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## Listserv

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## Happy Birthday, and Thank You! Ann Miller



Ann Miller is Interim Director of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning and an Associate Professor in the Nicholson School of Communication. Her research interests include the

impact of faculty communicative style on student outcomes, and health and risk communication. Dr. Miller joined the UCF faculty in 2008.

It's our birthday! Twenty years ago, the Faculty Center opened its doors to UCF Faculty. This followed a faculty senate resolution to establish the center to assist faculty in improving their teaching and foster the exchange of ideas. You might say Chuck Dziuban served as our midwife. He researched state of the art teaching and learning centers nationally, assessed the specific interests and needs of UCF faculty, and stepped in as interim director while a nationwide search for a permanent director was underway.

With the hiring of Karen Smith, we embarked on a two-decade trajectory of growth. One of Karen's goals was to make the center a comfortable place for faculty to come for help, a cup of coffee, or simply to work on their projects using the center's resources. She also organized the first Summer Faculty Development Conference (then known at the Summer Institute) in 1998. Under her leadership, and that of subsequent directors—Ida Cook (Interim), Allison Morrison-Shetler, Tace Crouse (Interim), and current executive director Melody Bowdon—the Faculty Center has hosted conferences, workshops, book clubs, and faculty development cohorts, and we've provided consultations to departments and individuals from across the university. What ties all of our programming together, especially in the face of the massive changes in higher education

and technology over the last 20 years, is two things: retaining a clear focus on teaching and learning, and a commitment to being faculty-driven.

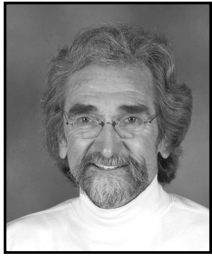
I was struck by that fact as I observed one of our semester-long faculty development cohorts last week. Nineteen faculty members from nearly as many departments sat in our classroom in CB1. As they took turns sharing specific pedagogical challenges from their classes, colleagues from all over the university brainstormed with them and shared relevant experiences from their own teaching. The conversation ranged over peer review techniques, in-class activities, and innovative uses of resources in Canvas. In just the 20 minutes or so I was there, I heard faculty from accounting, psychology, math, accounting, finance, biology, statistics, digital media, nursing, and history give input. It was an invigorating moment, and it was a microcosm of what we're all about.

In this issue of *Faculty Focus*, three faculty members who have been heavily involved with the Faculty Center offered to reminisce and reflect a little bit on our journey. The rest of the issue is a representation of our greatest resource—a range of articles by our amazing UCF faculty members about their innovations and experiences with teaching and learning.

It's the consistent support of UCF faculty and the UCF administration that have made all of this possible. At this milestone in our history we'd like to say a big "THANK YOU" to all of you who have been involved with us.

## The Faculty Center for Teaching Learning— an Alternative History of Process Not Place

Chuck Dziuban



Charles Dziuban is Director of the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness at UCF, where he has been a faculty member since 1970 teaching research design and statistics, and is the founding director of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. Since 1996, he has directed the impact evaluation of UCF's distributed learning initiative examining student and faculty outcomes as well as gauging the impact of online, blended, and lecture-capture courses on the university. In 2000, Chuck was named UCF's first ever Pegasus Professor for extraordinary research, teaching, and service and in 2005 received the honor of Professor Emeritus.

“Chuck, it will never work at UCF.” From the beginning, establishing the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) was a bumpy ride. Formal motivation came from an accreditation visit that resulted in concern about UCF's commitment to faculty development. Dear friend and colleague, then Provost, Gary Whitehouse called me using provost-speak, to say: “Chuck, I have an opportunity for you.” It took a year to convince me, but I finally began the planning process with the help of Frank Juge, Patsy Moskal and Mary Palmer—the easy part. The idea was not new. Bud Barringer, who advised pre-med students, had worked on the idea for some time and provided his original planning documents and summaries of his center visits throughout the country. Bud conceived the center as a faculty club where we could cross-pollinate our various disciplinary ideas. I traveled to centers at Winthrop, Western Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina and found three successful but very different faculty centers. However, each director assured me that if our center was to succeed, the faculty must be included in the planning process from day one.

To my horror, most of my esteemed colleagues universally responded in the negative. I am proud, however, that I turned them from doubters to enthusiasts by the end of the planning process. Ed Neal from UNC, Chapel Hill—my first speaker—addressed the issue *de jure* in 1997: faculty-perceived excessively large classes. That became our organizing theme, and despite the 40-minute delay in Ed's appearance and keeping grumbling faculty in the classroom in the bottom of the library to listen to a large-class guru, we had a turning point; we had faculty center buy-in.

The location of the center started another kerfuffle. I envisioned the center in the library where the Java City coffee shop is now as a coffee house where we could brew, play with,

develop and explore ideas. Long and dramatic conversations percolated but obviously not a coffee house. I even had renderings made: It was first located in what is now the Mathematical Sciences Building, and then in fall of 2000 where it is now in Classroom Building One.

Skip to our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, when classroom boundaries began to blur and faculty and instructors had to rapidly accommodate the changing world of information technology and knowledge acquisition. Students wanted active versus passive learning environments and faculty had to be on board or be left behind. The 10-year piece in *Faculty Focus* (January 2008, Volume 7, Number 1) is an excellent resource for those faculty and staff members who want to understand the center's historical beginning.

