classmen(?), they did a great job, where with West Virginia I had amazingly talented students; I had great students and amazingly talented in South Dakota too, I just feel that in West Virginia they were...they, what were they, first time college students, they need a little bit more hand-holding as well. I'm not quite sure why that was but it definitely seemed like that.

Neil: Hmm, OK, yeah, it's...every institution is different and especially with a large, contrasting a large student body with a smaller student body; there's different dynamics there, especially in the classroom. So, you're at West Virginia and you were there for a year?

Shannon: I was there for two years, yes and the reason why I liked it too, it was a newer establishment; I mean, they'd been there for a while but the building was new, it was only like four or five years so they had a lot of...I know, it's amazing!

Neil: Ooohh...

Shannon: The building was so, like, beautiful and I just...yeah, just go and visit it. And the town is just so cute, so I really fell in love with that place. Yeah, and it was just me and one other colleague and she was there for a year and then she left and I was on my own for a year and then they....she came back, she wanted to go into the industry to test it out again and she found out that she liked teaching better so she came back and just because of the low enrolment of how small the University is, they were only able to have like one Tenure Track person or Tenure person and then a couple of Adjuncts because I think as we all discovered, Adjuncts are paid less and they wanted...

Neil: Much less!

Shannon: Much, much less, and unfortunately especially there. But they're paid much less and they also wanted professionals that were in the field that were willing to teach one class. So the Adjuncts were amazing Professors, it's just they could only do one class because they were busy doing their professional lives, so...

Neil: So, your colleague might have come back because of all the vacation time?

Shannon: I mean, possibly! You know, sometimes we just crave to go back in the field and experiment and try that sort of life out again and it just might have not been for her and she came back to education. So, for whatever reason she came back and they kept here and I was able to then experience a Tenure Track position at Eastern.

Neil: Gotcha, yeah. I kid...but when you get the...

Shannon: But no, I would miss that too, yeah!

Neil: Well, I mean, teaching, there's a want to learn information and there's a want to share that information with others and sometimes the industry doesn't allow that to happen.

Shannon: Yes.

Neil: So there's that calling and I totally get it! So, West Virginia, then you went to Eastern Kentucky?

Shannon: Yes. Yep, so this is my third fall coming up. So, two solid years down! And I'm not sure how many more to go!

Neil: So, when you got hired at Eastern Kentucky, did you negotiate any years towards Tenure there?

Shannon: I did not, just because I had Visiting only under my belt. It's still going to be between a five to seven year process so on my contract right now, I have to go up to Tenure by 2022. So that makes sense, that's about six years, yep.

Neil: Yeah. So, can you walk us through the steps or the breakdown of the Tenure process at Eastern Kentucky, if you know it?

Shannon: A little bit yeah, I mean, I really have to just review every time I want to do it. So, every year I have to do a binder, and it is a physical binder that we don't have digital files yet and I really have to put down what I've been doing in my classes, the scholarship that I've been doing, the research that I've been doing; anything that shows I've been pro-active, I put it in. So, last year I made my binder a little bit too big: it was about, oh, four inches thick and they're like, you know, you don't have to put like every one of your presentations in there, or you don't have to put this whole book in there. I'm like, well, I did that book! Or a cover for the book, I could just put the cover instead of the whole book in. So my binder this year will be slightly smaller but not...but just as significant. Or more, hopefully!

(20:17)

Neil: So, every year there's those annual reviews then?

Shannon: Yes, yes, so my Chair, she's like, do it during the summer and I did not listen to her the first time: I did it like the first couple of weeks in School because I just kind of forgot about it and it was torture, so, do it in the summer! Do it in the summer! So, that's like next week, that is my week long task and it will probably take more than a week to get that together before School starts, because School's coming up quick! But...let's get that done.

Neil: It is!

Shannon: Yeah, so we do that and then we have a Review Committee in our Department and it's by three people that have been Tenured for X many years, whether it's just Tenured or have been Tenured for twenty years, and so they go through with a fine toothcomb, very fine tooth, which is great, because I need to know this. And they're just there to help me and guide me. They're like, well, really this isn't Scholarship; this should be under Department Service and change this to this and you're lacking this, so work on this. You have way too much of this so stop doing that! Different things like that so they're just prepping me for people that are going to be reviewing my binder in the end that have no idea really what a Designer does and they want to make sure I get the full benefits and satisfaction of what I've done and to be proud of that and to make sure that others understand how significant my work and what I've been doing, my research has been for the University and myself and the Department and because a person in the Science field might not understand our English and I want to make sure that they do, so they're prepping me for that.

