



TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

Newsletter of Eastern's Center for Teaching, Learning, & Assessment

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Attend the March 4th Teaching and Learning Conversation (TLC)

Registration for next week's TLC on *Teaching in the Art Gallery* is now closed. However, no registration is required for the March 4th TLC! All full-time and part-time faculty are welcome to attend. Please come prepared to think about your own teaching, eat lunch (paid for by the CTLA), and share your thoughts with your peers.

Using Gamification to Promote Knowledge Retention

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).

Materials from Previous TLCs and Workshops

Did you know that you can access materials from some previous TLCs? Visit the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#) (Eastern login required) to find slides and/or handouts from CTLA-sponsored workshops and TLCs, including the recent TLC led by Lyndsey Lanagan-Leitzel on *The One Pager*.

Save the Date for Upcoming Workshop

Swift Waters Workshop – Sustainability Across the Curriculum

May 28, 9 am to 4 pm

Thanks to a grant from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, Eastern will host a full-day workshop focused on preparing faculty to design new assignments, units, or

courses that incorporate sustainability through the lens of their primary academic disciplines. The workshop will be open to faculty from all colleges and universities, supporting a community of practice in Connecticut and beyond that expands student access to sustainability concepts and skills in their coursework.

More details will be coming soon. In the meantime, contact Dr. Patty Szczys at szczysp@easternct.edu with any questions.

Spotlight on a Book in the CTLA Lending Library

The Present Professor: Authenticity and Transformational Teaching

By Elizabeth A. Norell

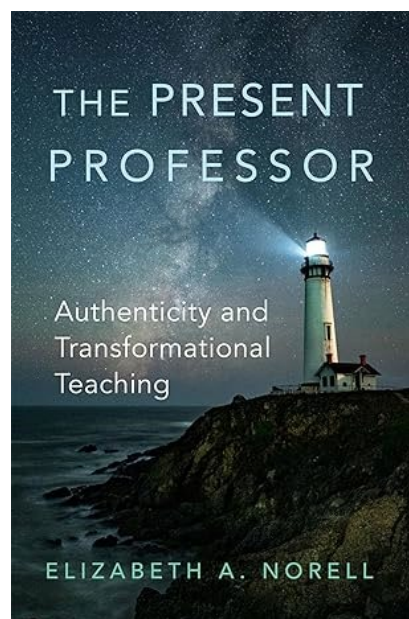
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In the opening pages of *The Present Professor*, Elizabeth Norell argues that, “When you cannot be present, you cannot teach effectively,” and “We cannot teach brains hijacked by stress.” She describes how stress affects both faculty and students—and that an academic culture that values *knowing over feeling* contributes to this stress. Norell makes the case that faculty can transform their teaching and better meet students’ needs when they spend time identifying and accepting their own teaching values.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the research and theory of teaching with presence and authenticity and covers topics such as imposter syndrome, the effect of positive relationships on learning, how academic culture affects faculty members’ perceptions of self-worth, and where faculty can find “safe harbors” within their institutions. It also includes case studies of 12 faculty from diverse fields, describing their path to developing more awareness of and putting into practice their authentic teaching selves.

Part 2 provides practical tools for faculty interested in examining their core values and beliefs and connecting them to their teaching practices. Chapters cover topics such as engaging in mindfulness practices, techniques to manage imposter syndrome and one’s inner critic, and confronting personal biases.

Norell concludes the book with reflection questions for faculty to explore their values, identify hopes for the future, and develop ideas for moving forward. She also offers suggestions for crafting a concrete, individualized plan for implementing strategies from the previous chapters.



To borrow *The Present Professor*, 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 #174 in response to question 1).

