TOPcast Episode #89: 7 Slogans to Save Online Learning

Narrator: What will your future look like? The job you do today could be different than the jobs of tomorrow. Some see this as a challenge. At UCF, we see opportunity, a chance for you to grow your knowledge, and strengthen your skills from anywhere life might take you. With in-demand degree programs and resources for your success, UCF Online can help you prepare for the future and all the possibilities that come with it.

(musical transition)

Tom Cavanagh: From the University of Central Florida's Center for Distributed Learning, I'm Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin Thompson: And I'm Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you're listening to TOPcast: the Teaching Online Podcast. Hey, Kelvin.

Kelvin: What is up, Tom?

Tom: What is up? Good question. Not the sun today. It's a rainy day here in Central Florida, but that's okay. We have our share of sunshine. "Sunshine." Say that 10 times fast.

Kelvin: We do. In Florida—outside of Florida, you might not know this—we refer to this rain as liquid sunshine. It's good. The Chamber of Commerce tells us to do that.

Tom: We need it once in a while. And we're not quite into our tropical season of every day getting a storm of biblical proportion for an hour and then it stops.

Kelvin: Yeah, you start seeing the arcs and the animals start floating by, and hurricanes are right after them.

Tom: Lightning. Thunder.

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: Yeah, it's always dramatic in the afternoons here in the summer, but we're not quite there yet.

Kelvin: That's true. Um, speaking of seasonal events, might I say to you, Dr. Cavanagh, happy anniversary?

Tom: Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I assume you're referring to our TOPcast anniversary?

Kelvin: Yes. Today is the first episode of our seventh season. Six years in the rearview mirror.

Tom: Wow.

Kelvin: I know.

Tom: We've been doing this nonsense for that long, huh?

Kelvin: I know. Like if the podcast were a kid, it would be like done with first grade into second grade or something I guess now, right? Something like that.

Tom: Wow. That's amazing. That is amazing. Well, congratulations, Kelvin.

Kelvin: Happy anniversary, Tom.

Tom: What is the seventh anniversary? Is that, like, pewter or something?

Kelvin: Bitcoin?

Tom: Bitcoin! Yes. I'll take that as a gift. I don't own any Bitcoin.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* Cryptocurrency of some flavor.

Tom: Dogecoin. Yeah.

Kelvin: I guess.

Tom: Okay. Sure. We'll go with that as opposed to whatever. Linen or something.

Kelvin: That's right. Bamboo?

Tom: Yeah, yeah. Well, cool. So, I assume we have something special in the thermos for our seventh season's initial episode.

Kelvin: No, it's just coffee.

Tom: Oh, okay.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* But it is, I don't know. I don't know what you think about it. I think it's fragrant and flavorful. It is another of the tasty flavored coffees. You know, I'm not a big fan of flavored coffees, but I have become somewhat enamored of the flavored coffees from Bones Coffee Company in Cape Coral, Florida. We've had a couple of those on in the past, and this one, I chose because—I think this is right—I think we both share a bit of a delight in a well-turned phrase or an elegant play on words, and today's coffee has a, eh, I don't know somewhat witty name. It's "Oh, Fudge!" Because it is—you guessed it—fudge flavored.

Tom: Uh huh. So I like it. You know, I do like a flavored coffee, as you know. It's good. Desserty for the afternoon here. "Oh, Fudge!" which is probably a reference to *Christmas Story*. That famous scene where the nuts are illuminated

just briefly in the nighttime sky. Yes. “Only I didn't say fudge.” Yeah. All right. So, there's a connection in here somewhere.

Kelvin: If you can find one there is!

Tom: Yeah, let's see. Well, I know what today's episode’s about.

Kelvin: That helps. *(laughing)*

Tom: Yeah, it does help because I'd be lost without it. You said something about how we both like a well-turned phrase.

Kelvin: Yeah.

Tom: And I'm assuming “Oh, Fudge!” is sort of the short reference to something else and not just the coffee. And we are going to be talking about phrases and, you know, sort of pithy one liners in our episode today. Am I close?

