# TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

**Newsletter of Eastern's Center for Teaching, Learning, & Assessment**
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## Attend a Teaching and Learning Conversation (TLC)

Teaching and Learning Conversations (TLCs) are faculty-led conversations about specific teaching strategies, typically held over lunch in Hurley Hall. Each TLC session provides faculty with the opportunity to hear a brief presentation on a specific teaching strategy that has been successfully implemented by one or more of their peers at Eastern. Participants will then have time to reflect and engage in small group discussions about how the strategy might be adapted and utilized in their own discipline.

All full-time and part-time faculty are welcome to attend TLCs. Unless otherwise noted, no registration is required. Please come prepared to think about your own teaching (bring something to write with) and share your thoughts with your peers!

Below are the first three sessions of spring semester:

### The One-Pager: A Creative Alternative to Papers

Tuesday, February 4, 12:30 - 1:30, Hurley Hall
*Led by Lyndsey Lanagan-Leitzel (Psychological Science)*

Do your students dread writing papers, and do you dread grading them? The one-pager assignment allows your students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts in a creative and fun way, promoting deeper learning of content for them and more enjoyable grading for you. This assignment can be easily adapted to your unique course content and learning objectives.

### Teaching in the Art Gallery: Developing Observation, Mindfulness, and Belonging

Wednesday, February 26, 12 – 1, Art Gallery
*Led by Maeve Doyle (Art & Art History), Kristen Morgan (Communication, Film, & Theatre), and Julia Wintner (The Art Galley/Art & Art History)*

Students can learn a lot from art. Viewing, examining, and appreciating art develops skills of observation, attention to detail, and mindfulness. Art brings the viewer into an artist's point of view, building students' empathy and promoting dignity and belonging. This session provides strategies

for using Eastern's Art Gallery as a resource to help students develop skills and understandings that apply across the disciplines.

***This TLC will be held in the Art Gallery in FAIC.*** To ensure we order the correct amount of food, registration is required for this TLC.

### Using Gamification to Promote Knowledge Retention (New date)

Tuesday, March 4, 12:30 – 1:30 pm, Hurley Hall
*Led by Ashley Cote (Health Sciences and Nursing)*

Gamification in the classroom involves incorporating game-like elements into the learning process to make education more engaging and motivating for students. The goal of gamification is not just to make learning more fun, but also to boost student motivation, engagement, and achievement, which support knowledge acquisition and retrieval practices. This session will include evidence regarding effectiveness of gamification and examples of gamification from the nursing classroom (e.g., Amazing Race themed Exam Review).

## Spotlight on a Book in the CTLA Lending Library

### A Teacher's Guide to Learning Student Names: Why You Should, Why It's Hard, How You Can

By Michelle D. Miller
© 2024 by University of Oklahoma Press (see publisher's description)

In *A Teacher's Guide to Learning Student Names: Why You Should, Why It's Hard, and How You Can,* Michelle Miller summarizes research on what's involved in learning (and retrieving) names. A psychology professor at Northern Arizona University, Miller has a mild form of prosopagnosia (also known as "face blindness") and has developed practical strategies that help her and other faculty to remember student names.
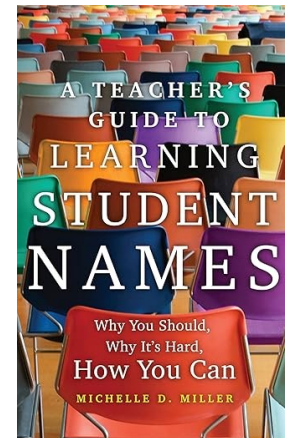
In the book, Miller identifies 4 distinct steps in learning and remembering student names. She uses the acronym ASAR:

- *Attend*: When hearing a new name for the first time, it's important to actively focus on hearing and learning the name and ensure we aren't distracted by other tasks.
- *Say*: Saying a new name out loud upon hearing it increases the likelihood that we'll remember it (and gives us a chance to make sure we've heard it correctly).
- *Associate*: Finding a way to quickly associate a student's name with other information about the student can be helpful.
- *Retrieve*: Engaging in retrieval practice is critical for remembering student names. This requires practicing saying students' names out loud or in our heads until we have them down.

Miller describes an ice breaker she routinely uses on the first day of class where she has students pair up and learn about their partner for 8 to 10 minutes. They then introduce their partner to the class. After each introduction, Miller makes a point of saying the student's name out loud: "Hello, Jack," or "Welcome to the class, María." In addition, Miller practices the names again by mentally dividing the class into small groups of 4 or 6 students. After each group has finished their introductions, Miller

repeats the names of everyone in that group: "Thanks for those introductions, Jack, María, Ashanti, and Aki." Throughout the introductions, Miller practices saying each student's name in her head. If she's feeling confident, at the end of the introductions she will try to say every student's name out loud (knowing that she will likely make one or two mistakes, and that students will give her grace).

