

**[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak:** Today, on episode number 322, Shauntae Brown White joins me to talk about helping students to thrive.

**[00:00:12] Production Credit:** Produced by Innovative Learning, maximizing human potential.

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**[00:00:22] Bonni:** Hello and welcome to this episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. Today's guest is Shauntae Brown White, and she was introduced to me through my partnership with the Association of College and University Educators or AQ.

AQ's courses and community site feature many of teaching and learning's top experts, faculty, developers, and practitioners to showcase evidence-based teaching. Shauntae Brown White, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Mass Communication at North Carolina Central University, where she also serves as the coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies program. Throughout her own educational journey, she has been influenced by many great teachers, the ones who made the most impact demanded a standard of excellence yet were nurturing enough to help cultivate the standard when she fell short while believing in her abilities.

Dr. White has used that same approach to cultivate a standard of excellence for her own students, which you'll hear about in this forthcoming interview. Dr. White exhibits creativity in the classroom to engage students making the course topics relevant to everyday life. Dr. White has created multiple courses which examine popular culture and the construction of race, gender, and class, including the urban narrative, and HBO's *The Wire*, interpreting Tyler Perry, black women in film, and media images of black women. Shauntae, welcome to *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

**[00:02:22] Shauntae Brown White:** Thank you.

**[00:02:23] Bonni:** I was so glad to be connected with you through AQ. I'm always especially interested in hearing about someone's journey into teaching. Could you tell us about when in your life you first started to think of yourself as a teacher?

**[00:02:39] Shauntae:** Well, it probably would start in graduate school. I decided to go to graduate school when I realized my junior year that the Christmas breaks and Thanksgiving breaks and Spring breaks and Summer breaks were about to come to an end. I decided, "Well, I think this graduate school thing seems like a nice option." Then, of course, my first year as a TA, I assisted a professor with a large lecture class.

Then the second year, I actually had my own class and I thought, "Oh, this is interesting." I didn't really go to graduate school to think about going into the Academy, I just went to graduate school because damn, I want to extend those breaks. I thought, "Okay. I feel pretty comfortable doing this. I think I have a natural ability for delivery. That's not a hard thing for me." What I didn't realize was that delivery is only one thing, there's also pedagogy, there's also approach. I guess, when did I start really thinking? Probably as a young tenure track professor, that I really start thinking about my approaches to teaching.

**[00:03:53] Bonni:** What do you remember about those early years of teaching at something that maybe you failed at the time that you still carry with you as a treasure today?

**[00:04:03] Shauntae:** Well, I think even as a young-- I think I was a tenure track professor at this time, and I remember that my background is communication. One of the first things for comm studies is you teach public speaking, and pretty much, you could teach public speaking once you have it down pat, I probably never had to look at a textbook. One time I really was teaching without the textbook.

While the chapters coincided with what was on the syllabus and what the students were supposed to be learning, another thing I realized is many students don't read. Then I had a student that was reading and he challenged me of "Where are you getting this information from because this is not what we read in the book?" That really convicted me about just being prepared. I think when I first started teaching, I was really nervous.

I was nervous every morning when I went in, I had early morning classes. Once I realized that students-- I was always going to be one step ahead of them because many of them did not read the textbook, so if I just had that, then that was enough. I really was called early on on the carpet when it was like, "Yes, you really haven't prepared as you should." Now, was I teaching them something wrong? No, it just didn't coincide with that particular textbook. It just really made me think about being prepared for everything that I do. I never want to step into a classroom and

not have a plan, not know where I'm going, not to have read what I had assigned the students to read. That probably was a big lesson early on.

**[00:05:38] Bonni:** If you're talking to someone who is relatively new to teaching, would you tell them that there is such a thing of being over-prepared? Is there a way to go the other direction in error?

**[00:05:50] Shauntae:** I probably would say no, but that's just me because I do like to be prepared. I would say the only time being over-prepared can be problematic is when you're glued to the script. Some things happen in class that are organic. I'm not talking about a class trying to hijack the conversation because they don't want to do something, but sometimes you have to go with that.