Kelvin: Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking. I couldn't come up with anything else, you know. So, there you go, and you get some fudge-flavored coffee out of it as well. So, we've tried, I think for the last few seasons, we do these season kickoffs to be a little meta, to be a little overarching, and aspirational and kind of comment a bit on the big direction of our field. So, the big idea for our season seven kickoff is kind of these pithy bumper sticker kind of slogans that articulate our aspirations for the future of high quality online, blended digital education.

Tom: Yeah, we've talked about this before, but not on the air. But our mutual friend and colleague, Chuck Dziuban, one of the things he used to do that I thought was so great was he would—when attending a large conference, like an EDUCAUSE conference—he'd go in the exhibit hall, which Julie Little once described to me when she worked for EDUCAUSE as a Moroccan bazaar.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* Some of them are bizarre.

Tom: Yeah, it's very much—not that I've ever been in person—but it's how I imagined a Moroccan bazaar to be. Chuck would go around and collect, like, the corporate branding, one liner kind of marketing spiel from all of these different booths. And then he would put them together into like a collage [or] word cloud. It was fascinating. And it was like, “Can you tell what they're selling with this thing?” And it was remarkable the similarities between them all even if it was completely different sorts of businesses. Yeah.

Kelvin: Which I think hits the two sides of a coin issues like with this gimmick for today's episode. Pithy sayings can be trite and they can miss nuance, but pithy sayings can distill a lot into a little and sometimes be memorable. So that's what we’d hope for if we throw some slogans out there. Maybe they'll be memorable. And, you know, I mean, we're kind of doing this not just to be gimmicky, but we're kind of on this trajectory, right, of focusing on quality and reputation repair post-COVID. And I don't know, maybe we'll throw the spaghetti against the refrigerator and see what sticks.

Tom: Yeah, these are all—from what it's worth—short enough to be easily Tweetable. Little pithy sayings. So, if you feel so inspired, or you want to come up with one of your own, tag us when you Tweet it. So, you have done a lot of the background legwork on this. I have just sort of, you know, casually commented on some of the sayings that you've come up with. So, Kelvin, would you like to kind of get us started?

Kelvin: Sure, I'll give it a shot. And you know, I kind of thought, you know, season seven: we'll see if we can maybe do seven of these. Maybe we'll get there. Maybe plus a bonus one or two reject pile or something. And some of these have variations, right? So, they're kind of in order-ish, maybe broader to more specific.

Tom: Seven brothers for seven sisters. These are seven slogans for seven seasons or something like that?

Kelvin: Yeah! Or maybe seven slogans to save online learning from ourselves. *(laughing)* Something like that. So first, here's two versions of the same kind of thing. Maybe "Online learning: anytime, anywhere, anyone," and I'm sure there's been a lot of entities that have used that "anytime, anywhere, anyone" kind of thing. But maybe another thing might be, "Online: anytime, anywhere, anyone" and you can kind of fill in the blank. You know, anytime, anywhere, anyone can learn, can participate, can be heard, can benefit, can get an education, can graduate. I don't know. "Anytime, anywhere, anyone" works for me. What about you?

Tom: Yeah, I like that. Yeah, and I had my own little subversion of this…[Well,] subversion of this which is maybe just a subset of what you were applying because I kept thinking of *Ratatouille*. *(French accent)* "Anyone can cook!"

Kelvin: Oh, yeah. I remember!

Tom: Anyone can learn, right?

Kelvin: Yes, that's right.

Tom: Yeah. So, but anyone can learn anytime, anywhere. You know, maybe I'll reverse it a little bit on you.

Kelvin: Yeah. Right.

Tom: And you had a couple others on there like anybody can succeed, you know, and can graduate. You know, I think those are great. And I think it's true.

Kelvin: Yeah, I think that whole any, any, any, right? "Anytime, anywhere, anyone." I really think the reason that shows up now and again through the years is I think it puts the student right at the center of everything. Because why is it anytime? Why is it anywhere? Why is it anyone? Because you're trying to afford that flexibility. I think that maybe more than a lot of things really encompasses a lot of what we aspire to.

Tom: Mhmm. Yup, it's true.

Kelvin: They go downhill from here, Tom. *(laughing)*

Tom: Yeah. Why is it online? Why is it anytime? Right, because that's the way the student needs it. It does. It puts the student at the center. All right, so that's numero uno.

Kelvin: Want to try another one?