Tech Tip (A periodic column from the Center for Instructional Technology)

Enhance Your Course with Full Grade Center

Contributed by Mauricio Calpa, Instructional Design Coordinator, CIT

Are you looking for a way to streamline how students submit their coursework on Blackboard? Try creating assignments directly within content areas and folders. Below are some options to help maximize efficiency:



1. **Create Assignments**
 - Assignments automatically generate a Grade Center column.
 - Add instructions, files, due dates, and grading settings.
 - Use rubrics, anonymous grading, and multiple attempts if needed.
2. **Group Assignments**
 - Assignments can be submitted collaboratively, with all members receiving the same grade.
3. **Managing Late Submissions**
 - Late submissions are automatically marked by implementing the “Due Date” setting.
 - If enforcing deadlines, set display after and until dates to restrict access.
4. **Submission Confirmations**
 - Students receive a confirmation email for each submission as proof.
 - Faculty can retrieve submission receipts from the Grade Center.
5. **Editing & Organizing Assignments**
 - Reorder assignments easily.
 - Modify assignment settings without affecting past submissions.

Need a walkthrough? Watch the [Create an Assignment Video Guide](#) for a step-by-step guide or review the [full detailed guide](#) on creating and editing assignments. And for any questions on creating or managing assignments, [book a virtual one-on-one training session](#) with CIT staff.

Make the most of these tools to enhance your grading workflow and student engagement!

Seeking Volunteers for Blackboard Ultra Beta Testing

CIT is still looking for a few more volunteers to assist with beta testing Blackboard Ultra for Summer 2025. This is a chance to get early access and help provide feedback. 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**.



Access Matters (A periodic column from Office of AccessAbility Services)



Supporting Students with Hidden Disabilities

Contributed by Sandra Flores-Gonzales, Assistant Director of OAS

You may know how to support students with visible disabilities, such as those who need to use crutches or a wheelchair. Visual prompts help facilitate specific needs. But have you ever given thought to students with hidden disabilities?

Hidden Disabilities: What Are They?

Not all disabilities are visible. Hidden disabilities are not obvious and make it more challenging to predict the barriers that they impose. These types of disabilities may include cognitive, neurological, or other mental health functions. Some common examples of hidden disabilities include ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Crohn's Disease, and Bipolar Disorder.

Often, students with hidden disabilities experience stigma and shame associated with their disability, because they may feel the pressure to prove their disability. They may find that they are judged for their struggles more easily because there is not an obvious barrier. However, these students may need an accommodation or general academic support, so it's important to provide compassion and understanding and help them acquire appropriate assistance.

What Educators Should Know

Successful classroom environments foster a culture of respect, flexibility, and acceptance without compromising academic rigor. Ensuring equal access to learning opportunities is a hallmark of effective teaching practices. Recognizing that challenges exist for some students and implementing supportive structures may contribute to a positive learning environment and avoid misjudgments, unfair treatment, or misconceptions.

Students have the right to choose whether to disclose their disability, and a recent study found that approximately two-thirds of college students elect to not report their disability to their school ([NCES, 2022](#)). This means that all faculty likely regularly encounter students who have an undisclosed disability, but would benefit from support. Implementing inclusive teaching and learning practices that benefit **all** students—including those with disabilities—can promote engagement and academic success, ultimately reducing the time and effort required to provide remediation.

Helpful Teaching Practices

The following inclusive teaching practices maximize academic success for all students:

1. **Provide clear and consistent communication** – Ensuring all expectations and deadlines are communicated in written and verbal form and placed in various locations (syllabus, Blackboard, etc.) helps all students stay on top of requirements and can be especially important for some students.
2. **Offer flexible deadlines when possible** – Allowing extended deadlines for assignments, quizzes, or exams helps students manage their condition without falling behind or automatically getting penalized for it.
3. **Promote time management tools** – Suggesting apps or any other techniques that help with organization, reminders, and deadlines may be helpful for many students.