Writing a 20<sup>th</sup>-year commemoration for the Faculty Center made me stop and think because it means that I am 18 years away from any direct involvement in the center other than participating in events and looking forward to Melody Bowdon's Sunday night “happenings” email—now thinking about how the Faculty Center will address the future.

Steven Johnson (2011) addresses the evolution of innovation in his book *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* and in doing so proposes a model for the faculty center of the future. He describes three elements: the adjacent possible, the slow hunch, and liquid networks. The adjacent possible, the realm of possibilities available for evolution and innovation, can be constrained by existing knowledge. Many authors address similar issues but never seem to interact with each other. We probably imagine things based on what we already know and run out of analogies. I wonder if we can devote some thought to what is the adjacent possible for our faculty center as Melody leads us into the future of quality teaching and learning.

Johnson's second element is the slow hunch. World-changing ideas come over time, not with sudden inspiration. We have to persist to bring ideas to fruition. Darwin had identified all the components of natural selection at least a year before he recognized his theory. Many initiatives happening at UCF will require slow hunches—access, persistence, authentic learning, diversity and inclusion, acceptance, excellence, size. The Faculty Center is a logical choice to lead many of those initiatives, all of which are elements in our scale  $\times$  excellence = impact formula. We are big and we are bold. Our faculty center is fast becoming the hub of a liquid network that is fueled by ideas.

Technologies of all kinds enable the leap into the adjacent possible and stacked upon each other produce boundless innovations—for example, online, blended, adaptive, active,

flipped course modalities and the seemingly boundless technologies that support them. When we started the center, we had no idea what would happen, never anticipating what it has become. We persisted and have overcome the challenges as UCF grew and changed with the many innovations that the Faculty Center created in its history.

Today we take the Faculty Center as a part of our lives here at UCF. While I am not actively involved in the center any longer, my reflection on the evolution of the Faculty Center has generated my Top Ten list of favorite things about FCTL:

1. Faculty are the stakeholders
2. The summer and winter conferences promote a celebration of teaching and learning
3. The faculty writing club: from idea to paper
4. Innovative leadership
5. The stakeholders' enthusiasm for excellence
6. Faculty generate solutions—no questions asked
7. The center strengthens faculty with new ideas and innovations
8. Faculty reach out
9. A hang-out that rivals a coffee shop
10. I'm the culprit who stitched it together.

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## 20 Years of Connections

### Meg Scharf



Meg Scharf has been a member of the UCF Libraries faculty since 1984 and a member of the FCTL's Advisory Board for almost twenty years. She serves as the Associate Director for Communication, Assessment, and Public Relations. Currently, her greatest interest is in student reaction

to new and future learning spaces in UCF's 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Library.

*Only connect....*

**A** preface to E.M. Forester's *Howard's End*, it summarizes my feelings about the Faculty Center's contributions to faculty and to the University over the past twenty years.

**Connect to PEOPLE:** When Chuck Dziuban and his merry band of co-conspirators planned the FCTL, UCF was in tran-

sition (When has UCF not been in transition?). But our campus was moving from a smaller community to a larger one. But with growth came larger silos. The Faculty Center offered everyone a chance to leave their silo for a bit and meet others with different perspectives and expertise. There were opportunities to find collaborators across departments, across colleges, across campuses, and across disciplines. Workshops, brown bag lunches, discussion and interest groups became part of the landscape for faculty at UCF, resulting in acquaintanceships, friendships, and collegial relationships. We learned that FCTL could help us find partners for a project or could find someone to mentor us through one.

**Connect to RESOURCES AND SUPPORT:** At times, FCTL could connect us to the exact resource we needed. We could be connected to assistance with finding or applying for grants. Or shown how to improve a presentation. Or help us achieve goals in student learning, whether it was receiving better written work from students, or encouraging better group work or discussions, or inspiring students to pursue research. FCTL's staff and faculty fellows were always ready to reach out. Way back when, UCF advocated for faculty who needed access to technology and provided a space for meetings and team work. Even today, FCTL's space in Classroom Building One supplies a haven with computer workstations for faculty.

**Connecting us with new IDEAS:** New ways to improve pedagogy and learning were at the very foundation of the Faculty Center, and it was inspiring and energizing to learn about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and even some ideas that have now gone out of our vocabulary. For example, when was the last time you heard the phrase, "teaching with technology"? We don't say it anymore because it happens every minute. Ideas for including elements of diversity and a global outlook in the curriculum (we called it "internationalizing" back then), using assessment to measure learning outcomes were all addressed from the beginning but are taken for granted now. FCTL continues to help bring forward new ideas about learning spaces and ideas that support accreditation initiatives, like Information Fluency and the current Quality Enhancement Plan.

**Connecting us with Ideas for PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** delivered by summer & winter conferences, workshops, newsletters, website, and personal consultations. The FCTL championed ways for faculty to present their successes and research to the UCF campus and to the greater academic community. They continue to encourage faculty success. All we have to do is call, write or stop in for assistance or brainstorming. That has never changed.

We are richer for participating with the FCTL. I feel particularly enriched and encouraged by the many people I have met

through FCTL over the past twenty years. The connections formed by FCTL continue to be an important part of our University community.

Here's to the next twenty years!