Taking this time on the first day of class (followed by additional retrieval practice both in and outside of class) helps Miller learn student names relatively quickly. It also helps students learn each other's names, which can contribute to feelings of belonging. Lastly, the visible effort Miller puts into learning names communicates care to her students.

The book includes other tips Miller has used to help her learn names, including making flash cards with students' photos (available on eWeb), using a short classroom assessment technique in every class that gives her an opportunity to practice using each student's name (while also assessing their learning), and having students display their names on table tents (particularly for larger classes).

Miller concludes her book with a quote from Norma Angelica Marrun: "An educator who learns to correctly pronounce students' names signals respect and validates students' racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural identities. Learning students' names is the first step in becoming a multicultural and culturally responsive educator."

> Interested in reading Miller's book? (It's only 94 pages of text!) Stop by the CTLA Lending Library in room 425 of the J. Eugene Smith Library, or fill out a request to have the book sent to you via interoffice mail (enter **#172** in response to question 1).

**A Tool to Help with Pronouncing Student Names**

Miller notes many people have a harder time learning names that originate from a language that is different from their own. One tool that some faculty use to help with this is NameDrop, a free tool that allows you to record yourself pronouncing your name for free and share the link with others. Some faculty have asked students to record their names and upload them to Blackboard or a course website as a getting-to-know-you activity in the first week of class. (You can also add a link to your own NameDrop recording to your email signature to help students remember how to pronounce *your* name correctly!)

# Tech Tip (A periodic column from CIT)

### Customizing Your Blackboard Full Grade Center

*Contributed by Mauricio Calpa, Instructional Design Coordinator*

The Blackboard Original Full Grade Center offers flexibility to organize, filter, and customize your view to efficiently grade students. Here are some things you can do:

1. **Customize Your View**: Reorder columns, freeze key columns, and filter by categories or grading periods to focus on what matters most.
2. **Simplify User Management**: Hide user rows to declutter your view while retaining all student data and accessibility.

3.  **Stay Organized**: Use the *Column Organization* page to quickly rearrange, hide, or manage columns with ease.

Streamlining your grading process with these features will give you more time to focus on what matters most—supporting your students.

Want more information? Learn step-by-step how to simplify your grading experience using [Blackboard's Original Grade Center Guide](#). And for any questions on managing the Full Grade Center, [book a virtual one-on-one training session](#) with CIT staff.

### Seeking Volunteers for Blackboard Ultra Beta Testing

CIT would like to announce that Eastern will begin beta testing Blackboard Ultra for Summer 2025. This is a chance to get early access and help provide feedback. We're looking for 8-10 enthusiastic and committed testers to participate. If you are interested, please complete the [beta test participation survey](#) to let us know more about you.

The deadline to be considered is **02/28/2025, 11:59pm ET.**

## Update from the Assessment Coordinator

Faculty evaluators are wrapping up their scoring of anonymized artifacts from fall semester, and aggregated results will be shared when they are available. This spring, we will continue to measure evidence of students' critical thinking skills. There are more than 45 courses being offered this spring that have critical thinking as the primary learning outcome. If you are teaching one of these courses, you should have recently received an email from Suki Grandhi with basic information about the assessment process for spring. All faculty teaching these courses will be asked to submit one assignment prompt designed to assess Critical Thinking in March. They will also be asked to submit student artifacts for the prompt at the end of the semester.

We will hold an information session and panel for ELAC faculty teaching Critical Thinking on Wednesday, February 12th, at 3pm. More details on this session will be coming soon.

Please don't hesitate to contact Assessment Coordinator Suki Grandhi ([grandhis@easternct.edu](mailto:grandhis@easternct.edu)) with any questions, suggestions, or concerns.

## Call for Applications: Teaching Scholars Program

The CTLA invites applications from full-time faculty members interested in conducting research on their own teaching practices and sharing their new expertise with other faculty. The Davis Educational Foundation has awarded Eastern a grant to implement a **Teaching Scholars** program under the direction of Dr. Courtney Broscious. This program will be comprised of up to 5 faculty in the 2025-2026 academic year who will develop a classroom intervention, implement it in their courses, conduct research to examine effectiveness, and share what they have learned through a set of deliverables.

The deadline for applications is **March 3**. Applicants are encouraged to read abstracts of projects from the first cohort of Teaching Scholars on the [CTLA website](#).