Neil: Yes, so are there any...are there any mentors that you have in your Department, maybe other colleagues that are helping you out with that?

Shannon: Really, EKU's nice with that because as soon as you come in, they give you a mentor to go with, so mine was actually my Chair and she just became Chair when I go there; she was Head of the Department when I came. So it was a nice switch-over and she is amazing; she makes sure I get all my stuff in on time, just like a good mom! Or a mentor. But she's great and so she's amazingly busy being Chair and way too important for me but she always makes time for me when I have like a billion questions to ask her but honestly, besides her, all my colleagues are very open and even though they're not maybe Design, they are Art, so they've been through the process, they know what's expected, so if I have any questions, they're all happy to sit down with me and talk to me and make sure I'm on the right path.

Neil: That is a wonderfully supportive environment. So, as you've been putting your Research and Scholarship together, have your colleagues or have the Review Board, I use that term loosely, Review Board, have they understood the Scholarship that you're doing or have you had to kind of explain yourself a little bit more in depth or has it just kind of fallen on deaf ears?

Shannon: No, I think they understand, especially with NO AWAY because they understand the benefit it does for the Department with recruiting, so I'm actually getting out there to the schools so that looks good on us, as long as the students like me, so that's, you know, hopefully! And they see that I'm going out there and sort of being a cheerleader for ECU as well and just the importance it actually holds because plastic consumption, especially is becoming really pronounced; you see it all the time on Facebook; SnapChat's finally picking it up; Instagram is huge with it, so it's viable, they're understanding why I'm doing this and why ECU needs to be doing this and we have a great sustainable committee at ECU and they're amazingly supportive, so I have a lot of rallyers with me and it's a great environment to work in.

Neil: That's amazing. So, I teach at Drake University and it was about five or six years ago, somewhere in that timeframe, the students here petitioned the University to stop providing plastic water bottles for events because there's so much trash after events. And they were successful at it.

Shannon: That's awesome. That's exactly what we need.

Neil: Well, unless you're thirsty and you don't have a cup!

Shannon: Well, think ahead!

Neil: That's one nice project that came out of your MFA degree that you're applying in your classroom then, correct?

(24:52)

Shannon: I'm trying to, yes, so actually I started a little bit last year but this year I'm really going more like full hog for it and with my production class it's just more about printing and just understanding more of the branding process. What I'm going to be doing with that is at there are four projects and Project Four is an awareness campaign, so awareness campaign plus consumption, and I don't care what they want to have people become aware of: that is up to them as a group, so they have to work as a group, which is a huge thing for students, it's very hard so that's a huge challenge in itself and that will be graded heavily, but also what can help someone? So, do they want to hold a knitting club and then

everyone knits a sweater and then they donate that or do they want to do, want to produce a cheap cook-book that people can come, they can learn how to cook a cheap meal or a quick meal for college students or just to like donate and then they could make a book out of it and people can have that book or maybe a little calendar; maybe they want to hold a run and then they could have awareness posters about, something that they're really positive about they want to see change in. So that's...I want a spark of fire and I feel like this is a great way to do that where they can come to a consensus and figure out exactly what they're passionate for.

Neil: So each student will be doing their own project or...

Shannon: No, it will be a group project but only of like between maybe three or four people and so they'll have all semester to do it; they have check-in points, so every project I have, OK, here's a half a work day or a third of a work day; go at it and you guys have to figure out the rest of your calendar together and this is what I expect to see at every check point and then at the end they'll have about two, two and a half weeks to wrap it all together and throw this event. And they could do it, like if they wanted to synch up with a sorority, they can do that, but they had to build all the promotional things so whether it be posters or if they want to do Instagram stories or SnapChats or whatever, they have to have at least six pieces to inform and then a give-away piece, so when they actually hold the event, maybe it's a little infographic about...I don't know, campus rape. I know that's really serious, but those are important things to be aware of. Or if they want to do something with the LGBTQ community; I have some great students who are very passionate about that and I would love to see that progress into something bigger on ECU.

Neil: Definitely. So they actually have to put an event on then as part of the project?

Shannon: Yes, yeah, so that's why I say synch with something in Richmond or synch with an organization or a sorority or a fraternity because they need those sort of like points too, those activities, they need to get those done, I know that for a fact, so I think it would just be a great collaboration process. They just need to make sure they know exactly what they want to do and to do it in a timely manner.

Neil: Always in a timely manner! That was a question I was going to ask. In Richmond how big is the non-profit sector there? Are there a lot of non-profits that are seeking help or that could use help?

