Ryan Straight was feeling overwhelmed under the weight of significant life changes. It was May 2012, and Straight had moved 2,000 miles from his home in Ohio to begin his new job.

"I can't be the only person going through this," Straight, an assistant professor of educational technology at UA South, thought to himself.

"At the time, there were tons of changes going on," he says. "I was graduating, I was no longer a student, so there was a kind of feeling of, 'Now what do I do?'"

The answer came while walking his dog. Every day, at a park across from his house, Straight walked his dog for about an hour and listened to podcasts while thinking about his situation.

"I got it in my head that I can't be the only person that's trying to navigate this space at this point in their career, but I don't see anybody having that conversation."

With that, "The New Professor" was born. Since May 2017, Straight has produced about 40 episodes, typically releasing one every other week. The topics, he says, range from "whatever is on my mind that day," such as work-life balance, online education and student government, to interviews with people living and working in the world of higher education.

A recent episode focused on the benefits of disconnecting and relaxing over the summer, and the difficulty many people have doing that.

"And I'm very much guilty of this. Even on vacation, when I'm in another hemisphere with no internet connection and no way to even get work done, I start feeling guilty," he says during the episode. "I really do struggle with actually disconnecting. So, if you feel that way too, know you're definitely not alone."

As his role with the University of Arizona has evolved, so has the podcast. Two years ago, Straight was selected to join Faculty Fellows, a group of 55 faculty members tasked with engaging students through research, career-readiness efforts and community outreach. He faced the challenge of how to make that connection when he was 75 miles northwest of the majority of students he was serving. Straight's appointment and the students he helps are at Sierra Vista-based UA South, but he works primarily from home in Tucson.

"And then it occurred to me," Straight says. "I already have it. The podcast is a great way to go where the students are, and I can bring content to them that maybe is useful or entertaining, or hopefully both."

Feedback from his students and others in the higher education world suggest he is doing
both. In May, Straight was included on a “Dean's List” of the top 30 information technology influencers in higher education by the magazine EdTech: Focus on Higher Education. Students also have responded favorably so much so that he has begun rolling podcasting into some of his classes, assigning students to create at least one episode of a podcast relating to the course topic. If they want to continue their podcast after the class, Straight encourages that.

Straight has also led workshops for people wanting to learn how to get started on their own podcasts.

He says he hopes to continue producing and growing his podcast "as long as there's something to say."

Given what's coming up in his life, he should have a lot to say. Straight is moving to the informatics and cyber operations program as UA South goes through transitions of its own. For now, however, Straight says the plan is to continue producing content and keep it simple.

“There are no ads. There's no funding. It's just me and my computer," Straight says. "That, and I like toys. I'm actually up to having six microphones now. It's become a bit of an obsession."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/new-professor-ua-south-assistant-professor-covers-life-work-higher-ed-lauded-podcast

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