4. **Be flexible with what counts as participation** – Incorporating various ways for students to earn credit for participation, such as being active in small group discussions or providing written contributions, allows students options for contributing to the class in a meaningful way. It can be also helpful to let students know in advance when they will be called on to share in class.
5. **Offer lecture recordings or notes** – Providing access to recorded lectures and notes allows students to make sense of information at their own pace, while also allowing students to focus in the moment, rather than writing everything down the first time it is heard or shared.
6. **Offer a variety of assessments** – Incorporating different types of assessments over the course of the semester (including, for example, projects, open-book, recording presentations, etc.) ensures that all students have at least one opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a format that plays to their strengths—and also develop skillsets in other formats.
7. **Encourage open communication** – Establishing a classroom environment where students have choices to share their thoughts, whether in class or during faculty hours, can reinforce positive teacher-student relationships and comfortable discussions.
8. **Share a general outline or key words or concepts** – Providing supporting materials can minimize cognitive overload for some students.
9. **Provide information for [Eastern Campus Supports](#)** – Sharing information about campus resources in more than one place (syllabus, Blackboard, etc.) can promote awareness for the various programs that benefit all students at different stages of their academic journey.

Additional Supports for Eastern Students

The [Academic Success Center \(ASC\)](#) is a resource center with tutoring in various subjects and advising outreach, along with other achievement centers that create a multi-faceted foundation of resources to promote academic success.

[Eastern Student Support Program \(ESSP\)](#) is a student-driven program led by coaches who help students with academic or social skills. Students can make regular appointments to learn organization, presentation, study, and other skills.



Update from the Assessment Coordinator

Information Session on Designing Critical Thinking Assignments: Lessons Learned from the Fall 2024 Assessment Process

The CTLA recently hosted an information session for faculty teaching Critical Thinking this semester. The session included an overview of Eastern's assessment process and provided a detailed walkthrough of the five dimensions of critical thinking on the [approved ELAC rubric](#). Assessment Coordinator Suki Grandhi shared lessons learned from fall semester assessment activities, including some tips for designing assessable artifacts. In addition, examples of two assignment prompts were shared, and Bill Forte walked participants through a critical thinking assignment he developed for a Macroeconomics course. A worksheet was provided as a tool for faculty to consider their goals for their critical thinking assignment, review how well their assignment aligns with the ELAC rubric, and reflect on changes they might want to make in the future.

All faculty can access the slides and other materials from the information session on the [ELAC Assessment Sharepoint site for faculty](#). A video recording of the session will soon be added to the Sharepoint site as well.

Do you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about assessment? Reach out to Assessment Coordinator Dr. Suki Grandhi (grandhis@easternct.edu).

Deadline for Applications: Teaching Scholars Program

Just a quick reminder that the deadline for applications for the second cohort of Teaching Scholars is due **March 3**. Funded by the Davis Educational Foundation, this program is for full-time faculty members interested in 1) conducting research on their own teaching practices, and 2) sharing their new expertise with other faculty. In the 2025-2026 academic year, up to 5 faculty will be selected to 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.

Applicants are encouraged to read abstracts of projects from the first cohort of Teaching Scholars on the [CTLA website](#). Please see the [call for applications](#) for detailed information about the program, eligibility criteria, participation benefits and expectations, and application instructions.

External Faculty Development Opportunities

Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- February 27, 12 pm: [Learning Through UDL Stories: Andratesha Fitzgerald on Stories That Shape Education](#). In this free webinar, the author of *Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning* will discuss the power of storytelling for student learning. Register to receive a link to the recording.
- March 3 – 4: [Northeast OER Summit](#). This 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.
- March 3 & 10, 10 – 12 pm: [Digital Accessibility Training Series](#). This two-part series offered by Dr. Lauren Tucker, Assistive Tech Specialist at Southern, will provide guidance on ensuring the accessibility of Microsoft Word, Powerpoint, PDFs, and other documents.
- March 5, 12 – 1 pm: [Avoiding the Mid-Semester Slump: Strategies for Engagement and Motivation](#). This free webinar from Alchemy will provide practical strategies for proactively engaging students, for identifying early warning signs of disengagement, and for adjusting your course to re-energize students.
- March 5 – April 9: [Implementing Alternative Grading Faculty Learning Community](#). The Center for Grading Reform and the RIOS Institute (for Racially-Just Inclusive Open STEM Education) are partnering to sponsor a 6-week learning community for faculty to incorporate an alternative grading schema in a future course. The group will meet on Wednesdays from 4-5 pm.
- March 9 – April 6: [Book club on The Opposite of Cheating: Teaching for Integrity in the Age of AI](#). Perusall is sponsoring a 4-week asynchronous, communal reading experience, facilitated by the authors. The \$15 cost provides access to the ebook for 8 weeks.
- March 21, 1 – 2:30 pm: [Rhetorical Grammar: Antiracist Approaches to College Writing](#). This virtual workshop sponsored by the Washington Center Collaborative at Evergreen State College