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## Building Bridges through the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Alla Kourova



Alla Kourova is Associate Professor of TESOL and Russian and directs UCF STARTALK and the Study Abroad Program for Russian language and culture. She is a recipient of the National AATSEEL Excellence in Teaching Award and is the Principal Investigator of 6 federal grants over the past 4 years. Her pedagogical credo is teaching language through culture.

**B**uilding bridges across languages and cultures in our increasingly globalized world has become greatly important. The job of these “bridge-builders,” those who bring people together across borders, has never been more important than it is today. Here at UCF we have a “bridge builder” in the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. By “building bridges,” I refer to the bridges of friendship among faculty, departments, colleges, professional organizations, and community centers of Florida, as well as the bridges of understanding and empathy we hope to instill in our students. My collaboration with the Faculty Center began 7 years ago when, with the help of Eric Main, I began two cultural projects, “Connecting Classrooms” and “Russian Culture nights.”

Through Faculty Center seminars, workshops, and the summer and winter conferences, I grew—and with me the Russian language program at UCF also grew. “Connecting Classrooms” is an ongoing project where UCF students from the Intermediate Russian classes collaborate with Russian students from Lyceum #7 in Novochoerkassk in the Rostov-on-Don region. The goal of the “Connecting Classrooms” project is to improve my students’ proficiency and communication skills in Russian, to increase students’ motivation and interest in improving their language skills by providing them with opportunities for involvement and “ownership” of their learning, and to encourage mutual respect and openness to different ideas among American and Russian students. Every year students have been working on a variety of joint projects that have taken them outside the boundaries of their classrooms. In the exchange, each group of students explains and clarifies

their own culture, language, and society to the other group. In the process, students acquire a deeper appreciation for their own cultural heritage.

The Faculty Center has also helped with the pedagogical and technical support for two other projects with the UCF Russian Language Program. For the last four years UCF students have participated in a U.S. Department of State grant, under the U.S.-Russia Peer-to-Peer Dialogue Program, titled, “Getting Closer: A Cross-Cultural U.S.-Russian Project Focusing on Teaching Foreign Languages to U.S. Students and Blind/Visually Impaired Students in Russia.” This project is based on a model combining oral, auditory, and dextral abilities of the Russian students and the TEFL skills of the UCF students. The first goal of this innovative program was for the American students to learn about Russian language and culture while applying TEFL strategies for students with disabilities. The second goal was for Russian students to learn about the English language and American culture. Faculty and students from each country collaborated virtually and in-person in the exchange of cultural information and communication in both languages. Sustained by the ongoing support from the Faculty Center’s Eric Main and Kris Hestad, I was eventually led to a new idea for a collaboration with UCF’s Digital Media Department to create a video game about American culture specifically for the visually impaired students in Russia, who experienced the game during our visit to their institution in St. Petersburg.

The project we are working on now is a Fulbright-Hays group grant called “Building bridges through Language and Culture in Russia,” a curriculum development project in Russia that includes pre-departure and post-departure programs at the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. The project is focusing on culture, history, and politics as the means to understand the role and realities of Russia in the international community, its historical stages, and the current political influences. In the post-program phase of this grant the Fulbright team of 13 UCF faculty with the help of the Faculty Center is working on designing new courses, modules, and a high-school curriculum in history and literature.

From my experience, the Faculty Center has played an impactful role in connecting faculty and students as they develop an understanding of different foreign languages, culture, history, and politics. Through the study of these topics, our students will expand their knowledge of other cultures and increase their understanding of global issues facing citizens throughout the world.

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## What Can We Gain from Student Learning Gains?

Amanda Groff and Rick Brunson



Amanda Groff is Associate Lecturer and the Online Undergraduate Coordinator in the UCF Anthropology Department and served as the UCF Center for Distributed Learning's Online Faculty Training Specialist in 2015–2016.

Rick Brunson is Associate Instructor of Journalism in the Nicholson School of Communication and Media and served as the UCF Center for Distributed Learning's Online Faculty Training Specialist in 2016–2017.



Faculty are feeling the pressure. From state legislators to university administrators, everybody wants us to demonstrate and measure exactly how students are learning. They want us to show results. Beyond satisfying these demands, we should be concerned with how our students are learning and how we can measure this in meaningful ways that benefits both educators and, most importantly, students. To accomplish this, we propose that faculty consider measuring student learning gains to help us see what's working in terms of teaching methodology and practice.

### What are Student Learning Gains

A consensus on the definition currently eludes academia in the United States. However, in the United Kingdom a prominent definition is “the ‘distance travelled’, or the difference between the skills, competencies, content knowledge, and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time” (McGrath *et al.* 2015). Using this definition as a basis, we identify learning gains as the improvement in student learning between the beginning and end of a course or semester. Effectively, we argue that learning gains enumerate actual change in performance between two points in time. These two points in time can be small-scale, like a semester, or on a larger-scale, like a comparative analysis among classes. Inevitably, there will be discipline effects, so we recognize that disciplines will have varying ways for implementing methodologies.