Sometimes you also have to go with, "Hey, they don't really understand what you're talking about here. Let me back up." That direction was really clear in my head but on paper, it didn't translate that for half of the class. "Yes, half the class got it, the other half did not. Well, I have to stop and do that, to stop and address that." I think the only time you really can be over-prepared is when you are just too glued to whatever it is that you set out to do for that particular day.

**[00:06:42] Bonni:** Oh, yes, absolutely. I think back to many, many faculty that I have worked with, there is that fear of "Oh my gosh, what if I get asked a question and I don't know the answer to it?" At least in the people that I've worked with and in my own experience, as you gain additional knowledge and you gain additional experience, I find that that fear, really, at least for most of the people I've talked to, pretty much goes away entirely because you start to realize you could never know all the questions and to become more interested and curious about the questions that you don't yet know.

That, to me, helps you be more comfortable going away from that script because the more we learn about our disciplines, the more we realize we still have to learn about our disciplines and that they're really still interesting to us as professionals.

**[00:07:31] Shauntae:** I think that I probably was released from that early on. I definitely had to be released from that. I started teaching media law, and my background really is not law. In fact, I had to take over for a professor in the middle of a semester, and I was like, "What? Why did you pick me?" The last time I dealt anything with media law was 1992 when I actually took it and heavens knows that life has happened within the last 20 years that would be different.

That particular class, students are always like, "But what about this?" They always come up with scenarios, and I have no problem. Even earlier than that when someone would ask me something, I'd say, "I don't know, but I'll get an answer for you. I'll have it when I come back." That's very freeing, and I think the students

appreciate that. I think that they appreciate someone saying, "I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that, but I'll find out for you." I'll come back and I'll say, "Hey, this is what I found out," or sometimes you even might even challenge the class and say, "Let's all look that up."

**[00:08:34] Bonni:** You had some feedback from a student that started out as a compliment and that you started to interpret with a little bit more nuance. What was it like when you had a student tell you, "She's a textbook with a smile"?

**[00:08:47] Shauntae:** I thought she was saying I was boring. [laughs]

**[00:08:50] Bonni:** Really? Okay.

**[00:08:52] Shauntae:** No, and I don't think that she really meant it in a negative way. I wasn't very engaging. I thought teaching was just going over what was in the textbook. You read it and now I'm just going to tell you everything that you read. I didn't take it as-- I've gotten, definitely, teaching evaluations where they really were going for the jugular. I don't think that she was doing that. It really did make me think like, "Well, what can I do?"

Unfortunately, I had some really great mentors, with teaching and research along the way. One of the first peer reviews that I had as a tenure track faculty, that person, she didn't say that, but it resonated like, "Okay. You're just regurgitating what was in the book. Let's find something." She shared some activities that we can do. One of the best ones was a Non-Verbal Scavenger Hunt. I taught interpersonal communication, so you had to have these 20 things that you go off on campus and go find some people, go stand really close to someone and record their reaction, or go smile at someone and see what their reaction is. The students had so much fun. They remembered that activity. Then, of course, you do have to make sure that they are connecting it to the theory, or me just telling them what they already read. Those two experiences really helped me to think about how to be engaging and how to have students apply the material that we were discussing more than just me telling them. A lot of times, as we were growing up, we had professors--

I had great professors, but the formula was I lecture, and you take a test, the test might be multiple-choice, and you write a paper. That's what I started out doing as well. I've evolved light-years beyond that now. I think those things all have appropriate places, but there are so many other ways that we can get students to learn, and to remember, and to experience, and process, and think about, and apply, and analyze, and all of those things beyond the traditional methods that many of us were exposed to.

**[00:10:58] Bonni:** When I hear stories like the one you just shared, Shauntae, it reminds me so much of the expression of having it, yes, in our head, which

textbooks can often give us things in our head, but being able to also hold things in our hearts, so really engaging our sense of meaning, of purpose, of significance, and then to translate that to our hands, "What can I actually do with this learning?"

For so many of our students, this shows up of it not being enough to just know stuff but actually wanting to be part of justice in the world in some way. What have been your experiences with students that you're recalling now around them really getting caught on fire with whatever it is that they're discovering in your class?