Shannon: There are definitely a few. I've worked closely with Grace Now, which is a food shelter and it holds every first Saturday, it's Veterans' Saturday and they have a great team there, that have started that, so they provide breakfast for them, they have a Benefits person there to tell them exactly, we can cover this. They open up their clothing store for them which, everything is free, so we worked with them before, we formed a logo for them, so that's a great process and then if the students are really interested in animals then they can go figure out, well, today is Adoption Dog Day, so let's work with local dog shelter or animal shelter, be like, we're going to promote this and be like, today is our day; let's bring our friends, maybe we can get a cat or a dog adopted to a loving home. So it can really be anything, just as long as, again, I spark their interest, they figure out how to work with the community or some type of collaboration process and just start to understand why Design can equal Love.

Neil: Design equals Love. Expand on that!

Shannon: Just, I mean...I love Design; I love, maybe not everything about Design but I love a lot of things about Design and I want them to feel that passion. I think sometimes with the projects we assign, because we want to teach them certain things about the programs or about type that it gets very specific and sometimes just more of a task than a joy and so I'm hopefully going to bring again, again, that spark, I'm going to keep saying that, that joy in their eyes because they're like, OK, well me, I'm interested in helping decrease plastic consumption and just having people become aware of it, stop being a blind eye when they see a ton of it on the ground; be like, I'm going to put this up; or maybe I should stop using a straw at restaurants, because all you have to say is, please no straw. And I want them to have that sort of understanding and be like, OK, well, if I really like working for animals or if I really love animals, then why can't I make a campaign about no-kill shelters or why can't I go work at some type of establishment that protects them? They can have that, they don't have to have a nine-to-five job; they can go, do a lot of different things with Design and I want to open their eyes to that and I just want to make sure that instead of a job, it's a career and a passion and that they have that love for it.

(30:20)

Neil: Now do you find that your students are flexible enough to do that?

Shannon: That's what I'm training them in! So I hope so, yeah, I mean it's hard because the class I'm doing this with, it's only their second year; they're Juniors but it's only their second year as Designers so I am still hoping they're twisty and bendable enough to be like, OK, look at these possibilities and right from the get-go intro class I'm like, OK, these are the possibilities you can do with Design; you can be X, Y and a million Z but they're still so young that they're like, I'm not sure if I understand what you're saying, so I'm trying to open up that channel for them to understand a little bit better.

Neil: It sounds like the process of how you might do that could be a panel presentation somewhere!

Shannon: That's very true, yeah, that's a great idea.

Neil: So when I said flexible, what I meant was, outside of the classroom, do they have enough time outside to be flexible enough to go work with a non-profit or to schedule that in, because I know from my experience, a lot of our students here at Drake are double or triple Majors and scheduling something outside of class time is really challenging and difficult, so all the workshops or outside of class activities need to be planned during class time to be assured that they will make it there, so I didn't know if that was the case with your students.

Shannon: You know, you're right with that where I find a lot of students any more, they have a full curriculum, sometimes over-full curriculum and then they...

Neil: Tell me about it!

Shannon: They usually have a part-time or full-time job and sometimes an internship with that. Students that really want to excel and know that they want to be Designers will make time for that but also I make time for it in class, so that especially with this project, every project I have they have time, but I'm more than happy to meet them at any point and that's the big responsibility about being a Designer; you have to figure out your schedule and it is the toughest lesson to learn as a student and even as a young professional is, how do you balance everything and sometimes that is like, well let's not go to the bar tonight and sometimes it is well, maybe I shouldn't take this two hour shift that's going to be pay me fifteen dollars, twenty dollars, and maybe I need to work on my work. And I know that's such a complicated and difficult question and I've had a lot of trouble with students trying to figure out and balance their lives but I'm always there to help them and again, it's just a life lesson and

it's a hard one and when you learn it, you learn it good! But yeah, it's one of the most difficult things to teach them as a Professor because it's sort of like, bye-bye: fly little birdie and flipp! They could either fly or they can land hard and most of them land hard so it takes them a few times but they'll get there, they'll learn; we all have...

Neil: Yes, that is...

Shannon: I know that's harsh but...

Neil: No, no, no, that's really good advice; that's what we do as Design Educators is, here's a problem, now you have to figure it out and...figure it out!

Shannon: And that can be really scary for a lot of students. So...

Neil: Well, and for us Educators as well because you want to help and you want to tell them...no, no, no, don't go in that direction because it's going to wind up doing this and this and you don't want that, but you have to zip your lip and be like, OK, I'm just going to let them...let them go...it's going to be painful but I'm going to let them go!