### What do Student Learning Gains tell us?

By researching learning gains, we can directly learn how students benefit from their time in classes. Learning gains do not draw upon students' pre-existing skills or personal experi-

ences; simply, learning gains give us a clean view of what students are learning in a particular class over a specific amount of time. Because learning gains can be quantified based on a time scale, comparing learning gains allows for comparative judgments, which is valuable to us as teachers, as well as students and other departments on campus. Learning gains allow us to hone in on what is working and use that to our advantage as we educate our students. In return, we become better, more effective teachers.

### Impeding Misconception?

In order for learning gains to be properly evaluated, we must recognize there are impeding misconceptions that can hinder faculty participation. First, there is a common misconception in academia that a student's final grade is the most important indicator of learning. However, we believe it is the learning gain that indicates the effectiveness of pedagogy and the quality of an education; not whether or not a student earned an A. If a student shows improvement over the course of a semester, regardless of their final grade, then that is a win for us as teachers! Second, there is the belief that student evaluations of teachers should suffice. As we all know, evaluations are a way for students to comment on us as teachers and what they liked/disliked about the class, rather than what they actually felt they learned. Third, there is a belief that pretest/posttest studies have poor internal validity and do not work. In fact, this is quite the opposite! This method works quite effectively when utilized and constructed properly. Finally, there is a belief that assessing learning gains takes too much time. Point of fact: the time consumed managing and implementing assessments is completely under our control.

### How Can We Measure Student Learning Gains?

First, we suggest that any attempt at assessing and measuring learning gains be a collaborative endeavor that faculty formulate and design together, being mindful of the specific needs of the students, disciplines, and professions they serve.

This collaborative process can start with some framing questions such as those offered by educator and author Dr. Robyn R. Jackson of Towson University: “Once we have determined what students should know, how will we know that they know it?” “How will students show us that they have reached or exceeded the learning goal?”

At UCF's Nicholson School of Communication and Media, the journalism faculty has collaboratively designed both internal and external assessments to measure the knowledge, skills, work readiness, and personal/professional development of our students. Internal assessments are those that we deploy within specific classes. External assessments are surveys we use to capture data about our students' performance

outside of our classes at their pre-professional internships at local, regional, and national news organizations.

For example, all professional journalists must possess working knowledge of the language conventions, standards and practices articulated in the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. To measure student learning gains pertaining to this body of knowledge, we use an internal and external assessment. Internally, we perform a pretest and posttest in JOU 2100 News Reporting, the cornerstone course in the major, which measures what they have learned within a semester. Externally, we ask each student's editorial supervisor at their off-campus, semester-long internship to complete a survey that rates the student's command of Associated Press style. By designing an internal and external assessment, we can gauge what our students have actually learned in class and how they are applying it outside of class in a workplace setting.

We have designed similar internal and external assessments that measure student learning gains related to skills, such as the ability to conduct journalistic research, and work readiness, such as the ability to produce accurate digital, print and broadcast news stories under tight, strenuous deadlines. In addition to giving us data on what our students have actually learned, these measures also allow us to troubleshoot and tweak the course curriculum as needed to improve student performance and meet the demands of a changing industry.

In conclusion, measuring learning gains is not only beneficial to individual educators, but it also has the potential to impact education campus-wide. As faculty work together to implement and share assessments that work, we can identify what's working and not working in our classrooms and academic programs. We hope faculty will consider how they can use student learning gains to benefit their teaching and their students.

For more information, please view our webinar, "Showcasing Student Learning Gains," produced by the Center for Distributed Learning at <https://cdl.ucf.edu/daw-learning-gains/>.

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## Engaging Students through (and despite) Changing Technology

Tim Brown



Tim Brown joined the Nicholson School of Communication and Media in Fall of 2004, after a career in television news. He teaches primarily broadcast reporting but also courses in media and society. His research interests include media in journalism and in the classroom. His research has been published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* and *Electronic News*, among others.

Since I started in academia nearly two decades ago, I've been fascinated by the role that technology plays in the classroom, both as a help and a hindrance. At times I've been the one who pushes to use new gadgets in new ways; at other times I've been the "luddite" who has kept laptops and phones out of classrooms. Along the way I've picked up one or two things. I'm not sure they are definitive answers, but at the very least, they're some semi-learned observations.

One thing I've learned—no matter who we are, instructor or student, we are now easily distracted by the next "squirrel" that comes along on our screens. Don't believe me? Think back to the most recent conference you attended. Or a faculty forum/training session. Or even a small meeting. When was the last time you were able to make it through the entire session without drifting away to "check up on that important email" or "finalize that last quiz question?" Or, to be honest, that plane reservation or spot sale on Amazon? If we're susceptible, then we know our students are as well.

So what should we be looking for? If the focus is solely on laptops rather than mobile devices, Heflin (2017) found that students reported more engagement if their in-class device had a full-sized keyboard, rather than a smaller, mobile one. Other research (Kuznekoff, Munz and Titsworth, 2015) suggests that we should try to use the distractions to our advantage; in other words, if we assume students are susceptible to distractions (Tindall and Bohlander, 2012) on mobile devices, then make those distractions related to class. Kuznekoff and colleagues (2013, 2015) noted that students who received text messages that were NOT related to class reported the most distraction from the course material; those who received text messages related to course content showed more interaction with the content and more interest. So, maybe we should find a way to send course-related content to their devices in class?

