

Plan Your Path : Author Interview

Transcript

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Narrator: Plan Your Path, Author Interview. Introduction.

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Sarah: Hello, I'm Sarah Gibson. I'm the co-op coordinator at TRU for Sciences and Arts, and I have been at TRU since 2005 in many different departments, starting from Open Learning and then TRU World, and then I've been an instructor in the Faculty of Student Development and in the Faculty of Arts.

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Lindsay: Awesome. I'm Lindsay Blackstock and I am an assistant teaching professor in the Faculty of Science.

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Lindsay: Primarily, I teach chemistry, first year chemistry, and some upper level environmental chemistry courses. And also I am more recently the first year science cohort coordinator, and then I'm also the coordinator of a new peer mentorship group on campus called S.T.A.M.P: Science Trajectory Ambassador Mentorship Program. Sarah and I have been really excited to work together.

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Narrator: How did the idea for this Open Educational Resource come about?

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Lindsay: Sarah and I first really got to know each other at a TRU Open House in 2023. And it was at that time that we really connected through our relationship and love of co-op. Sarah, as the co-op coordinator of sciences, but myself as an alumni, I also took the co-op program and we had this shared idea of the importance of professional and academic planning for students in undergrad because we felt that there might be some gap in students recognizing the importance of goal setting early in their undergraduate program.

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Sarah: That's right. As we just got to know each other, we decided that it would be an amazing collaboration to support the career development and professional abilities of science students, so we thought we were the perfect match to work together, and then we started to collaborate on a project that would be-

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Lindsay: Like a science intervention workshop, for lack of a better word. We started in summer 2023 and we started meeting weekly over the summer to try to prepare this planning tool and workshop that would go along with it for students.

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Lindsay: During that time is when there was the call for the first year science cohort program from the Faculty of Science. Because Sarah and I were already deeply engaged in the development for this workshop, I highlighted that as one of the commitments to student success in my application for that position.

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Lindsay: And I think that could be one of the reasons that I might have been selected for the position and it worked out so fantastically because we felt together that the first year science cohort group would be a perfect target audience for this science intervention worksheet.

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Sarah: That's right.

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Narrator: How has working with the TRU Open Press supported or shaped this project?

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Sarah: I'll start by saying because the first time we ran the workshop in fall of 2023, we had developed a 2.5 hour workshop, but included in that workshop was this planning tool, and the planning tool at that time was a hard copy, paper version where students literally took pen to paper and wrote things out. We did that hard copy paper version for two years of the, the first two years of the workshop development.

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Sarah: But in that time, our longer term goal was to have this online resource, and we decided together that if it was possible, we wanted this to be an Open Educational Resource. So we approached the TRU Open Press team and feel so thankful that TRU Open Press was able to take this project on as and make it one of their own.

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Lindsay: Yeah. I think that both Sarah and I were so confident in TRU Open Press because both of us have worked with TRU Open Press in different capacities before.

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Lindsay: And if it weren't for the support of all those working on this new tool, we don't think that we would have been able to get to its completion at this time. So, we're forever indebted and we're so grateful because we're so looking forward to launching this tool in the next iteration of our workshop this academic year.

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Sarah: Yeah, I agree. What we feel like we had a longer term vision of it, but without the tremendous support of TRU Open Press and the amazing expertise on the team, that it wouldn't have evolved the way it has is that we thought, 'Oh, maybe we'll put it online' somehow or that it would transform out of a paper version.

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Sarah: But the Open Press team has created something that is even beyond our expectations right now.

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Narrator: What was it like collaborating with your research assistants or students on this project?

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Sarah: The TRU Open Press Team and the students have been absolutely incredible. We started this process in the spring of 2025, but we had a bit of a deadline, which was we had an opportunity to present this new framework, this new planning tool at an international conference.

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Sarah: And when we took the idea to the Open Press team, saying, was there any way that it could possibly be done in time for dissemination internationally at this conference? And they worked so hard, so diligently, so impressively, to make sure that they met that deadline, and it was a very tight turnaround.

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Sarah: And the team just did remarkable, amazing work in a very short period of time and made it happen for us so that it could be launched in time for that conference.

