



TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

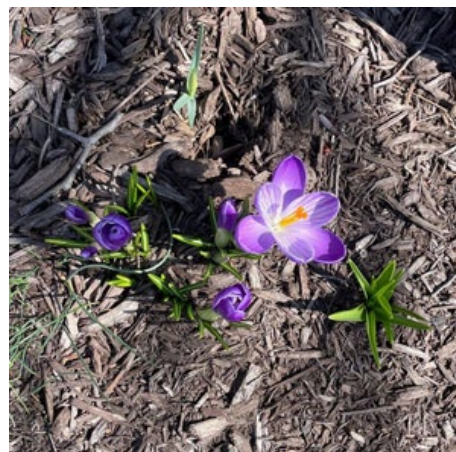
Newsletter of Eastern's Center for Teaching, Learning, & Assessment

Issue 13 • March 2025

Happy spring, everyone! I hope that Spring Break provided some time for rest (or at least the chance to cross a few things off the to-do list). Signs of spring are starting to appear on campus, including crocuses.

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Lead a Faculty Learning Community Next Year (deadline April 4)

Are you interested in leading an ongoing discussion about a pedagogical topic next year? The CTLA is currently seeking proposals from faculty who are interested in facilitating a new Faculty Learning Community for the 2025-2026 academic year. The role of the facilitator is to:

- Identify a topic for a year-long discussion
- Select a book or other reading to get the group started and help frame discussions (once the group starts meeting, other readings or resources may be identified)
- Communicate with members regarding meetings and other items (the CTLA will provide logistical support)
- Ensure that members have equal opportunity to share ideas
- Work to keep meetings on track to achieve the group's agreed-upon goals (this may involve preparing 2 or 3 discussion questions for meetings)

Please note that the facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic—but should be curious about the topic and interested in exploring it over time with faculty from other disciplines.

Facilitators will receive a stipend of \$750, paid in May 2026.

To learn more, read the [call for proposals](#) on the CTLA Sharepoint site (Eastern login required to access). [Upload your completed proposal](#) through MS Forms. **The deadline to submit is April 4.**

Interested in participating, but don't want to facilitate?

No worries – just wait a few months and apply to participate in a specific learning community! The Instructional Faculty Development Committee will be reviewing proposals for new learning communities and selecting up to three to receive funding for next year. Once the three are identified, a call will go out seeking faculty interested in participating. Keep an eye out for that call to come out in late spring or summer, with an application deadline sometime in August. Pending funding approval, participants will be eligible to receive a \$400 stipend.

Learn from this year's Faculty Learning Communities

This year, 21 faculty are participating in one of three [faculty learning communities](#), which meet every two or three weeks to investigate and implement new teaching and learning approaches. Each group is making plans to share what they have learned this year with the university community. Below is a description of two upcoming sessions led by members of the learning communities.

AI-Assisted Learning: A New Paradigm

Wednesday, April 30, 12 – 1 pm

President's Dining Room (Hurley Hall – lunch provided by the CTLA)

Led by members of the 2024-2025 AI-Assisted Learning Faculty Learning Community: Wayne Buck (Facilitator, Business Administration), Amanda Leiss (Anthropology), Li Liang (Finance), Kinson Perry (Business Administration), David Stolloff (Education), Sudha Swaminathan (Early Childhood Education), and Julia Wintner (Art & Art History).

In the 28 months since ChatGPT was released, AI has had a profound impact on education—and has affected how some students and faculty think about teaching and learning. In this session, faculty will share what they learned over the past year as members of the *AI-Assisted Learning Faculty Learning Community*. Informed by [Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning](#) (2024) by José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson, members have been discussing the possibilities and pitfalls of generative artificial intelligence for their teaching practices.

In this session, learning community members will describe how they experimented with the use of AI in their courses, either to assist with course planning and assignment design or to engage students in strategically using AI in their coursework. Session participants will hear about lessons learned from these experiences and how they affected both faculty and students. Participants will also be encouraged to imagine their own potential use of AI in their teaching.