will explore how faculty can use linguistic justice and critical language awareness frameworks to teach grammar and other foundational college writing skills.

- March 26, 2 – 3 pm: [Internationalizing UDL: Addressing Biased Assumptions in Language Use](#). This interactive webinar sponsored by Goodwin University will explore pedagogical strategies faculty can use to include diverse languages and linguistic points of view in education.
- March 27, 3:30 – 5 pm: [Navigating Dialogue in a Time of Misinformation and Disinformation](#). Sponsored by the Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center at the University of Michigan, this free virtual workshop is part of the center’s workshop series on Building Dialogue Skills During Adverse Times.
- April 1, 8, & 15, 10:30 – 11:30 am: [Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Ecology and Environmental Science](#). Sponsored by the Undergraduate Network for Increasing Diversity of Ecologists, this free 3-part virtual workshop will help faculty discuss with peers how to implement and assess culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants will be given 3 practical tools for implementation. The deadline to apply to participate is March 25.
- April 4, 11 am – 1 pm: [AI in Academia: Tools, Tips, & Strategies to Promote Responsible Use](#). This virtual event will provide practical strategies for helping students use AI tools for academic research, as well as resources for co-creating *with* students course policies for AI use. Registration is \$30 (Eastern is a member of the New England Faculty Development Consortium).
- April 9, 2 – 3 pm: [Navigating Student’s Overreliance on GenAI](#). In this free workshop by Eastern Kentucky University, presenters will discuss strategies for talking with students whom they suspect have over-relied on AI in assignments.

Other opportunities

- Due March 10: Applications for the 2025 Notre Dame University [Inclusive Teaching Academy](#), to be held in Chicago June 2 – 6. Participants will receive intensive training on inclusive pedagogy and spend time redesigning their course materials. Participants are provided free registration, lodging, and some meals.
- March 17 – 28 (or other dates): Educause is offering an online microcredential program on [Teaching with AI](#). The 5-module program takes 5+ hours to complete and is designed to help faculty and instructional designers integrate AI into courses.
- 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 4 – 5: The Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence at Colby College will be hosting an [Artificial Intelligence at Small Liberal Arts Colleges conference](#) in Waterville, ME.
- April 11: Indiana University is hosting the [2025 Midwest SoTL Conference](#) in South Bend, IN. This year’s theme is “Care, Kindness, and Creativity.”
- June 30 – July 2: The Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center is hosting their [annual conference](#) in St. Louis, MO. This year’s theme is “The Weight of Words: Navigating the Evolving Role of Dialogue in Polarized Times.”
- 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 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.
- Due February 28: CAST is accepting proposals for [UDL-Con: International](#), an online and in-person (Washington, D.C.) conference for educators interested in Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Due February 28: The Center for Grading Reform is accepting proposals for the [Grading Conference](#) focused on alternative grading. The conference will be held virtually June 11-13.
- Due March 14: Goodwin University is accepting proposals for the [2025 UDL Conference](#), to be held October 17 in East Hartford, CT. The theme of this year’s conference is “Agents of Learning: UDL 3.0 in Action Through Learning-Driven Design.”
- Due March 15: The Center for Innovative Pedagogy at Kenyon College is accepting proposals for the [2025 What Works conference](#), a hybrid conference to be held May 28-29. Presentations should focus on the teaching of undergraduates in small colleges and universities.



A view of recent snow from the 4th floor of the library.