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Lindsay: Yeah, I think really working with the team, it underscores your resilience, your motivation, your organization, and your initiative to communicate because Sarah and I, while Sarah's more the point person working on this initiative in the open space, we found that the communication has been so detailed, it has been so timely and we're so impressed just with the work ethic of the TRU Open Press team.

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Narrator: What impact do you hope this OER will have on learners or educators?

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Lindsay: So I think, first and foremost, Sarah and I really feel and believe that this tool can make an impact for students at large, where we first at first, how we designed this tool to be used was for early undergraduate students, maybe in their first or second year who were thinking about planning forward for their future and we were aiming to have the tool assist them in creating small, achievable and relevant goals that will support them in reaching their next step.

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Lindsay: However, when we started launching this workshop, and including more students with diverse backgrounds into the experience. And what I mean by that is opening it up to not just early undergraduate students, but also those that are maybe in their third or fourth year and beyond.

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Lindsay: What we were hearing back anecdotally was that the students in the upper level were saying, 'Hey, where was this for me?' 'This has been so helpful for us.'

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Lindsay: What Sarah and I did was we then evolved our workshop to be directed at a different population of students, and we evolved our workshop from Plan Your Path to Present Your Path. We were able to use the exact same tool and we are so looking forward to see how this online version of the tool can be used in this space.

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Lindsay: And the key thing with Present Your Path, how we work that workshop is we tell students, rather than goal setting and thinking forward, let's use this as a collaborative time to unlock your memories of everything you have accomplished and validate your efforts and activities over the time you've been at TRU. So using this tool can be multifaceted.

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Lindsay: It's either a forward thinking planning tool, or it's a retrospective tool that allows you to organize all of the efforts that you've made in your professional and academic development and then identify what are the values that you have and what are the themes that you've been invested in to really help students curate an amazing package to make them successful in the next step. Mmm.

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Sarah: And what's particularly helpful for the final year students, that reflective exercise of going through the process of really digging deep into what they did accomplish, it allows them to be prepared for professional school applications, grad school applications, or industry job search. We're basically setting the students up in their final years to make sure they're ready for the next phase of their career path.

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Lindsay: One thing that was so important to both Sarah and I is that the tool and the workshop associated with the tool really reiterated and emphasize some of the key and core lessons that are taught to students through cooperative education because both of us recognize that while it's an amazing program, maybe not every student has access to participate in the full capacity and we felt that this is an open and inclusive way to provide access to all students to plan efficiently for their path moving forward.

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Sarah: Amazing.

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Narrator: What challenges did you face during the development process and how did you overcome them?

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Sarah: I think partly because this is just one project of many, although it's really dear and near to our hearts and we're very extremely passionate about this project.

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Sarah: It's just one of many and so we have very busy demanding roles and just finding the time to set aside to focus on it for what it's worth. We feel like it needs to be done well, but just finding the time and balancing multiple priorities.

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Lindsay: I think that's where the TRU Open Press team comes in because if we didn't have the trust in your team in your capable hands, it really would have slowed down the process, and Sarah and I knew that this tool in this project was in very good hands and we could trust the team to continue moving it forward, and we were able to check in as we had time.

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Sarah: Yeah. Huge advantage of the TRU Open Press team expertise and the amazing students.

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Narrator: Was there a moment during this project that really stood out to you? Something you'll always remember?

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Sarah: Yeah, we were talking about this about the unbelievable effort that went into achieving the deadline.

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Sarah: And I guess I'll say on perspective for the students, the students had just been hired as co-op students in this role, and the TRU Open Press team made a commitment to say that you could meet this timeline. And we knew it was a very tight timeline, and I want to say, I think in the span of a week, there was a first draft of this open educational resource, and when it was presented to us, we were blown away at how much work and thought and care went into the first draft and development.

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Sarah: And that just speaks to a couple of things, the expertise on the team and to the dedication and commitment levels, but also the fact that it's really was created out of the student lens, and it just showcases how students, I believe are resonating with this tool.

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Lindsay: Yeah I think for me, in addition to what Sarah has mentioned, for me, one of the blow me away moments was seeing how one of the students, Samar was able to creatively come up with an additional embedded visualization of our tool that went beyond and above what typical plug-ins, if I'm using that word correctly, are available for the platform that we were using.