Teaching in the Age of Distraction

Monday, April 28, 1 – 2 pm

President's Dining Room (Hurley Hall – lunch provided by the CTLA)

Led by members of the 2024-2025 Teaching in the Age of Distraction Faculty Learning Community: Racheal Pesta (Facilitator, Criminology), Jeff Calissi (Music), Caitlin Carenen (History), Stan Kolek (Psychological Science), Jennifer Leszczyński (Psychological Science), Christina Nadeau (Nursing), Becki Quick (English), and Ellen Smith (Health Sciences).

Many faculty feel like they are competing with technology for students' attention, and that students have shorter attention spans and less motivation for completing classwork than in previous years. In

this session, faculty will share what they learned over the past year as members of the *Teaching in the Age of Distraction* Faculty Learning Community. Informed by James Lang's 2020 book [*Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do About It*](#), the group explored how to overcome the challenges of teaching and learning at a time when holding students' attention often feels elusive and fleeting.

In this session, faculty will share the different strategies they tried in the classroom related to managing devices, and they'll share recommendations based on their experiences. Session participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices and approaches they might consider in future courses to help mitigate distraction—both in and outside of class.

Save the Date for May Workshop

Designing Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy Assignments

May 27, 9 am to 3:30 pm (time tentative)

The CTLA will host a workshop on May 27 designed for faculty teaching ELAC courses. Drawing on lessons learned from the first year of ELAC implementation and ELAC assessment, the workshop will include information on transparent assignment design, examples of ethical reasoning and quantitative literacy assignments, and time for participants to work on their own assignments and get feedback from peers. Keep an eye out for a full description by email in the next couple of weeks.

Apply for Upcoming Workshop (priority deadline: April 15)

Swift Waters Workshop – Sustainability Across the Curriculum

May 28, 9 am to 4 pm

***Stipend possible for Eastern faculty**

Thanks to a grant from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), 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.

"Sustainability" encompasses a bold framework of goals aimed at ending poverty and hunger, fostering peace and equity, and ensuring that all people can lead fulfilling, prosperous lives. It prioritizes a healthy planet that is safeguarded from degradation, and it requires us to address climate change and honor the needs of future generations.

The Swift Waters workshop will promote curricular innovation through exposure to the interdisciplinary themes inherent to sustainability. The "Wicked Problems" intrinsic in sustainability themes align with High-Impact Practices such as Collaborative Assignments, Community-based Learning, Diversity/Global Learning, and Research.

Workshop participants will hear from Eastern faculty about how they have integrated these complex issues into their courses, and why they feel this work is important. Participants will also have time to work on developing a new course or modifying an existing course.

Who Should Apply to Participate?

The Swift Waters Workshop is an interdisciplinary development workshop for those wishing to incorporate sustainability concepts, problems or solutions into new or existing courses. Faculty from all academic departments are encouraged to apply. In addition, we welcome faculty from all colleges and universities, supporting a community of practice beyond the boundaries of one institution that expands student access to sustainability concepts and skills in their coursework.

Grant funding is available to provide Eastern participants a stipend for developing a new course (\$500) or modifying an existing course (\$200) in summer 2025.

To participate, [complete the application form](#). Contact Dr. Patty Szczys at szczysp@easternct.edu with any questions.