Tom: Sure. Let's try another one.

Kelvin: "Better learning by design. Better learning online."

Tom: It's reminiscent of our last episode where we had Shannon Riggs on.

Kelvin: Yup. I guess you could have "Thrive online. By design."

Tom: Yeah. That's good. Yeah. So, here's my interpretation. It is slightly corollary, and it's a play on the orange juice. "It's not just for breakfast anymore." "It's online learning. It's not just for convenience anymore."

Kelvin: Yeah, I gotcha. Sure.

Tom: So, it's about other things. It's about success, and it's about thriving, and it's about, you know, quality. I think when online learning started—and justifiably so—it was all about convenience. It was about making learning accessible, and not to say it's not that anymore, but I think it's more than that now. It's that and success. You can do things online that you can't do face to face. You can have a qualitatively superior experience, in some cases, then you can even face to face depending upon how a course is designed intentionally. And students are engaged so that they may thrive. So, I think it's more than just convenience.

Kelvin: Yeah, I think that's good, and, you know, I'd go so far as to say, you know, Shannon, in Episode 88, really talked about how, you know, you can't compare the, you know, the best of one modality with the worst of another. And it's really all about design, regardless of modality. But I would go so far as to say, I think online invites design, right? Because we tend to have more explicit design processes supported by IDs and other professionals compared to face to face. Therefore, we tend to see better learning online. But online—I've said for years—online makes the formerly invisible visible, or the formerly implicit explicit, so that just invites design into the process.

Tom: Yeah, well, when you even think about an entity like Quality Matters, or like we have an Excellence in Online Teaching Award here at UCF, and part of that award is for the committee of faculty peers to evaluate submissions—courses—that have been designed. And, as you said, it's explicit, it's transparent, you can see the design, because there's a record of it online. And that's not necessarily the case face to face. So, it may be a great course, and it may be engaging, and you

may love going to class and listening to that professor, and but it's ephemeral, right? It disappears when that class is over. And unless you were sitting there, you wouldn't know if it was good or not. But in an online class, you would at least know that it's designed well. Whether or not it was delivered and facilitated well is maybe a separate question, but at least you know it was designed well.

Kelvin: Mhmm. Ready for a third one?

Tom: Let's do it!

Kelvin: Alright, this one, we might be controversial so it gets its own little caveat. "Online learning: it's not just Zoom." *(laughing)* Look, that might be a little defensive. We don't want to beat up on Zoom, but so many of us at this point use Zoom as like Kool Aid or something, right? We use Zoom synonymously with synchronous. So, what is that? Synecdoche or pars pro toto or something? You know, we use the one thing and mean the broader thing or whatever.

Tom: FedEx for overnight delivery or Xerox to make a photocopy or something.

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: Kleenex. Yeah.

Kelvin: That's right. All those things. All those things. So, "Online learning: it's not just Zoom" because I'm sure some people think it's just Zoom.

Tom: Some people, after the past year, they do. Yeah. Okay. I have corollary for that one.

Kelvin: Please go for it.

Tom: It's just…I imagined I might make this bumper sticker and stick it on my car.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* I can't wait!

Tom: "Synchronous online can actually be good!" Yeah, but it goes back to the previous one about intentional design and making sure that you build a course that's not just show up and talk in an online modality as opposed to just show up and talk in a classroom.

Kelvin: Yeah, yeah, I think that's good. Um, you know, I guess another corollary that—you know, I was going in this direction too, especially for asynchronous courses—is "Online we learn by doing." We've certainly talked about that, and you've experienced that a lot. The perception from some folks, parents, students, others, that, "Hey, give me some actual teaching. Let me see a video pointed at a professor. None of this teach myself stuff." Well, online, we learn by doing. I mean, you know, I was in 4H as a kid, and that was one of the—it seems like we had a lot of mottos—but that was one of the mottos: learn by doing. You know, be hands on. You know, some things have to be experienced in order to be

understood. And that's part of what the classic online asynchronous kind of…It involves you more than just like a synchronous Zoom session can.

Tom: Mhmmm. Yeah, totally agree. I mean, I'm a believer in the constructivist lens through which to design instruction, whether it's online or any other modality. And I'm not a big fan of the passive "you sit while I talk" kind of instruction that seems to be the paradigm in so many people's minds who haven't experienced real online learning other than, you know, the emergency stuff of the past year.

