

TRANSCRIPT: RETAKING AN ASSESSMENT - W/ JULIANNE KOCH, JESSICA GALTERIO AND ERIC ANDERSON

The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.

Speaker #1:

[Intro music]

WGU's IT Audio Series. Flexible, portable, profound.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Hello, night owls, and welcome to another episode of the IT Audio Series. I'm Julianne Koch.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

I'm Jessica Galterio, and we are program mentors in the College of IT at WGU.

Later in this episode, we will speak with the course instructor Erik Anderson. But first, we want to talk about something that can be a little difficult, failing your exam.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Failing a test is really hard. No one really goes into a test expecting to fail it. That moment when you find out you didn't pass, it really does hit like a punch in the gut. Sometimes the hardest part about the whole second attempt process is just handling the emotional fallout of not passing it the first time. But I want to tell you something right now while you're listening to this episode. I've been a program mentor at WGU for a long time. I've had many, many students graduate, and not one has done everything perfectly on their first try. But do you know what they all got, their degree.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Right. In the end, that's all that matters. However, in the moment of failing an exam, there are a lot of other emotions happening all at once. Shame, regret, fear, disappointment, anger all on a loop, all at the same time. But it's important to stop and remember at a competency-based university like WGU, you get to give yourself credit for knowing 68 percent of the content, even if 72 percent was passing.

Calling your program mentor to talk it through really can help you manage these emotions in the moment as well. It's only natural to feel upset about the result and acknowledge those emotions. But it's also important to remember that that was only your first attempt. With some diligence, you will be successful on the next attempt.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Yeah, absolutely. Jessica, did you know that I got my masters in management and leadership here at WGU?

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

How interesting!

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Yeah. When I first came into the program, my first paper, I was so excited to get started and so motivated. I sat down, I wrote that paper, it felt like I wrote it in one afternoon. I went to town on it. I got that thing done. I finished it. I read through it once to make sure that I met all the requirements. Then I turned that sucker in and about 24 hours later it came back.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

That quickly.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Yeah, it came back right away like pretty much immediately, it felt like. That let down. When I get that notification that you have revisions, it was so frustrating. I opened it up and I looked at it and it turned out that in my excitement, I didn't actually proofread it for things like spelling and grammar. Apparently, I had some problems there. I fixed it. I had a quick chat with my program mentor who's awesome, talked about he had a similar experience too and turned that thing back in and used that feedback and gotten there and I passed it that second attempt. Then I was a little more careful, I think, about spelling and grammar for the next paper.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Lessons were learned.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Definitely. That's just true, it was definitely a learning experience. I learned from that to be more careful about that on my next attempts at things. But it was just this real letdown at first, but I turned around real quick and especially with the confidence I got from my program mentor, I was able to get that thing in and then feel confident about it. It was really that learning experience. I still passed the class and still got my degree. There's that.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

That's fantastic. Well, for myself, I'm always reminded of my experience with biology and my undergraduate bachelor's degree. I needed to get at least a C for my program. The first time I took it, I got a 68, the second time I did, I got a 70. Then I heard that it was a little easier at the community college in the state that I went to college. I was like, well, let's give it a try there and talk about feeling a lot of emotions at once. I was much older at that point and I was in class with 16 and 17 year-olds who were excelling in biology in high school. Here I am on my third attempt, just trying to get the C I need for my program. It was very humbling, it was upsetting. I had to drive off-campus. But at the same time that class made me so much more resilient as a student. There were no other courses that I had to retake after that.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Yeah. That's good.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

That was it.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Well, those of you listening to our conversation here, take a minute and build yourself up. Yes, it's true you didn't pass your exam, but you have an opportunity to take it again. Thomas Edison, we've heard of him. He tried 10,000 different times before he invented the light bulb. Famously, he's got a quote out there, "I have not failed 10,000 times. I just found 10,000 ways it did not work."

Now is the time for you to get back in there and give it another try. Because ultimately, you're not going to let this test stand between you and that diploma on the wall, are you?

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Nope. Well, that's another great thing about WGU. You don't have to wait until next semester starts to get another crack at passing the course. We do have a process to go through. However, most people who go through the process pass on their next attempt.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Let's talk a little more about exactly what that process looks like. Today we have a special guest, the course instructor for the Business of IT courses, Eric Anderson. Erik began his career with WGU in 2013 as a program mentor. In 2020, he made the transition into a course instructor position with the Business of IT team. He supports the Project+, IT, and leadership courses. Eric also runs an elementary and middle school music camp in the summer, and he has a 13-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter.