Shannon: The only way you succeed is through failure, so I believe every student has to fail. It could be once, it could be five times: that's their learning process. I've failed a thousand times and I'm still here. Barely sometimes, but I'm still here, and you know that's the thing with students, they...what I've been finding out is that they put in a certain amount of time and a certain amount of effort and they're like, OK well I expect an A. I'm like, it doesn't work like that. At least for me. I'm sorry, but no. Average is a C and average is great and you'll be better, you'll get better; you'll learn to be stronger and I want you to fail. I almost push my students to do that so they can see their breaking points and sometimes that's really stressful on students and sometimes students are like, wow, you are a bitch but thank you! And I'm hoping to still get those compliments after they graduate or maybe I'll finally get compliments once they graduate and like, oh, you really prepared me for the real world Shannon: thank you. Instead of right now, where they're like, I hate you Shannon!

Neil: Yes, I've had a few students like that too!

(35:00)

Shannon: Yeah, because some of them are like, wow you really prepared us: you gave us a lot of work but you really prepared us and other people are like, I am never going to talk to you again, you could not pay me to be in a room with you. I'm like, well, that's your life lessons and that's what you've learned and you know, that's the way the game is played sometimes.

Neil: Absolutely, and you'll get paid to work in a room with someone like me though!

Shannon: It is...if they can make it then yes, absolutely.

Neil: Oh my gosh, so true.

Shannon: I know! I'm rough! I can be really mean sometimes and I don't mean to be, it's just like, I'm trying to teach them those life lessons early so they don't have a mental breakdown at twenty-five!

Neil: No. Probably some tears are shed, but...

Shannon: Yeah. Not in front of me but definitely behind, I think!

Neil: So, something you mentioned, kind of piqued my interest. You were saying a C is average and that's great. So, how do you lay out a rubric for your students for them to recognize what constitutes a C versus what constitutes an A, because it's really, really subjective.

Shannon: It is and it's a hard part about being a Professor. So, I had to pull every understanding of design that have and I have to be very open because sometimes students will design something that I personally won't like, just because maybe I don't like that style. It doesn't mean it's not good and I think students get into that realm of like, oh, well that's not Shannon's style so she's not going to like it. No, that's not how it is; I'm like OK, I don't like Picasso but I can appreciate everything he's done for us but I really don't like Picasso's work; I'm sorry all Picasso lovers out there.

Neil: (sharp intake of breath)...oh my gosh!

Shannon: I know; I can't take it; it's too much for me. Anyways, but, so I've actually been really working on my rubrics this semester. They've been more of a check-point list before, be like this is what I expect, this is what to look out for, so how does the image and type work together? What about the hierarchy of type and I list what I'm looking for. But now I've gone extremely specific; I've done a gridded-out table and little bullet points in there to be like, OK, this is exactly what I'm looking for in here. With a little bit of wiggle-room; it's not like OK, I'm looking for twelve-point type in red...on blue paper, because that would look awful, but...you know, I want them to understand I'm looking for how well you know technology, how well you work with your craft, your design and the design is the meat and potatoes, right? How they bring it all on home. So I really concentrate on that. So, see they have everything, they understand it but they might not have put enough energy into the research and ideation process which I am huge on and students, I don't know why, they just tend to not like it overall; still trying to figure out that conundrum there, but...the big thing with students and I think it comes back from High School is, my heart goes out to High School teachers; they are the warriors of the world to me! But they're like, OK, well I did this amount of work, it looks good: I deserve an A. I put in five hours, it's great. And again, I'm looking for deeper research, deeper understanding; really being a hustler almost with it. And what students don't understand is that I can completely read through their bullshit. I've had enough experience where I can be a great bullshitter and I can break down my design and it can look great; that's what you go to Graduate School for, kids: you'll learn how to bullshit great. But college students, they don't do it so well; they think they have it but I'm like, well I'm just reading through this like crazy; so work on that; work on that, students! I feel like I'm in the Comedy Hour right now!

Neil: Oh, it's fine! So, your rubrics are quite specific now, and do you get much feedback from the students when you give them comments on their work? So your final grading, do you give them a grade sheet with comments on it or...

Shannon: Yeah, so it's going to be changing because I've just developed these new rubrics and they're much more in depth but before what I would do is that I'd have basically an ABCDF category and I'd have three slots and so it would be like, Excellent, and it'd be like sort of like an A-plus, A, A-minus and I'd put a check-mark where I think that fit in. And then I would leave notes and sometimes there would be just like a small paragraph if I know they're excelling it'd be like, OK, work on this, this and this and be a little bit more obtuse with that and then otherwise it would be like just maybe paragraphs upon paragraphs of, OK let me help guide you little bit more. Because some people need that and that's fine and some people need masses and masses of notes and again, that's great. It helps them develop and I

just hope they take that like I've taken the time to really look over their work, really have them look in every direction when I'm looking at and writing these notes for them and I just hope they take that and absorb it a little bit; they might not take every comment I have and that's fine and they're their own independent person of learning and developing their styles but...yeah, I hope they realize how much time and effort I actually do put into grading their work.