Spotlight on a Book in the CTLA Lending Library

Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning

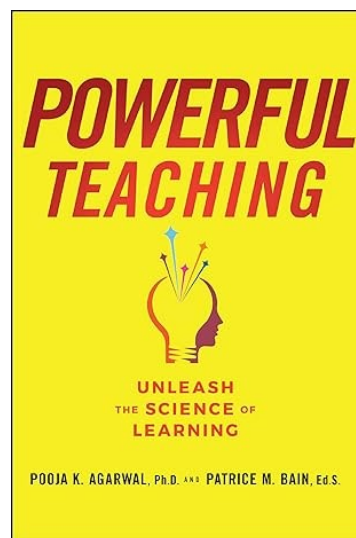
By Pooja K. Agarwal & Patrice M. Bain

© 2025 by Jossey-Bass (see [publisher's description](#))

Originally published in 2019 and now out in paperback, *Powerful Teaching* distills research on the science of learning and gives tips on implementing four key learning strategies in the classroom: retrieval practice, spacing/spaced practice, interleaving, and feedback-driven metacognition. The authors—a cognitive scientist and a K-12/university educator—stress that the strategies outlined can be implemented in less than a minute without additional prep or grading time.

The book discusses each of the four strategies in turn, beginning with a description of the research behind the strategy and followed by specific recommendations for using the strategy in different academic settings. The book also includes chapters on overcoming challenges in implementation, using the strategies to reduce student anxiety, and talking with students about the science of learning.

The authors also provide a website with [free templates and downloads](#) that faculty can use with students, including retrieval practice cards, a quiz on neuromyths, and tips sheets for students to help them practice the four strategies. (Additional tools are available for free on the [Retrieval Practice website](#).)



To borrow *Powerful Teaching*, stop by the CTLA Lending Library in room 425 of the J. Eugene Smith Library, or [fill out a book request](#) to have the book sent to you via interoffice mail (enter #173 in response to question 1).

Digital Accessibility Tip: Accessible Text in Slide Presentations

Some faculty and staff were able to participate in this year's Connecticut Tech Act Project Accessibility Training Series by Lauren Tucker. Dr. Tucker is an associate professor of special education at Southern, and with her blessing, the next few issues of the newsletter will feature some tips from the training

series. This month’s tip is around how text size, font, text color can affect the overall readability of slides in a presentation.

Text Size

To ensure readability for those with low vision, dyslexia, or even for those sitting at the back of the room, accessibility experts recommend a minimum font size of **24 points or above** on presentation slides (some experts suggest 28 points or above). They also recommend that slides include no more than six to eight lines of text per slide. Some advocates also suggest keeping each line of text short, in recognition that most individuals have difficulty reading text and listening to a speaker simultaneously.

Font

Accessibility experts also recommend that slides use a **sans serif** font, such as Calibri, Arial, or Verdana. These fonts do not have decorative strokes or serifs added to letters (some people refer to them as “legs”), which make them more readable for some individuals—particularly when reading on a screen. Serif fonts include Times New Roman, Courier, and Georgia.

Serif Fonts	Sans Serif Fonts
Times New Roman Courier Baskerville Old Face Book Antiqua Georgia	Calibri Arial Aptos Verdana

Color Contrast

Text color can also create readability problems if there is not enough color contrast between the text color and the color of the background. For example, light blue text might not be readable for some individuals on a dark blue background. Contrast is the number one accessibility issue flagged by Blackboard Ally (Blackboard’s accessibility tool). Fortunately, there is a free tool you can use to check the color contrast on your slides and documents.

Contrast Checker

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > Contrast Checker

Foreground

Hex Value
#FFFFFF

Color Picker

Alpha
1

Lightness

Background

Hex Value
#8B0E04

Color Picker

Lightness

Contrast Ratio

9.71:1

[permalink](#)

Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Pass**

WCAG AAA: **Pass**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Large Text

WCAG AA: **Pass**

WCAG AAA: **Pass**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

[WebAIM Contrast Checker](#) allows you to click on the background and the text to see if there is enough contrast between the two to meet the AA standard (or the higher AAA standard) set by [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG](#). In the example to the left, I checked the contrast of the header in the Serif/Sans Serif Fonts table above. To use the tool, I clicked on the “color picker” under Foreground. In the box that popped up, I then clicked on the small eye dropper icon and then clicked on the white text in the header of my table. The checker identified the Hex value of the color (in my case, #FFFFFF). I then repeated the step under Background, and the checker calculated the level of contrast between the foreground and background. In the case here, the contrast is 9.71 to 1. (To meet the AA standard for normal text, contrast needs to be at least 4.5 to 1.)