But here's the catch—students are territorial. This seems to make sense in the current age of face-id smartphones and 4k video games, but it was even apparent in the early days of the first iPods and even flip phones. Initial studies showed hints

that students would use iPods to listen to “podcast review sessions” (Huntsberger and Stavitsky, 2007), or even try to pick up a few extra Spanish phrases while on the shuttle bus. But did students really want us in their devices? Research early on showed me that students would use devices if there was a clear reason for it (Brown, 2007; 2010). And then I was lucky enough to team up with Dr. Amanda Groff from Anthropology in my early days here at UCF, and we found evidence (Brown and Groff, 2011) that students like to create a wall between us and them on their devices. Students are fine with getting “emergency” information (e.g., “class is cancelled”) in any way we can reach them, but beyond that, they’re less interested. While some studies (e.g., Gikas and Grant, 2013; Chen, Seilhamer, Bennet and Bauer, 2015) seem to show students are getting more interested in mobile devices in education, it appears that it’s for things *the students* want, rather than goals determined by the instructor. They seem more interested in finding the information they want for themselves, rather than working within the confines of course structure. That may be good, or it may not. But it creates a challenge for us if we’re trying to reach students in different ways.

So how do we reach them? Or are we stuck in a whack-a-mole scenario where we try to reach some students one way only to recognize that we need to find a different way to reach others? It appears the “old ways” may not be so old after all. Several Educause surveys have long shown that students enjoy a “midpoint” when it comes to technology in the classroom, and that they often prefer a good mix of technology and face-to-face contact from their instructors. Again, I’ve been lucky to fall in with a couple of good groups of colleagues. In an ongoing study, Dr. Groff and I joined in with Dr. Alisha Janowsky and Dr. Patsy Moskal to look at student technology preferences (Brown, Groff, Janowsky and Moskal, 2017). We found evidence that students are still compartmentalizing their tech for both academic and personal uses, but they’re now also beginning to differentiate between *consuming* content and *producing* it. For all we may marvel at the number of Snaps a student can send during a day, students tell us they prefer NOT to use mobile devices for assignments that count toward their grade, even small, simple quizzes. Interestingly, they ARE willing to email faculty from their mobile devices, but that may be because it’s a reflex from a “push” notification, rather than going to an app and “pulling” down an assignment. And it helps establish a connection in online classes as well, which *another* group (Miller, Katt, Brown, Sellnow and Sivo, 2018) is finding. In looking at how an online class climate can impact student outcomes, we found evidence that shows regular email contact between student and faculty can have a positive effect on the student’s perception of learning. It’s important to note that email wins out over video chat or other forms of online messaging; perhaps the “business” type of communicating is still important after all.

My conclusion? Probably the same as yours—we’re still looking for answers. But maybe that’s the key: answers, rather than THE answer. We reach students in different ways each and every class, so reaching them through different technologies for different reason isn’t so unusual. What I’m still trying to figure out is which ways are going to work for ME in MY classes, and how often, if any, those ways are going to change. The comfort for me through this change is that I’m not alone in this; if anything, I’m like most everyone else in that I’m still looking for answers.

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## Walking in Their Steps: Learning History through the Role of Museum Curator

Patricia Farless



Patricia Farless is Associate Instructor in the History department, where she has taught courses in American History, US Women's History, and US Legal History. Her research interests include US Women's Legal History, Constitutional History, 19<sup>th</sup> Century History, Women's History, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Ms. Farless earned a B.A. in History and Political Science and an M.A. in History. She is an advisor for the History Department Online Program and for the Prelaw in the Humanities Minor.

Historically (pun intended), I used two types of assignments (research-based essays framed to address content prompts and a museum visit with critique) to help students understand that history is best studied as a narrative. Moreover, I strove to convey to them the differences between primary and secondary sources and the roles these types of sources serve in historical research. More broadly, through these assignments, students were asked to demonstrate their mastery of the material, use of sources, and critical thinking and writing skills.

As with most GEP history courses, my students write papers that require them to work with primary and secondary sources in support of their narrative. The museum visit and critique require students to research, visit (virtual is accepted), and evaluate a museum that fits the scope of the course. This assignment introduces students to the role artifacts serve in moving a historical narrative forward. Moreover, the museum project bridges the all-too-often existing gap between the history classroom and how a community experiences history.

These two types of assignments sat as stand-alone projects and, over time, have grown stale for students and teacher. With that said, I do believe they both offer value. I struggled with how to (1) translate their potential value into an effective learning experience; (2) synthesize the two types of above assignments; (3) introduce peer review as a way to promote collaborative learning; and (4) overall, increase active learning in my online GEP courses.

The solution came from my recent participation in the Course Innovation Project (CIP) Enhancing Active Learning Using Webcourses@UCF. Because active learning occurs when students create projects, I currently have my AMH 2010 students making their own digital museum exhibits as their final project, with components to promote metacognitive learning. To encourage active learning through collaboration, my students will participate in peer review for their final projects. This se-

mester I am offering peer review as an option. However, by Spring 2019 I will implement the peer-review process through all stages of the project. This endeavor has two major parts with Part I entailing the original museum visit and critique. At this stage, students observe and critique a museum exhibit, asking questions that encourage them to think about historical narratives visually as well as textually. Additionally, it encourages them to evaluate the role primary sources/artifacts serve in supporting or detracting from the narrative.