Kelvin: Maybe we'll do a quick plug here. We'll throw it in the show notes. Dr. Michelle D. Miller's recent Chronicle of Higher Ed piece about like a year of remote teaching. She does some reflections on that. It's a very good piece, but one of the things that stood out to me that she said, she referred to the lost ground in the fight for active learning, and I think especially lost ground in the fight for online active learning.

Tom: I agree with that fact. Even here UCF, as we've been working to get rid of kind of lecture capture in some courses—particularly in our College of Business, and we've talked about this in the past on the podcast—and had to go back to some of that same strategy by necessity over the past year. But I think once we're back, we'll pick up our initiatives where we left off and start phasing them out again.

Kelvin: Number four?

Tom: Numero quatro.

Kelvin: All right, here's where my geekiness shows. So, you can choose not to like this one. "Learn online. Travel space and time."

Tom: Wow. That's a bold statement. "Travel space and time." But I like it, because I talk a lot about the, you know, two dimensions of flexibility of temporal and spatial flexibility that online learning affords. So, I get it.

Kelvin: Yup. It's not just replicating face to face. We keep talking about this, but I'll say it out loud again. It provides flexibility for students with adult life responsibilities. That's what classic online learning does real well. We need to be open to, like you said, doing synchronous well. You know, there's times it may be you just want to travel space but not time, but traveling space and time.

Tom: Wow.

Kelvin: That's good.

Tom: Yeah, it's like a wormhole.

Kelvin: Like a TARDIS.

Tom: Yeah! *(laughing*) That's a *Doctor Who* reference, right?

Kelvin: That's right. That's right. That's good! *(laughing)*

Tom: I know enough to know that.

Kelvin: That's good. Kelvin Bentley will be proud of you.

Tom: Yes. My Time Lord friend.

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: Anything else you want to say about traveling space and time?

Kelvin: No, no, I think I think that stood on its own. Maybe that's a sign that that one works? I don't know. Maybe? Maybe it doesn't. I don't know. Number five?

Tom: All right. You want me to do number five even though it's one of yours?

Kelvin: No, please. Go right ahead.

Tom: "It's always your turn to speak in classic online courses."

Kelvin: I think that's true. I think that's true. It's maybe not as elegant a turn of phrase, you know, but it's always your turn to speak online. That might kind of work, but it doesn't always work in Zoom, right? Because it's more like the classroom because we kind of go one at a time, and you might, you know, "Oh, sorry! You didn't get a chance to speak up." But that's what I love about asynchronous courses, right? That you don't have to be the outgoing student, and, you know, there's literature that talks about the benefit to introverts or to speakers of languages other than the language of the course is taught in benefiting from that thoughtful "construct your thing you want to say." That's beautiful.

Tom: Yeah, totally agree. I mean, as you said, one of the things that we always talk about—it's become even almost a trope in online learning—is that the quiet student in the back has just as much opportunity to contribute as the sort of dominant one who always raises their hand and kind of takes over the room. And I think about like, there was a woman I knew in my doctoral program who confided in me that she had epilepsy. And she had a lot of anxiety about getting up in front of class and presenting, and she actually had asked me to present one of her projects on her behalf, and she got permission from the professor to allow me to do that. But somebody like her who had those issues in a live classroom, would be able to participate without those issues online just as meaningfully as every other student in the class, and I think it's an equalizer in many ways.

Kelvin: Yeah. Yeah, I agree. That's a good story. Can I throw in one kind of an alternate version from the reject pile? At the risk of beating on Zoom again. "Make room, not Zoom." Make room for each other to speak.

Tom: *(laughing)* See, I like those ones. I like the headline, BuzzFeed, kind of clickbaity ones. Yeah. "Make room, not Zoom." All right. That's good.

Kelvin: You want to do number six?

Tom: No, I'm gonna let you do number six.

Kelvin: *(laughing)*

Tom: I've read it.

Kelvin: "I read it, and I won't touch it." I got it. Alright, that's fine. "Online learning is about people."

Both: "It's people!" *(laughing)*

Tom: A lot of people have no idea what that reference is.