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Lindsay: So he had kind of created just it as a visual timeline at the top of our resource. We thought at that meeting, Sarah and I said, Hey, that's so cool.

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Lindsay: Can we do more with that? And Samar and Dani were both like, Oh, this is very challenging.

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Lindsay: However, I was so shocked to see recently opening up the tool. Samar did it.

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Lindsay: He created a tool. He coded it.

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Lindsay: Right. He created a brand new thing that's interactive for students and we challenged him, and he met that challenge, and that is something that we are so excited about, and I can't wait to see how the students interact with it because through the lens of Samar's creativity, combined with Sarah and my original version of the tool, now on this open platform, we provide

two different avenues for students to visualize their plan and to engage with the tool.

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Lindsay: So, it really provides multiple ways of using and interacting with it, depending on the preference of the student or the user, which we think is so fantastic.

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Sarah: Yeah, super impressive.

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Narrator: How do you see the role of open education evolving in the next few years?

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Sarah: As Lindsay said earlier, both of us in different capacities have had the opportunity to work with TRU Open Press on different projects that have been enormously impactful.

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Sarah: So I'll say, for me, I've had an opportunity to be part of the TRU Career & Experiential Learning career textbook, which is an Open Educational Resource. Also, myself and two other colleagues were the initiators and co-developers of the TRU CEL Resume Catalog, really impressive resource because where most universities are going the opposite way of using their, placing their resources and tools behind password protected areas.

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Sarah: At TRU, we're aligning with the TRU mission and mandate of open access university. We believe so strongly that TRU Open Press must continue to evolve and expand because of the enormous impact that it has on faculty staff and on our students, most importantly, and on the community at large, because when these resources are allowed to flourish in an open access way, then there's no limits, then everyone has access and can use them.

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Sarah: And it just encourages or increases the ability for TRU to showcase the commitment to open access and who we are as a university.

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Lindsay: So I echo Sarah's sentiments about open and accessible resources in chemistry in our first year courses, we have switched to OER resources for our text, and myself and Dr. Sharon Brewer, we've worked with our student partners as well to develop with TRU Open Press another amazing resource called PassChem and it is a student driven, formative self assessment tool for students to really engage in efficient practice and skill development for those chemistry practice problems outside of the classroom. And I think definitely in sciences at large, there is a shift towards ensuring that there are lowering barriers for students, increasing access.

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Lindsay: I know that there is a shift moving where more and more people and instructors and um, those educators, are moving towards open access resources, and I feel as the world becomes more open and especially with the use of generative AI tools, I think that the limits, there are no limits, and I think that we are going to be able to really effectively and efficiently generate more open resources. I just really think that the future is exciting when it comes to OER.

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Narrator: If someone is thinking about creating an OER, what advice would you give them?

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Lindsay: Yeah. My advice is that you should be comfortable with imperfection, recognizing that open works are iterative and you always have the ability to improve upon the works that you start with. And I find that as educators or as professionals, we can put high standards on the quality of the work that we are producing or sharing.

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Lindsay: I think that in the spirit of openness, it is important to be transparent in the development process. I think that showing where perhaps challenges or potential opportunities are in the development process is good for everyone to learn from.

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Lindsay: So I think it's important to just start, meet yourself where you're at, and ask for help. One great place to ask for help is TRU Open Press.

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Sarah: Yeah. I agree. My advice would be if you have an idea and think that it could be transformed into an Open Educational Resource, do it because the team is so supportive, so incredible, and it just becomes fun. I have to say, Lindsay and I have had a lot of fun through this process, so we're just really grateful for the opportunity that TRU Open Press provided us and just letting the creativity flow in particular from a student lens.

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Lindsay: Yeah, and being just flexible with how the final product is going to look because if you are too rigid in your vision as a non-expert, of the platform. You may be creating unnecessary boundaries for the final product, and I think it's important just to maintain an open attitude.

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Lindsay: Right? With how things can shape up because we were open and flexible, and we're so glad with how everything turned out.

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Narrator: Thank you for the interview, Sarah and Lindsay.