# External Faculty Development Opportunities

## Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- January 24 (deadline to register): The **Maple League Book Club** will be reading and discussing James Lang's *Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do About It.* The book club will meet virtually four times this semester, starting the week of January 27 (multiple meeting times are available). The Maple League is a consortium of four Canadian universities.

- January 24 – 25: **12th annual Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Symposium**. This free, online conference is focused on approaches for assessing student learning. This year's theme is "Navigating the Challenges of Assessment: Tales from the Field." The keynote speaker will be Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director of the NSSE survey.

- January 27, 2 pm: **Learning in Colour: Building Safer Classrooms for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized Students**. Hosted by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, this free webinar will explore strategies that "that facilitate safety, challenge racism, and ultimately contribute to more equitable and inclusive postsecondary institutions." Attendees are invited to view the online resource developed by the Learning in Colour team.

- January 29, 11 – 12: **Student Evaluations Demystified: Turn Feedback into Success While Staying True to Your Teaching Style**. This webinar from Harvard Business Education Publishing will cover how to interpret and use student feedback to reflect on and improve their teaching. The webinar will also share research on the strengths and limitations of student evaluations and how to solicit feedback throughout the semester.

- January 29, 12 – 1:15 pm: **Hands-on Building AI Powered Assessments You Can Take Back to the Classroom**. In this $15 webinar hosted by the New England Educational Assessment Network, participants will learn about building AI-powered "MicroApps" and using them in the classroom.

- January 29, 2 – 3 pm: **When Learning Gets Tough: UDL to Support Effort and Persistence**. In this free webinar hosted by Goodwin University, Allison Posey from CAST will share strategies for implementing the UDL Guideline "Sustaining Effort and Persistent" in courses and for balancing challenge and support.

- February 21 – 22: **2025 CT Digital Humanities Conference**. This free conference at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain aims to advance collaborative scholarship in digital humanities research and pedagogy across New England.

- March 3 – 4: **Northeast OER Summit**. This low-cost, virtual conference is designed for "new and experienced OER advocates… to learn and share effective practices in awareness building, implementation, collaboration, strategy, and research." The theme of the conference is "All Hands On Deck: Exploring Open Education Through Collaboration and Innovation." Registration is $35 before February 24.

## Other opportunities

- January 27 and February 3, 10, 17: AAC&U is hosting a four-week webinar series on **Teaching with AI**. Faculty can register for one or all four webinars and use the AAC&U discounted rate. All registrants receive a free copy of *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* by José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson.

- February 5, 12, 19, and 26: The USC Race and Equity Center is hosting **The Equity Minded Teaching Institute**. The 4-module, online institute is designed for faculty and administrators who are interested in "leading race-conscious inquiry to produce equity-minded classrooms." Topics include syllabus design, using disaggregated course outcome data, grade and attendance mapping, and classroom observations.
- February 20 – 22: The **Winter Red Rock Great Teaching Retreat** will be held in Bryce Canyon, Utah.
- February 26 – 28: Georgia Southern University is hosting the **SoTL Commons Conference** in Savannah, GA. The conference will feature presentations and conversations on the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- March 26: The University of Tennessee, Knoxville is hosting the **Innovative Teaching and Learning Conference** in Knoxville, TN. The theme for 2025 is "Cultivating Academic Success: The Synergy Between Fostering Authenticity and Transformation in Teaching and Learning."
- April 11: Indiana University is hosting the **2025 Midwest SoTL Conference** in South Bend, IN. This year's theme is "Care, Kindness, and Creativity."
- July 12 – 25: The Aramfo Educational Foundation is hosting the The **Teacher Leader Fellowship Program** In New Zealand. The program will provide opportunities to learn about New Zealand's educational practices and Maori educational philosophies, with visits to schools and universities in Auckland.

# Opportunities to Share Your Teaching and Learning Expertise

- Due January 26: The University of Central Oklahoma is accepting proposals for the 15th annual **Transformative Learning Conference**, to be held in Edmond, OK, on April 17. The theme of this year's conference is "Reshaping the Impact of Higher Ed for the 21st Century."
- Due February 2: Indiana University is accepting proposals for the **2025 Midwest SoTL Conference**, to be held in South Bend, IN, on April 11. This year's theme is "Care, Kindness, and Creativity."
- Due February 10: The **Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center Conference** is accepting proposals for its 2025 conference, to be held June 30 – July 2 in St. Louis, MO. This year's theme is "The Weight of Words: Navigating the Evolving Role of Dialogue in Polarized Times."
- Due February 28: IUPUI is accepting proposals for the **2025 Assessment Institute**, "the oldest and largest U.S. event focused on assessing and improving higher education." The conference will be held October 26-28 in Indianapolis.