Kelvin: It's a *Soylent Green* reference. It's Charlton Heston. I actually have seen *Soylent Green*, and I kid you not, a couple years ago, it freaked me out. I was in our little kitchenette in the old office by the microwave and there was some sort of like meal packet, and it said something about Soylent Products. And I was like, "Oh my Gosh!" I think it was some kind of a meal replacement thing. Somebody used that term, and I got really weirded out for a second.

Tom: Wow. Yeah. I can't say I've actually seen the movie, but I've seen that scene like so many other people.

Kelvin: Soylent Green is people. You don't want to eat that.

Tom: Yes, but online learning is *about* people. Or you could say it's people, because it doesn't happen without people. It's not technology.

Kelvin: That's right. That's right. You know, sometimes I…maybe you've had this experience. Sometimes in the past, people say, "Eh, I don't do online courses." "Why's that?" "Ehh, I don't want to learn from a computer." You're not learning from a computer.

Tom: Right. I know.

Kelvin: So, this, too, has a student-centered quality to it. I think of our colleague, Michelle Pacandky-Brock ("Brocansky") and she's used the kind of the "Humanize ed," you know, kind of phrase: humanizing education. I think, putting humans at the center, I think that's good. And like you talked about construction of knowledge earlier, constructivism. That? This is all about the people stuff.

Tom: Right.

Kelvin: It's all the people interaction stuff.

Tom: Right. Well, and also interacting with the faculty member. A good online class is not a robo-course.

Kelvin: Faculty are people, too. *(laughing)*

Tom: Yes. Most of them are.

Kelvin: "Most of them are." *(laughing)*

Tom: All right, I'll do the last one here.

Kelvin: Yeah, okay.

Tom: Then I have a bonus for you.

Kelvin: All right. Can't wait!

Tom: So, "Online learning: you know, 25 years of evidence-based quality" or "a quarter century of evidence-based quality." Online learning didn't show up last year because of the pandemic. Or—forgive me because I'm still sensitive about it—it didn't show up in 2012 when Stanford and Sebastian Thrun did a MOOC.

Kelvin: I was waiting for that. *(laughing)*

Tom: You know, that wasn't the invention of online learning, either, I hate to tell you. Some of us have been doing it since the 90s.

Kelvin: That's right. I'm with you. Both of those things. Yeah, that's exactly right.

Tom: I'll get off my high horse.

Kelvin: That's right. And you know, there's a lot of literature, research literature, professional practice literature. There are professional associations we've talked about before. The Online Learning Consortium has a journal online learning. Gosh, Oregon State has an efficacy research database. At UCF, we have Drs. Chuck Dziuban and Patsy Moskal who have just a…gosh. I mean their catalogue of studies is immense.

Tom: The Dziuban/Moskal corpus alone is archivable.

Kelvin: Huge.

Tom: Yes.

Kelvin: It really is, right? And really, that kind of evidence supports the kind of practices that we've been kind of talking through in this episode that we try to summarize in these bumper sticker slogans. You know, the asynchronous, the flexibility, the active learning. They speak to all of that, but like you said, not new.

Tom: Not new.

Kelvin: Not bad.

Tom: No. Can be great!

Kelvin: *(laughing)* Can be great!

Tom: Just like anything. It can be great or it can stink. You know, back to the previous one that it's all about how it's designed and facilitated. At the risk of repeating myself.

Kelvin: I can't wait to hear your bonus.

Tom: Yes, well, the bonus is one I've pilfered from you, so…

Kelvin: Oh! I *really* can't wait to hear it.

Tom: Yes. So, this is me quoting you. "The future is blended." There's a bumper sticker or an epitaph, if I ever heard one.

Kelvin: Oooh. I hope it's a bumper sticker. I hope it's not an epitaph.

Tom: "The future is blended." I think it's true, especially coming out of the pandemic. So many people, so many faculty who have maybe not been teaching online have been exposed to online tools and probably are going to keep using them to some degree going forward, whether they're flipped, or it's full blend or whatever. Online learning, I think we may have reached some level of critical mass during the pandemic that will help to propel it forward.