Eric, welcome to the IT Audio Series.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Eric, can you walk us through the second attempt process?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Well, first of all, thank you for inviting me to talk about this process.

Failing an exam is not fun, and I believe everyone's been there. As a matter of fact, I love that you quoted Edison. There are so many quotes in this, but one of my favorites is from the author and entrepreneur, Danny Iny. In his book titled *The Audience Revolution*, he gave this gem, "Failure is only failure if it happens in the last chapter, otherwise, it's a plot twist." Plot twists can make things memorable. How many good stories do you know of that don't include some type of plot twist? All of the most memorable ones have a good twist to them. Education's not different. No one is immune to failing. Failing is probably one of the best ways to learn.

When I see message come through that a student has missed passing an exam, one of the first things I do is research the student. It could be the program mentor habits coming out of me. But I begin by looking at who the student is. If they have anything extraordinary going on in their life. This past year has been really weird. Students do have extraordinary things going on in your life and really got to take that into account. A program mentor notes are some of my best friends. Those are just invaluable to a course instructor because you know the students inside out, upside-down what's going on in their life. I know there's limits to what you can put in there, but when I read the notes, I get a gist of what's going on with the student. I'll look at their past history. How have they done on exams in the past? Have they had to do multiple attempts? Is this new for them? Because it maybe. They may have aced all their other exams and when they get to this one, this one now really tripped them up. This may be their first time and I need to know that. Doing those things, are they facing hardships? Do they have challenges? Maybe a recent life change. That helps me get a good perspective from the student's viewpoint.

After that, I look at what the student's preps been like or their study habits. Had they completed the material or what their score sheets say? What is their term or exam history look like? I'll also look at communication. How often does the student miss their calls with their program mentor? Now, that tells me some things about the student. I will take all that into account and then I begin communicating. I usually begin like, I'm so sorry you missed passing this exam. I want to help you with that. I'm here, I'm ready to begin working with you and just so you know, I never used the word "you" either. It's always "we." Like, "Can you please send me a copy of your score sheet so we can begin working on your next attempt?" I like to get that feeling of team with them.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

I really like the plot twist idea that looking at it from that perspective, because that's really very true. Plot twists are in everything otherwise, it'd be boring. While boring can sometimes be maybe the most straightforward approach, it's not always the way that things work, it's almost never the way things work. I love that. Looking at it from that perspective can really help to process that and to really move forward.

What happens next?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Yeah, and most of the best stories have a good plot twist. You don't really remember stories that don't have a good plot twist.

In education, when there is a plot twist or students failed, their learning process is going to be different and probably deeper because of that. They're going to take more from an exam they failed.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

I agree.

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

From the exam they just pass without thinking about.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Yeah, I agree absolutely. Absolutely. What exactly does that process look like? What should a student expect?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

I'd like to talk to the student. I ask them what the exam experience was like, what they saw, if there's anything that stood out. For most of the courses, we have the usual suspects. Courses and exams have specific things. We tell students pay attention to this, but when they go to take the exam, those are usually the things that the students missed out on. Those are things the student will need to review again. That's where I start and then I use their score sheet feedback and their engagement for the plan. Student can expect the plan, usually customized for them, and maybe reviewing material they already have or reviewing material possibly skimmed and may include mixed resources for tough target areas.

My goal here is to make sure this next attempt will be successful so they don't have to pay out of pocket for a third attempt. I feel like I've failed if they have to pay out of pocket, that's something that I failed on my end, not preparing them. Some students come in as process film or just a roadblock that they need to get around. I like to change their viewpoint and one where I'm a teammate of theirs and I'm only here to make them successful. It doesn't always work but if the student feels I'm on their side, the whole process seems faster and smoother.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Well, I really appreciate that attitude, Eric, too, and it's really true. I tell my students that a lot as well. We pay for the first two attempts so that if you need that second one, we really try to make it your final one. Plus, a big part of their tuition is course instructor access. Why not get the most value for your money?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Yeah, and it drives me nuts when students will go in and purposely not try to do the main learning resources and like, "Oh, I went to YouTube, I went to Reddit, I went to this and that."