Animated Text

Please note that animations in presentations can be problematic for some individuals. Blinking or flashing animations (or .gifs) can [instigate seizures](#) for some.

Learn More

Interested in learning more about making sure your slide presentations are accessible? Check out the following resources:

- From WebAIM (Web Accessibility In Mind): [PowerPoint Accessibility](#)
- From Microsoft: [Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities](#)

Update from the Assessment Coordinator

All faculty teaching spring ELAC courses with critical thinking as a primary learning outcome should have received an email on March 3rd and a reminder on March 12th requesting that they upload their critical thinking assignment prompt. We have received prompts from 35 out of 41 courses – thanks to all who have submitted so far! (If you are teaching a critical thinking course and did not receive an email, please contact us asap at ELACassessment@easternct.edu.) The prompts have been anonymized, and trained faculty evaluators will begin reviewing them this week to consider their alignment with the Senate-approved critical thinking rubric. Faculty teaching critical thinking courses will be contacted at the end of the semester with instructions for submitting student artifacts.

Interim Assessment Report

Analysis has now been completed on the data gathered from the fall assessment process, including an assessment of LAC 101. The interim report is available on the [ELAC Assessment Sharepoint site for faculty](#). A comprehensive full-year report will be developed after assessment is completed of spring ELAC courses. Feedback on assessment reports is always welcome—please send feedback or questions to the Assessment Coordinator, Dr. Suki Grandhi, at grandhis@easternct.edu.

Looking Ahead Next Year: Assessing Quantitative Literacy and Ethical Reasoning

The ELAC assessment process is on a 3-year cycle, with one or two learning outcomes being assessed each year. In the 2025-2026 academic year, Quantitative Literacy (QL) and Ethical Reasoning (ER) will be assessed. Faculty scheduled to teach QL and ER courses next fall will receive an email this spring letting them know what to expect for next year. In addition, the CTLA will be hosting a workshop on May 27th on designing QL and ER assignments—information on this session will be sent to faculty soon.

External Faculty Development Opportunities

Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- 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 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.
- April 9, 12 pm: [Space Matters: Building Supportive Learning Environments](#). In this free webinar, Adam Finkelstein of McGill University will discuss the impact of physical and digital learning spaces on student success and share strategies for enhancing learning environments. Registrants will receive a recording.

Other opportunities

- 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 2 – 6: The University of Delaware is hosting [Integrating Problem-Based Learning and Artificial Intelligence](#), a virtual workshop held from 9 am to 12 pm on each of the 5 days.
- June 9 -13: The University of Guelph is hosting the second annual [Teaching with AI Conference](#), in partnership with several other Canadian universities. The conference will be held virtually.
- 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 April 4: Goodwin College is accepting proposals for the [Agents for Learning: UDL 3.0 in Action Through Learning-Driven Design Conference](#), to be held October 17 in East Hartford, CT.
- Proposals are currently being accepted for the [2025 AI + OER Institute](#), a free virtual event to be held August 8 – 9. The conference is being organized by Clover Park Technical College.
- Interest survey due April 15: The Journal on Excellence in College Teaching is accepting manuscripts for a special issue on [Reimagining Learning Outcomes Through AI-Enhanced Pedagogy](#). Manuscripts on a range of issues will be considered, include AI integration in courses, impacts on student learning and assessment, ethical and institutional considerations, pedagogical strategies and perceptions, and global comparisons. Manuscripts are due by August 1.
- Due June 23: Proposals are now being accepted for the [Original Lilly Conference on College Teaching](#), to be held November 20-22 at Miami University in Oxford, OH. The conference seeks proposals related to enhancing the quality and effectiveness of higher education teaching and student learning. Proposals must demonstrate excellence in at least one of the following categories: research, innovation, application, or integration.