To spotlight my work in the Spring 2018 CIP, the remainder of this article elaborates on the steps found in the second part of the project, having students create their own museum exhibit. As part of my CIP, I employed methods used by the Transparency in Learning in Higher Education Project (*TILT* HigherEd). Through its implementation, my students gain greater understanding of the project expectations. More to the point, it creates student buy-in by explaining the “how and why” of the museum project as noted in the project description, skills gained, purpose and due dates (Winkelmes 2014).

**Part II Overview**—Students create their own digital museum exhibit, complete with narrative and a description of possible artifacts. After consultation with the instructor, students complete their exhibits and then hold a “museum exhibit reveal.” The reveal provides them with constructive feedback from their classmates. As part of the final exhibit (graded by the instructor), students write a summary of the peer-review experience and why they did or did not implement the feedback received. Besides the initial experience of constructing their own exhibits, peer review will provide students an opportunity for metacognitive and collaborative learning and to experience the impact their work has on the class as audience.

### The Assignment

**Part II—Creating a Digital Museum Exhibit as Narrative Knowledge.** This part of the project will help students become familiar with how to blend text and visual representation with the purpose of conveying effective and cohesive historical research and presentation. While this project revolves around historical study and presentation, the skills gained can be used in future courses and professional endeavors.

**Skills/Objectives:** This project provides students the ability to:

1. distinguish between primary and secondary sources
2. demonstrate an understanding of the role each source serves in historical research.
3. demonstrate research skills, critical thinking and historical knowledge of a chosen topic.
4. create historical narratives through visual and audio presentation.
5. critique, interpret, and reflect on their research.



**Step 1**—Students provide a description of the historical narrative they will convey in their exhibit and propose a list of potential artifacts. While 5–7 are required for the final project, students will initially submit a minimum of 10 artifacts. Students will then discuss with the instructor which artifacts are the most effective and why.

**Step 2**—Make an appointment to discuss research and flow of exhibit with instructor. These conferences will take place through the conference tab in Webcourses. Sources and organization will be discussed in addition to the main thesis of the exhibit.

**Step 3—Museum Reveal.** Present the museum exhibit through the conference tab (recorded) and invite other students to join. Notices must be sent at least one week prior to the reveal, announcing the time and providing a short description (2-3 sentences) of the project. This will provide students with peer feedback to possibly implement prior to submitting the final exhibit. If a student chooses not to utilize the feedback, that student must provide justification.

**Step 4—Post assignment,** including feedback received from classmates at the reveal. Students attend 2 student reveals (may watch recorded reveals) and provide written critique of at least one museum exhibit. Students will answer the same questions they completed for their initial museum visit.

Stay Tuned... My next *Faculty Focus* article will include student perception of the assignment.

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## Navigating the (Oculus) Rift: The State and Place of Virtual-Reality in the University

Landon Kyle Berry



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In 1996 I went to the theater to see the new Sinbad flick, *First Kid*. The movie tells the story of a goofy-but-determined secret service agent played by Sinbad (this is obviously a comedy), who regrettably takes on the task of protecting the teenage son of the president, Luke, who happens to be an all-around brat. In one scene, Luke runs away from the White House and heads to the nearby mall. While waiting, Luke tries his hand at playing a virtual-reality (VR) game. Growing up as a gamer, I remember being enthralled at watching Luke don a headset and gloves and dive into a game world. The scene shows Luke moving his body and then cuts to his avatar making those exact same moves in the game world. The thought that I could actually enter the world of games moved me in indescribable ways. This possibility was my dream, and surely, I thought, it would soon be realized.

Cut to 2018. While having a night in, I discovered that *First Kid* had been added to a streaming service I subscribe to. I recommended it to my wife and we sat down to watch. I was so excited when the mall scene came up, and as I described to her the amazing VR scene, I found myself watching my nostalgia lens shatter before my eyes. Before me was not the perfectly-rendered VR dreamscape I remember from my childhood, but rather a blocky, pixelated mess which showed characters blasting polygons at each other in a Trapper Keeper landscape (you can check out footage from the game, *Dactyl Nightmare*, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6t69mp0ZhE>).

While VR graphics have improved dramatically since 1996, the medium doesn't quite live up to its expectations. In the realm of gaming, promises of functionality and immersion are combated by wonky gestures and motion sickness (Fussell, 2017). For gamers who grew up on consoles and PCs, VR cannot replicate crisp lines and genre expectations. Webster (2017) describes the frustration of playing *Resident Evil 7* (a game designed natively for the PSVR) when otherwise creepy and compelling moments play second fiddle to the protagonist's hands floating lifelessly in the middle of the screen to a comic effect (which is not experienced on the PS4 console version). But how might we describe the current landscape of VR in academia? What similar concerns, successes, or frus-

trations exist? For that matter, what purposes can VR serve in teaching and learning, if any?

For many, VR use in academia may be an entirely new concept. However, VR has been used in educational settings since the mid 1970s (Greenwald et al., 2017) and became widespread in 1993 with applications serving teaching and learning, research, and accessibility purposes (Youngblut, 1998). Twenty-five years later, these three categories remain steady. VR applications currently allow students to gallery hop and explore historical artifacts in full 360° view, go on walking tours of historical and political sites, and even explore fully-rendered ancient cities, or step inside a living cell as if the user were microscopic. However, though the apps available are numerous, and though the possibilities of incorporating VR into an educational setting are many, there is no guarantee that the incorporation of VR into a class will be useful or meaningful. The goal of the remainder of this article is to offer up some guiding principles to help instructors consider if VR should be on the horizon for a specific class they plan to teach.