**[00:11:46] Shauntae:** Oh, wow. Well, one that just automatically comes to mind is, as I took over the media law class, one of the things that I introduced was developing protests. Pick an issue, you're going to find a three-pronged way to protest, whether that's collecting signatures. Of course, they didn't really understand I really meant, "Go find out how many signatures you actually need. You need to go find that out in the state, not just the 24 people in this class and maybe your roommates but some other people. Is it letter-writing to legislatures, to campus personnel?" whatever their topic was going to be.

I got some really interesting topics about just being able to design a protest. Of course, media law is really focusing on how journalists are not going to get sued, but a part of that is really understanding our First Amendment rights as citizens, our rights to petition, our rights to protest, our rights to speak. That first time I did that assignment, it was just awesome, it really was. Now, a learning curve is you can't always repeat it. I was like, "Oh, this is a winner." I change out my assignments frequently, but I really enjoyed that first class.

The second semester, I used it, it was fine. Then, by the third time, I was like, "Yes, we need to get rid of this because this is no longer working, for whatever reason." Some things work with some students, some semesters it clicks, and then other times, it doesn't. I really haven't done that in a while, but just in this whole-- where we are in our nation, looking at our president, who I often wonder like, "Do you have anyone to tell you about the First Amendment, that you understand that?" I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the fall but definitely want to address just First Amendment rights so that we understand as US citizens, what rights do we have?

**[00:13:45] Bonni:** I had a similar assignment that I gave a couple of years ago, maybe two and a half years ago or so, and it failed abysmally. Part of it was because I was trying to do too much. I really recognized I only have my failure to go from, but I just see that if you're not willing to really focus on something and slow yourself down because, for me, they just didn't have enough background where they had already done the research, it was like business ethics, so I wanted them to either plan a protest or to write letters.

I forgot I had some other options as well but really, just a means to express, to either celebrate something a company was doing around a lot of social enterprise and that kind of thing or something that they wanted to criticize when you just know they're just jumping through the hoops, they're like, "Do we have to mail this?" [laughs] I was like, "Oh, you can't--" Even though I believe in that, I did not allow enough preparation to really be able to do it sufficiently. You really inspire me on this one.

**[00:14:55] Shauntae:** Yes. When they get it, it's so awesome. I think, on one of the other assignments I can think of, I taught a Women in Communication course, and they actually had to do oral narratives. They needed to interview women, or I think we did have one person who had retired, who were working in the media industry, and they had to be African-American women or women of color, and then how did they negotiate race and gender in that particular industry?

The students, they were calling people that they see on TV, or on the radio, or somewhere else, some of them were PR personnel. I had one student, and this is maybe her second class in mass communication, and she's like, "I have learned so much in this class. One, I don't think I want to do this because they don't get paid a lot." I was like, "Oh, that's not what I wanted you to take away-

[laughter]

**[00:15:48] Shauntae:** -but really understanding women and communication, just all women, period, and then, when you add the layer of race onto that, what that might actually mean." That was another one that was really exciting. Then, with that, they had to actually present those oral narratives at a research symposium. They all chose to do a poster project, poster presentations. Then, we also organized, for our department, a panel discussion with some of the women. We had a panel of about nine women who came on campus and shared their experiences based on those oral narratives. It was really great.

**[00:16:23] Bonni:** It must be absolutely wild for you now looking back to both of those class experiences and wondering what lingers in your students' minds, hearts, and hands from what you taught them. That's wild. You were mentioning already how much has changed in our country.

**[00:16:38] Shauntae:** Yes. Every once in a while, you get something from a student out of the blue. I teach at an HBCU, so I had a white male student take Black Women in Film. He was a good student, he can write. He asked me to write this recommendation, and he just shared how much he had learned. He had not even considered the experiences of black women, that just hadn't been something that he'd really considered or even studied, but he had learned so much.

I would just hope, especially now when our climate is we are looking to be more affirming of everyone and to just deal with racism and how people contribute to it, whether it's knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, that that student would be able to take that experience if he had no other experience. He went to an HBCU, so I'm sure he picked up some other things. Just the note that he wrote me afterwards, well, I guess it was the semester after, was very moving. I appreciate hearing from students, especially when they're really out of the blue like that.

**[00:17:43] Bonni:** You are someone who continually strives to develop professionally. I'm curious about your motivation around that constant desire to refine and improve.