Kelvin: Yeah, I agree with that. I think that ubiquity of online tools use, and then also counterbalance with that kind of that desire to get back into a room. I'm having to discipline myself. I've been called out twice on this in the last few months. My preferred phrase from years of doing this work is face to face to refer to four walls and a door, right? Face to face. But I've been called out twice now by colleagues who are like, "In a Zoom call, you're face to face." Like, are you, though? Yeah. And so, you know, now I'm hearing people start to prefer in person. You know, like, oh, I don't know, I guess so.

Tom: I guess I get it. I mean, I can't argue with in person, but I'm going to respectfully disagree with people who say that what you and I are doing right now over Zoom is face to face. I'm sorry, but no.

Kelvin: It's hard. It's hard to see. This is like, I see your face. You see my face, but it doesn't feel like face to face.

Tom: Yeah. No, it's not face to face. It's interactive, and it's visual, and I think it's as close as we can get in this simulacrum that we live in right now. But, you know,

it's not face to face. Anyway. So, “the future is blended” quoted, sayeth, Dr. Thompson.

Kelvin: Hey, I'm with you on that one. Yeah, for sure. Well, do you want me to try to tie this up into an even pithier tidy bow?

Tom: Yes, please my coffee, my fudge is winding down.

Kelvin: *(laughing)* I don't know, you know. Looking at it, I don't know that this bottom line is that pithy.

Tom: It’s as pithy as you get, Kelvin.

Kelvin: Truer words have not been spoken. So, slogans have their limitations. We talked about that at the very beginning. But communicating a lot of meaning through an economy of words is helpful as we seek to rally other professionals and the public—other stakeholders—to the cause of championing high quality online teaching and learning. So, if you find any value in any of those, maybe you can practice saying a lot and a little putting them on a bumper sticker, putting them in a Tweet. Hey, gosh, send us a Tweet @topcastnow, or send us an email at topcast@ucf.edu. We'd love to hear your slogans.

Tom: Yes, yes. Pick one to live by over the next year.

Kelvin: Tattoo it on your back.

Tom: That's right, like I do. Right. So, Kelvin, we have a moment. Shall we do one of our plugs—

Kelvin: Yeah, sure!

Tom: —that have come up in the old podcast machine?

Kelvin: Yeah. You want to plug it?

Tom: Sure. So, we have a new review from TOPcast listener and past mystery wooer—back when we were doing that—Amy Crowley- Crowley-Gonsoulin from Miami Dade College. Fellow Floridian here. And so, Amy says, “Tom and Kelvin are delightful to listen to as they share a cup of coffee that Kelvin always manages to connect somehow”—emphasis mine—“to the topic they are discussing that episode. They have insightful conversations often with guest speakers from the field of online learning and education that are also entertaining. I especially enjoy the addition of video to the more recent episodes.” Thank you, Amy for watching the video. “Overall, a charming and educational podcast that fosters collaboration and connection for educators, designers, and administrators in online teaching and learning.”

Kelvin: That's awfully nice.

Tom: What a lovely, lovely review. Thank you, Amy.

Kelvin: Charming. She called us charming.

Tom: Yeah. I'll take that.

Kelvin: Sure.

Tom: I don't know if it's true, but I'll take that.

Kelvin: I think the connection is more I throw it out there. I mean, I think the connecting is more heavy lifting on your end. *(laughing)*

Tom: *(laughing)* Well, thank you, Amy. We do appreciate that. Thank you, Kelvin for the coffee. So, if you have thoughts on our podcast, our little homemade podcast here at TOPcast and would like to, you know, comment or share your thoughts with future listeners, consider clicking a star rating or leaving a review on Apple Podcasts or whatever the platform of choice where you listen to this episode. We're on all major podcast platforms.

Kelvin: That's true. It helps! It helps the algorithm find things, and gosh, it just makes us feel good when we see what you said.

Tom: Yeah, we read them all.

Kelvin: Yeah, that's true.

Tom: So, awesome. Thank you. So, happy anniversary, Kelvin. Here we are in year seven.

Kelvin: Can you believe that?

Tom: Wow. All right.

Kelvin: That’s amazing.

Tom: Well, until next time, for TOPcast, I'm Tom.

Kelvin: I'm Kelvin.

Tom: See ya.

(musical outro)