(40:18)

Neil: Yes. So when they do get their grade and it's not a grade that they would have liked to have earned. Not given: earned.

Shannon: Some of them do approach me. Others just sort of hold in that internal anger until reviews at the end of the year and then it's like, she's a hard grader. I'm like, but am I? Just look at your work, absorb your work. Understand what you should have learned or have learned when you made that piece and read my comments and see if I'm really that harsh. So I try to definitely do the hamburger effect so at least they get one nice comment out of me! But usually, I mean usually it's not like, this is horrible, you didn't pay attention. It's more like, well let's look at this; you should look at A, B and C. Or, try this, or maybe this should be like this. Or, reflect back on the lesson about D, B and F, I don't know. So I....go ahead.

Neil: No, go ahead.

Shannon: No, I'm done!

Neil: OK! Well, do you give them a certain amount of time to re-do the project to earn more points?

Shannon: Oh no, they don't get to re-do it, no. It's a one and done for me!

Neil: Nope!

Shannon: I had that I think my first time in, my Chair at the time she was like, you can try this, but I've only ever had one person do it. I'm like, OK, I'll try it and no one took me up on the offer, I'm like, well, then it's not worth my effort to have that extra time for them, so...

Neil: That's great! So, you primarily teach print-based courses or do you teach any web or digital courses or do you kind of weave them both together?

Shannon: A little bit of both, so we definitely have one class called New Media and we're really trying to change our curriculum to fit into more two separate digital classes where it's more web and coding and then video animation. So right now unfortunately I have to cram everything into one class. It's hard, it's rough.

Neil: Oooh...

Shannon: So, and I'm still...it's still not the class I want it to be by far and it's not my expertise; I'm fine with video and I'm fine with animation but web, I was never really trained in it that much and I just never really pursued it. So it's still a battleground for me and I'm still learning and developing and I've just actually had two interviews with the person who runs the ECU pages, the website, and also someone who owns his own company and just does strictly web design because I want to learn more and I want to make sure I'm on the right track; like OK, what do you guys do and how can I prepare my students for that? So, that's the adventures I go on to help myself and my students to learn more and to be confident in my teaching skills. But they really love After Effects, so I'm excited for that. How we've been trying to combine it is that their second Design class is called Sophomore Studios so it's very random; like, what's going to be in this? So I'm trying to do Print and Web where I sort of introduce PhotoShop Timeline, just so they can get their little feet wet with animation and then I save After Effects for later because I want them to see, with Photoshop Timeline they can do so much and they can do so little and I want them to be able to be prepared for that, where After Effects you can do everything, so it can be overwhelming. And you can do a lot in Photoshop Timeline, honestly, it's a really fun program I think and so also with that I introduce, here's a web page design; let's break it down and figure out the parts of it and also feel comfortable designing one page, a long scroll page, so I'm trying to break it up a little bit more but we just need to honestly re-configure our curriculum path for Graphic Design which we're in the process of doing because of NASAD, we need that accreditation, or we want that accreditation, so we're trying to figure that all out, which is a pain!

Neil: Yes! Well, if you haven't yet, you should definitely check out Adobe XD for Prototyping.

Shannon: And I learned a lot of great stuff at UCDA this year, so...different mock-up systems and prototyping so I'm excited to try those out and look back on my notes and reflect about how I can add these things in.

Neil: Well, we're about at the end of our interview, so do you have any parting thoughts or up-coming projects that you'd like to talk about?

Shannon: I just want to reiterate that I think failure is fantastic and again, everyone fails, whether you believe that or not, but I failed a thousand times and it's OK to do that and all the superstars out there, they've all failed at something so don't feel bad about it because you're only going to become stronger by that and I've had a rough go at everything, just from moving to the different Universities and everyone's been welcoming but it's a huge challenge to take on and to be a Designer, you really have to have that passion for it so if you don't have that passion for it, get out now because it can be a struggle, but once you find your groove, you're going to be in love with it.

Neil: I couldn't agree more! Well, Shannon, thank you very much for taking the time out today to be on our podcast.

Shannon: Thank you so much for having me, I really appreciate it.

Neil: Absolutely, and I hope to see you at the next Conference.

Shannon: Oh, you will; I'm already planning!

Neil: Great!