**[00:17:55] Shauntae:** Well, I wish I really could say that I'm all about students first, making it student-centered, but it really keeps me from being bored. I think the students benefit from that, that I'm always going to do something and think about something in a fresh way. I don't want to do the same thing I was doing 20 years ago, I don't want to do the same thing I was doing 10 years ago. I just always am looking for new ways to incorporate.

Even transitioning in this COVID, I'm going all online next semester, not necessarily looking forward to it because I do do a lot of collaborative work, but it also is going to be a lot easier to do collaborative work online. I don't know how we're going to put people in groups. Face-to-face, you'd be yelling at your group across the room. I would have to say, first and foremost, it's probably so I don't get bored and uninterested.

I think that that helps me to have passion about what I'm teaching and new assignments, and new approaches. Then, I just want to do things with excellence. The same excellence that I am expecting and demanding and helping to cultivate in my students, I need to be able to give that to them. If I'm giving the same warmed-over things that I've been doing for the last 10, 15, 20 years, then I might need to rethink what my definition of excellence is.

**[00:19:14] Bonni:** I have heard about one of the approaches that you have cultivated over some time, I know this was not as easy as it's about to sound, called Voice and Choice, and it's part of your layered curriculum. Could you describe that to us and a little bit of the background of how you happened upon it?

**[00:19:31] Shauntae:** Well, first of all, we have an outstanding, amazing coordinator for our Office of Faculty Development and offers all kinds of workshops, and I'll go to all of them, but this one, it's funny because I didn't go to the workshop, but I was like, "Oh, I want to try this." I went and did it and incorporated and it's just like, "Yes, you just totally missed the mark here. This, you just don't even get it." The following

year, I actually went to the workshop, I was so moved by that, I went and purchased the book of the woman who created it, and then revamped my entire introduction to women's studies. Basically, what that is saying, what Voice and Choice is, you start out with your learning outcome and then-- I've had four different units in this particular course. With that, you offer students multiple assignments to get at learning those outcomes. For instance, one of the units might be understanding the development of Women and Gender Studies as a discipline, as well as the women's rights movement. They might have four or five assignments to choose from, so they had to choose three.

For instance, one might be, make some notecards of significant women in each of the four waves of feminism, and you had to include women of color, and you had to make sure that all the waves were done. It was interesting. It's very interesting what students actually choose. The artsy people really get into making these notecards and then maybe another one might have been watching some videos on YouTube and writing a summary.

Another option, if I was trying to get them to understand the history of Women's and Gender Studies at North Carolina, was to research the history, and they had to interview several people who were involved in organizing it. Then, another one might be looking at the name, whether it's women's studies, Women and Gender Studies, and how that's evolved looking at several institutions. Some of the students can select that. That's your C layer.

Your C layer is, I can stop at a C, and I can achieve these learning outcomes without having to do anything else, so if I were to take the test today, I can answer those questions. Then, your next level is your B level where you're trying to do something with that information. You might analyze or create or apply. I think one of the options was actually to create a marketing campaign for the Women and Gender Studies program at NCCU.

Of course, you have to understand the discipline of women's studies, period, just the evolution of it, and then the history behind it at NCCU, and then you're going to do your marketing campaign. The really artsy people do that. I can't really remember what the other option was for that. They had maybe two options to choose from, from there, and then the final A layer. That's your B layer. Then, the A layer, it's really giving them a problem that there is no right or wrong answer to it.

In that particular unit, I know they did debates. They had to debate if introduction of Women and Gender Studies should be a requirement in the General Education Elective at NCCU if that should be a requirement. It's very interesting what people selected. It was interesting that that gave them the option to work in pairs or groups for Level B and A. For C, they did need to do that one alone.

It was interesting that for the A and the B that many-- The A, they had to do-- You can't do a debate by yourself. I did put them in teams. For the B layer, they had the option of working with other people. I thought myself creating something that it's going to be much easier to work with a team than by yourself, but many of them chose to work by themselves. It was very telling in terms of what students selected and when they selected it to work with other people.