I'm like, "We have lots of educated very smart people who have looked at this certification or this, the goals of this course and said, 'Here's what's best to get the student to pass this,' and they're going everywhere but that one area." It's that frustrating thing [inaudible]

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Well, it's a good perspective to have and might be a new one for some people to hear.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

All right, next question.

Sometimes when I get a student who sees a second attempt requirements, they get really worried they aren't going to be able to finish the requirements and have time to finish the rest of their courses. How do you help students manage that anxiety?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Oh, that's a tough one. When I begin working on a student's second attempt plan, I try to take their timeline into consideration. I will talk to them about what needs to get done and work towards their buy-in for success.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Oftentimes, students are embarrassed or worried that their course instructor may be judging them based on the fact that they didn't pass or that there's some type of stigma associated with failing their exam. What does that first call between you and a student who didn't pass look like?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Empathy, empathy, empathy. They need to know that it's all right and they're not the only ones. We're here for that purpose.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

That's awesome to hear because I definitely have students who are worried and concerned and embarrassed and they put it off and maybe procrastinate that call a little bit. It's really great to hear that one of the first things that you do is put yourself in their place and then talk to them about that.

When you do get the student on the phone and you're talking to them and seeing things from their perspective, how do you customize second attempt requirements based off, of how that student individually did on their first attempt? For example, I've recently had a student who, and they only missed passing their test by one question.

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

If a student miss passing my one point or one question, I like to let them know that this is probably going to be quick. I want to make this quick, the last thing I want is for them to take this again in two months. I want this to be a week, maybe two weeks at the most because everything's fresh. This is a lot of material to try to maintain. You were really close, let's hone in on those specific things you missed. I just had to call the student today who he missed by three questions.

"What were those three questions?"

I'll go through look at their engagement, look at their score sheet, and then talk to him what did you see on the exam and I'll take that and come up with a plan. Here's some material for this, here's some material for that, here's some material for that. I'll give them a little subscript of it while I'm talking to them on the phone and I'll say, "Okay, this is where you're going to see in here. Here's the important parts to look at. This is why this will help on your next attempt. Let's try and get this done by next weekend or let's shoot for eight days from now or nine days from now."

The last thing I want to do is try to be a roadblock for them.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

I like to hear that because I very often will have students who might get maybe an email that has a long list of something to work through and that can be really intimidating so hearing that you can really customize that

individually for the student is something that I think really can help students to feel maybe a little bit better about talking with you on the phone.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Is it important to make a phone call or is an email enough?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Well, students are all different. I know as a program mentor, I had a mixed bag of some students reacted better to phone calls, some reacted better to emails.

I can say it's always better to talk to a course instructor. It's easier to explain something in person, but that's not always possible. I try to do what I can to get that communication channel with the student. One phone call that may be the same value as four or five emails. But in the end, as long as we can expediently get the student to pass then we were successful and that's the goal.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Awesome. Well, thank you again, Eric, for visiting with us today about the second attempt process.

Are there any last words of wisdom you might want to tell students who are in this situation who are going in for their next attempt?

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Well, one of the things we've been doing prior two, but maybe three years now we've been doing this. We have a "Come Explore the Course Instructor" cohort and it's a whole group of us from program chairs to course instructors, to program managers and program mentors.

One of the things we do is, well, we opened up to every student coming into WGU from the start. It doesn't matter what college they're in. But we basically walk them through here's what a course instructor is, here's what a course instructor does.

It's usually facilitated by course instructors with program mentors also helping. I know that those sessions really seem to help break down that barrier of, "I'm only going to go to a course instructor when I absolutely need it." It's a last resort. With that, we always encourage them as soon as you start a course, book a call to your course instructor.

If you want to make this easier, faster, less troublesome, reach out to your course instructor from the start. What do I need to do to get through this course? We're here to help you get through that. We're not roadblocks, we're not things to get in your way. We're here to help you, speed you through that course, make sure you learn as much as possible and do it in a timely manner.

Speaker #2 (Julianne Koch):

Awesome. Well, thank you again.

Speaker #3 (Jessica Galterio):

Thank you so much, Eric.

Speaker #4 (Eric Anderson):

Yeah, I appreciate being on here.

Speaker #1:

[Wrap up music]

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