First, VR works best when it does one or both of the following: (1) It allows users to do the physically impossible and/or transcend time and space, (2) it allows users to experience and/or perform disciplinary tasks in a low-stakes environment. Regarding the former, we might think about VR as a separate space that you and your students can occupy. Impactful, disciplinary learning often takes shape in spaces that are designed to resemble professional spaces and facilitate disciplinary tasks (Berry, 2018). While those spaces exist on campuses (e.g., laboratories, conference rooms, computer labs, etc.), those spaces are often in high demand and present scheduling and accessibility challenges. VR can create learning opportunities in these kinds of spaces while combating issues of availability and accessibility. Imagine the challenges faced when arranging for a geology class to visit a local park. Having that on-site experience is invaluable for preparing the next generation of geologists, but perhaps that visit poses physical challenges for many of your students. Perhaps it may be expensive or conflict with your students' other class schedules. Not only can VR potentially replicate these sites and allow students to traverse and interact with them, but VR can break physical barriers by allowing students to suddenly become the size of mountains and peel back rock layers, or even become the size of a molecule and investigate the features of sediment as if they were larger than life. These learning experiences can not only support traditional, disciplinary learning, but they can create novel experiences for students, allowing them to learn in ways that would otherwise prove impossible.

Moreover, VR can be leveraged to support student learning by creating low-stakes environments in which students can practice activities that are important to your discipline. Aubrey

(2018) discusses the innovative way a professor at Hastings College teaches communication studies by incorporating a 360° VR video app. Dr. Perlich uses VR to help students practice their public speaking assignments without having to stand up in front of their peers. The app uses a pre-recorded audience to simulate the act of speaking in front of a crowd, but allows students to do so without the accompanying pressure and nervousness of face-to-face communication. After practicing in front of the virtual audience and building their confidence, the students then perform their speech in front of a live audience. This scaffolding of both assignments and skills helps to develop more fully-realized and effective communicators.

While VR can create these novel and influential learning experiences, it certainly can be used ineffectively. When used to replicate activities that could easily be performed otherwise, VR can become trivial and contrived, taking away from the learning experience. For example, if your chemistry class has access to a lab, then why use VR to replicate that exact lab and have students conduct experiments they could do locally? On the other hand, as stated previously, if that VR lab could allow students to expand atoms to incredible sizes and walk around them to observe them, then that creates a novel learning experience. Moreover, any discussion of VR would be incomplete without mentioning motion sickness. Unfortunately, most users can only experience VR in limited doses. Any plan to use VR should consider this limitation and plan for students to dive for brief stints. Requiring students to don headsets for too long could result in ill and disengaged students.

Currently, UCF is partnering with Embodied Labs to develop VR modules for medical students and professionals. Embodied Labs has already launched several highly successful modules that help medical students experience the effects of macular degeneration and alzheimer's, and further build empathy for their future patients (Washington & Shaw, N.D.). The Karen L. Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning is currently operating two VR units, one of which is mobile and can be moved to various classrooms on campus. If you are curious about VR, stop by anytime and experience it for yourself. We are happy to talk with you and discover what benefits VR may offer your specific classes.

When watching *First Kid* in 1996, I would have told you that VR is the future. While my vision of that future didn't pan out quite as I imagined, I feel confident in again saying (in 2018) that VR is the future. While the technology is still making strides toward more crisp visuals and more fluid interactions, VR is primed to offer effective and novel learning experiences for students and instructors alike.

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## Preparing for Classroom Emergencies

**Lori Dunlop-Pyle, Courtney Gilmartin, Debra Luken, Marcel Fernandez, Jose Vazquez Perez, and Valeska Wilson-Cathcart**

As faculty, we spend much time, focus, and effort perfecting our trade. We want to be sure we are educating our students in our beloved disciplines to the best of our ability. One important aspect of teaching and learning is feeling safe in our classrooms. Feeling insecure about safety can distract our students from learning and us from our primary goal of offering the best education we can. Consequently, the new UCF syllabus requirements now mandate our inclusion of a statement about classroom emergency procedures.

Taking the time to formulate emergency plans before the semester begins makes sure that we are prepared to handle an array of possible emergencies that may occur in our classrooms. When you are calm and sitting in your office with plenty of time to think, you will be able to assess the effectiveness of your plan and will be able to ask experts for their advice as well. You may also make the decision to seek extra training. You will not have these luxuries if you are formulating your plan as an emergency is occurring in your classroom. In the moment when an emergency begins to unfold, people tend to do one of three things: they freeze, they run, or they jump into action. Having a plan ready before the emergency happens will help you to be more likely to jump into action, rather than freeze or run. It will also help you to stay calm and to react with a clear mind. In an emergency your students will be looking to you for leadership. Your reaction will prompt their reaction.

UCF offers many types of training and resources which can help you prepare for classroom emergencies. Below are descriptions of some helpful resources.

### Medical Emergencies

Though UCFPD's average response time is under two minutes, seconds are critical in the event of an emergency, and your preparedness could make a life-saving difference.