A lot of the feedback that I got from my informal assessment, not necessarily the traditional SRI, is they talked about how much they learned in the class and how much they learned from each other. That also meant that I had to give up some kind of control because I didn't know what they were going to come back with. For instance, with the women who made up the--

For the students who selected no cards of the women and each of the waves of feminism, I teach Women and Gender Studies, I don't know as many women in the fourth wave, which is the wave that we're doing now, as in the first, second, or even third, so I've had to take your word for it. It's almost like you're giving up some control as the instructor as well and really relying on the students to come back with the information. So many of the students just talked about how much they learned in the class and they learned from each other.

**[00:24:05] Bonni:** We've talked about the idea of agency many times on this podcast over the years. I still find myself describing it in a way I know is false, as in, I give agency to my students, and people were always gently correcting that idea of like, "If you give it to them, that means they never had in the first place."

[laughter]

**[00:24:26] Bonni:** Would you speak a bit about your ideal of agency? What does that mean to have agency as a learner?

**[00:24:33] Shauntae:** Well, I don't know if I've mastered it really in my other courses because using the layered curriculum and introduction to Women and Gender Studies really showed how much I really don't. In the other courses, we come up, we say, "These are the assignments we're going to do. This is how many you have to do, and that's that if you want to get a good grade."

This one really did show that I was empowering them to have agency. Not only could you choose the grade you wanted, which, by the way, most of them attempted to get the A, I had very, very few students that stopped at the C layer or even the B layer, so I was really happy about that. That motivated people and people actually did say that. It was-- They said fun, but it was freeing to be able to choose which assignments that they wanted to do and they could choose an A.

Then, sometimes life does happen. "In this season, I'm going to take a C on this unit because it was homecoming or because I was fighting with my boyfriend/girlfriend." If you took a C on this one but you got As on the other, you probably ended up with an A in the class. Just having an out, I think, or not an out but an option, that really helps people to feel that they are empowered in their learning process.

Now that I am going online, I definitely want to figure out how I can do this with media law. It seems very daunting to come up with multiple-- because really, you have to have if you have-- I think in the C layer, they had to select three assignments. That means you at least need to have five in order to make a choice. Coming up with five different assignments to appeal to different people to the tactile, people, to the creative people, to the other people, it takes a lot of thought that goes into that, but once you do it, I was really excited and pleased with how that class turned out and would love to see that in the rest of my classes as well.

**[00:26:29] Bonni:** The last two semesters, I've been experimenting with HyFlex. HyFlex is one of those words that means a whole lot of different things to a whole lot of different people. I'll give you what approach I was using, which would be that any student could choose to instead of show up in an in-person class, there would be an equivalent assignment or experience that happened at their own pace online.

It's not like they're just watching a video of what happened in person, or it's not like they have to join remotely at the time we were meeting. Of course, the first semester I experimented with it, I didn't choose to switch the demo or switch all the way up. They could do that twice, which felt pretty radical to me and then ... in the spring. Of course, as soon as COVID hit, then I was like, "Oh, well, you could do it as many times as you want for the rest of the semester."

It was an amazing thing because, of course, the students really liked it, but I found it so freeing for me too. I like your phrasing, when we empower others to have agency, it's almost like it gets renewed for us too, in some ways, because so much of what we do can so easily be reduced to the transactional. It's not at all what we intend. For the vast majority of us, I don't think people, that's what they want in their teaching experience, but we build systems and structures that really reinforce it.

**[00:27:54] Shauntae:** Yes, and I am, definitely, a person that likes control. As you said, when you release it, it's like, "Oh, okay. Why did I like control anyway? I still have some things." For instance, with these, they do have deadlines. You got to finish the C layer before you can move on to the B layer, not even before you can move on. This is the deadline for the C because now we are moving on as a class to the B.

There are some that might be structured in a different way. I'm like, "I can't deal with--" because once I've moved on and graded this one particular thing, I've moved on to something else. It's very hard for me to go back like, "What? This was from four weeks ago." Like, "Okay, you're still at this layer." In that sense, I still need to maintain some sense of control, but definitely letting that go and letting go and letting--

I'll say this, a well-designed class can drive itself. If your objectives are really clear, if your assignments are clear, if readings are really laid out, it really can drive itself, and you can let go. I feel pretty confident that the students walked away knowing the learning objectives and the learning outcomes for that particular course.

**[00:29:08] Bonni:** You mentioned, in our conversation before the interview started, about being a parent and I shared, of course, that I am as well. It reminds me of what you just said about deadlines. With parenting, it's not about having zero boundaries. There definitely need to be boundaries in the classes, especially around things like deadlines, not completely rigid ones that don't take the learner into consideration, but if you think about the learning process and the iterative ways in which failure, getting feedback, trying again really contributes in powerful ways to the learning process, then there isn't room for that.

Like you said, if we just allow for there to be no deadlines at all, then the tendency can often be to snowball, and then that's not real learning that's happening at the end of that term or that semester.

**[00:29:57] Shauntae:** Absolutely. Because I teach in a mass comm program and I had to learn to ... one of the things I did do is revamp all my syllabi of a few years ago and did the motivational syllabus. I went to a Lilly Conference, and Christine Harrington was presenting, and she has a lot of phenomenal things that created this motivational syllabus. Now my syllabi are like 30 pages because everything is in one document.

The one takeaway that I got from her was really framing those harsh policies positively and offering an explanation. My explanation as to why I don't accept late work, at least for mass comm, is this is a deadline-driven industry. If you're not ready to go on air at 5:03, there's a dead spot if you miss the deadline for the record being finished. We understand that we do miss deadlines, but I want my students to get in the habit of having a work ethic to show up to class on time and to meet deadlines.

The other thing because that's such a harsh policy, I did have a life-happens pass because life really does happen. Maybe your car didn't start that morning or you couldn't find a parking space or you did have an argument with the boyfriend/girlfriend last night and you just couldn't get to the reading. You can turn

in that pass, no questions asked, you're going to get what the pass allows you to get. I do try to have some kind of understanding that life really does happen all the while just saying that there is a standard of excellence that we all should try to strive to meet more often than not.

**[00:31:34] Bonni:** Shauntae, before we transition to the recommendations segment, as a fellow music lover, I would love to hear you talk a little bit about how music plays into your teaching.

**[00:31:45] Shauntae:** Oh, well, this is something I just started this year, this past school year '19/'20. I really started with the Intro to Women and Gender Studies. I wanted my daughter to make a playlist that I can play just at the beginning of classes as students were coming in, and it was women's empowerment. On the playlist, she put Cardi B's, *Money*, which I was horrified like, "Is this about women's empowerment?" but I left it in there.

In fact, I included that assignment around Cardi B or Beyonce or Megan Thee Stallion, are they feminists? That was one of the assignments they could choose in another unit. I played the music, it was a nice playlist, just of women singing about women's empowerment, to some extent, different genre and definitely, different decades of music, and the students really liked it. Then I started doing it for all my classes.

This semester, I have my "get up and get started" music. That's what's usually playing if they have a quiz, for instance, on media law, they usually have quizzes, and the students are always stressed out, I had my classical music playing. I had that classical music playing when they actually took the quiz because they take the quiz first and then they have to take it with the team. Sometimes people finish before, but having that background music on was really nice.

Then I had mid-tempo music when they worked in teams. The upbeat music was too much. I can see people really enjoying that a little too much. I was like, "Okay, let me bring that down just a little bit." I think it was nice, transition music, and it just set the mood. I usually would go in and ask the students, "Do you want to hear the old-school or new-school?" Interestingly, they always picked old-school. My 17-year-old daughter said, "That's probably because they don't think you have good music for new-school."

[laughter]

**[00:33:30] Bonni:** Oh, I love it. Before we go over to the recommendation segment, I wanted to take a quick moment to thank today's sponsor, and that is SaneBox. As many of you know, I have written a book about productivity. It is one of the essential tools in my productivity toolbox. What it does is it lets SaneBox worry about

what's coming into my inbox and sort it out so that it can really suss out and identify the most important messages, and it hides the distractions.

The newsletters that, yes, I like to read them because, otherwise, I'd unsubscribe, but I don't want them to be interrupting some focused time in my day where I'm trying to work through emails that really do represent commitments that I have to others. It essentially provides a little "Do Not Disturb" for me so that I can focus on the most important things when I'm there in email. SaneBox creates folders when you first set it up, and your inbox gets to have the messages that are the most important ones to you.

The distractions get moved over to a folder called SaneLater, as in, "I want to look at this later, not now when I'm doing what should be a productive time of working through my important emails." There are lots of other ways that you can use SaneBox to help yourself stay on top of email and let you control it instead of it controlling you. I like to use the feature where if I have a message, I'm sending out to one or more people, and I want to make sure that I get a reply, but I don't want to add that to my task manager.

Instead, I can just say three days at SaneBox. If I don't get a reply by then, it'll push that message back and have it get my attention. That's just one of many features of SaneBox. It is very trainable, they talk about "If something comes into the folder that doesn't quite work for you, you can just drag it to the folder that you want it to go into in future times." I have to tell you, though, it gets it right about almost 100% of the time for me. I very rarely have to do that training process.

When I do, it's such a seamless thing. If you're interested in finding out more about SaneBox, head on over to [sanebox.com/tihe](https://sanebox.com/tihe), as in, teaching in higher education. They've got a special plan for *Teaching in Higher Ed* listeners. You can get their free 14-day trial. There's no credit card required for that trial. Then if you sign up, you can get a \$25 credit toward a SaneBox subscription. Again, that is [sanebox.com/tihe](https://sanebox.com/tihe), an absolutely essential service for me and my own productivity, and I hope you'll give it a try as well. Thanks to SaneBox for sponsoring today's episode.

Well, this is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. On a past episode, I recommended this episode of Brené Brown's podcast, not to worry, I'm not going to recommend it again because I think I haven't ever recommended the same thing twice. Knock on wood, perhaps I have. There was an episode I shared about over-functioning and under-functioning during times of stress. I've thought about it so much since then.

Then at the last part of even the title, I sent it to a friend the other day, and it talks about cultivating peace. One of the things I've realized about myself, I've mentioned that I'm serving on our COVID-19 leadership team and have a

leadership role as a dean and then also thinking about my own teaching, that I am getting to feel a little bit "I don't want to overdo this," but just feeling a little bit like maybe I'm addicted to that urgency, waking up in the morning and feeling like, "Okay, okay, okay, what's going to be the emergency that will present itself today?"

As soon as I sent that to a friend, I thought, well, perhaps you should send it to yourself and think a little bit about cultivating peace. To me, this can look a lot of different ways in my life. Music really can help me cultivate peace. I want to recommend, actually, a beautiful song by an artist I'm not super familiar with, Alyssa Graham. She had a beautiful song called *My love*, which I was familiar with, but just not her version of it. That brought me a lot of peace yesterday.

I also just mostly want to recommend that however it is that you cultivate peace in your life, is that through meditation, is that through prayer? Is it through music? Is it through walks, yoga? Whatever it is, to be carving out time and purposeful ways to do that, it is a time of resistance for many of us, it's a time of urgency and a sense of wanting to do well for our students, but it also could be a time for peace. I know I need to be more purposeful in carving that out in my life. For anyone who needs to hear that message today, I encourage you to be looking for ways to purposely cultivate peace in your life. Shauntae, I'm going to pass it over to you now for your recommendations.

**[00:38:30] Shauntae:** That's awesome. Oh, can I do two?

**[00:38:36] Bonni:** Of course?

**[00:38:37] Shauntae:** Oh, yay. I'll do my not quite academic. One of the things that I do miss from commuting, because I had about a 30-minute commute, was I just started, maybe a year ago, doing audible books. Of course, when we were detained at home, not detained, when we were on our stay-at-home orders, I didn't use it. I had just started Tressie McMillan Cottom's *Thick* and essays just about a black woman's experience.

My department chair actually said, "Oh, you should think about bringing her," and he posted or put an article on my desk or slid it under my door, and the first thing I read is how she opens up the book and it says, and of course, I'm going to mess it up, so I'm sorry. "Basically, I was too thick when I should have been thin, to let boys be able to shine and white girls be able to shine" or something to that extent. "I was too much for the white girl scouts and so on and so forth that I just was really thick in places where I should have been thin."

I know I've messed that up, but that was it. I read that, and I put the article down, and I said, "Let me go get the book." I got the book. I had started it probably right before our spring break, which we never returned to campus, and then I said "Wow,

I need to pick this up and finish it." I have been looking at are listening to audible just at home, which is a little bit different for me because I used to do it in my car.

**[00:40:00] Shaunae:** Still, that's an awesome book. Then my second one and it goes not necessarily with cultivating peace but definitely taking care of yourself, I was very much an underachiever and trying to get steps in. My trainer looked at me like I was crazy when I was like, "10,000 steps a day? Who can do that? On an average day, I'm good for 4,000." Well, I have gotten more steps in while I have been at home than in real life. That is because I channel my inner Beyonce and just dance. That is how I've doubled the amount of steps that I've got. I haven't gotten to 10,000 yet, but I have gotten to 8,000 several times.

**[00:40:39] Bonni:** Oh my goodness, that sounds like so much fun. I have to ask about the Tressie McMillan Cottom's book. Does she read it? Is she the one speaking?

**[00:40:47] Shaunae:** Yes. She is the reader. I am totally a groupie. I'm going to get all her books and then figure, out once we start bringing people on campus, how we're going to get here. She actually is a graduate of North Carolina Central University, and we used to be with English and mass comm. We've since broken up, but I want to get her back to campus because I just absolutely loved the book, and I love listening to her.

**[00:41:07] Bonni:** I've been able to listen to her podcast a few times, it's on the Luminary Podcast Network, which I don't subscribe to, but you could get a free trial membership. I certainly have heard her voice before, and I'm just getting goosebumps thinking about what it would be like to hear her voice as she reads her own book. That book was transformative for me. I don't want to spoil anything because you've got some really powerful stories ahead of you, but I feel we might have to exchange cell phone numbers and talk after you get through some of those stories because they're still weighing on me in really powerful in good ways all this time later from having read it. Oh, you got some good stuff ahead of you.

**[00:41:45] Shaunae:** From *Thick* or from the podcast?

**[00:41:46] Bonni:** From *Thick*.

**[00:41:49] Shaunae:** Oh, okay, awesome, yes. I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to use it. I don't teach Intro to Women and Gender Studies this semester, but I do in the spring, so I'm like, "Yes, let me see how I can put this in here."

**[00:41:58] Bonni:** Talks about a doctor's visit and I just-- Oh, you already know?  
[laughs]

**[00:42:03] Shaunae:** Yes. No. I've finished it. I did finish it.

**[00:42:04] Bonni:** Oh, I didn't get you, I thought you said you were still working on it, and I didn't want to spoil it for you.

**[00:42:07] Shaunae:** No. I didn't finish it before the stay-at-home orders, but I said I just started listening to it around the house. Yes, I have finished it, it is awesome.

**[00:42:16] Bonni:** Oh my gosh, ... getting the tissues out? [laughs]

**[00:42:17] Shaunae:** I do remember that doctor bit.

**[00:42:23] Bonni:** Oh. Oh my goodness. I feel like I have to just do the audible experience for that because I bet it's a whole another level.

**[00:42:28] Shaunae:** Yes. I wish I read Michelle Obama's book, but I would have liked to have listened to that too. I think that would have been a great experience.

**[00:42:36] Bonni:** Oh, yes. It's been so fun. The Obamas have both been reading to our kids, they did for PBS. They did some reading live over the last few months. Even if you didn't catch it live, you could always get it on YouTube. Those have been so much fun too. There's a couple with them together, and they're so playful and lovely, and it's just fantastic.

**[00:42:53] Shaunae:** I'll have to check that out. I haven't seen those.

**[00:42:55] Bonni:** Thank you so much for coming on *Teaching in Higher Ed* and inspiring us and help us think through the aspects of our teaching so we all can keep getting better at this stuff. I really appreciate this conversation with you.

**[00:43:07] Shaunae:** I'm so glad to be invited. Thank you so much.

[music]

**[00:43:12] Bonni:** Thanks once again to Shauntae Brown White for joining me for today's episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I hope you all head over to [teachinginhighered.com/322](http://teachinginhighered.com/322) to learn more about Shauntae. Also, if you'd like to check out SaneBox, today's sponsor, head on over to [sanebox.com/tihe](http://sanebox.com/tihe). It really is essential in me being able to have some semblance of managing my email, and I hope you'll give it a try for that two-week trial as well. Thanks so much for listening. Thanks for joining me in these conversations about teaching and productivity. I'll see you next time on *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

[music]

**[00:44:06] [END OF AUDIO]**

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