There are several types of medical emergencies that may occur in the classroom. From severe events such as cardiac arrest, seizures, and allergic reactions to injuries such as cuts, bruises or falls. It is important to be prepared to handle those situations should they arise. Always be ready to call 911 in case of an emergency. Make sure to inform 911 dispatchers about the type of medical emergency and your location on campus, including building and room number.

Always take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the location of the building safety equipment, such as automated external defibrillator units (AEDs), first aid kits, and fire extinguishers. Knowing where these items are ahead of time allows quicker access in case of an emergency.

Remember AEDs may not be on the same floor as you, but there are signs posted in the buildings notifying people of their location. They are generally located by elevators or building common areas. You can also sign up for the free Pulse Point app on your smartphone at <<https://www.pulsepoint.org/>>. The app provides the AED locations on campus and valuable instructions for CPR and AEDs.

Here are some tips for a few types of situations that may occur in the classroom. Please note these are not a substitute for certification training. Always call 911 in case of a medical

emergency. If the person is responsive, make sure to obtain consent from the individual before offering any assistance.

- If someone should suddenly collapse, do not hesitate and call 911 immediately. Check the person for responsiveness and breathing. Be ready to start CPR and administer an AED.
- Signs of a severe allergic reaction include swelling and difficulty breathing. If someone should have a severe allergic reaction or asthma attack, you may help them find any medication they may need, but you may not administer any medication to that person. Monitor the situation, keeping the person calm waiting for EMS to arrive.
- If someone is having a seizure, make sure there is nothing in the surrounding area that may cause injury. Give them plenty of space and do not try to restrain them. Monitor the situation and keep them comfortable until help arrives.

To be fully prepared for any of these types of medical emergencies, departments can arrange CPR, AED, and First Aid certification courses through EHS. These courses will provide specific and hands-on training on how to respond to these types of emergencies. More information about the training is available on the EHS website. Students can get CPR, AED, and First Aid certification through the Recreation and Wellness center on campus.

To help spread awareness about cardiac emergencies, EHS and other university partners host UCF Heart Day in September. It is a campus event where participants can learn hands-only CPR, see AED demonstrations, and other emergency/health-related vendors. More details will be sent out closer to the event.

### UCF Police

- The UCF Police Department is a full-service law enforcement agency with officers who patrol campus 24/7 and 911 dispatchers who also work around the clock. UCFPD offers a variety of free trainings, from regular monthly self-defense classes for women to the collaborative Shots Fired training, a by-request class that explains how to react to worst-case scenarios and how the UCF Alert emergency notification system works.
- UCFPD regularly shares emergency preparation and crime prevention information via its website (<<https://police.ucf.edu/>>) and Facebook (<<https://www.facebook.com/UCF-Police>>) and Twitter (<<https://twitter.com/UCFPolice>>) pages. Those are great places to look for more frequent updates, and the videos shared there are helpful classroom training tools.
- Officers from the Community Partnerships Unit also are available for classroom visits and to answer any questions.

### Security and Emergency Management

- The Department of Security and Emergency Management keeps UCF secure through the management of cameras and access control and safe via the planning for and management of large-scale emergencies.
- In addition to supporting UCFPD's Shots Fired training, the department manages UCF Alert, the campus mechanism for reaching the community in the event of a variety of major emergencies.
- The Office of Emergency Management maintains UCF's crisis plans and is available to assist departments and faculty members with building their own plans, exercising emergencies, and securing office spaces.

### Resources from CAPS

- Significant changes in behavior, appearance, and academic performance can be signals that an individual is experiencing mental distress. UCF has resources to support these students, but faculty members play a critical role in making that connection and assisting the university with intervening before crisis level.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is the only free-of-charge campus agency designated to provide comprehensive psychological services to university-enrolled students. The staff at CAPS seeks to strengthen student success by minimizing the interruption of learning caused by mental health concerns. CAPS offers initial assessments, brief individual counseling, group therapy, consultations, workshops and educational presentations on a variety of topics. CAPS provides crisis intervention through walk-in services during the day (normal business hours) and offers after hour's assistance through CAPS Crisis Line (407-823-2811, press #5).
- CAPS supports faculty as well and offers professional consultations to assist faculty in their work with students. Separate from CAPS, UCF Student Care Services has a Student of Concern process that allows UCF community members to report concerning students at <[https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofCentralFlorida&layout\\_id=10](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UnivofCentralFlorida&layout_id=10)>. If you believe a student poses an immediate threat to self or others, skip the form and call 911 immediately.



## Advising & Devising: Collaborating with Graduate and Undergraduate Students in Sharing Course Materials

Martha Garcia



Martha García is Professor of Spanish and Coordinator of the Honors in the Major for the College of Arts & Humanities. Her research concentrates on the aesthetic aspects of the literature and culture of Medieval Spain, as well as the early Modern and Enlightenment periods of Spain. She authors academic books and articles, contributes to edited collections, and edits a scholastic edition of a theatrical masterpiece of the Golden Age theatre.

### I. Pedagogical background

We all agree that *assessment* constitutes a key factor in teaching and learning. However, defining and applying *assessment* is difficult across interdisciplinary subjects. In the most recent edition of *Assessing Student Learning*, a “Four-Step Teaching-Learning-Assessment Process” has been delineated as part of a constant cycle of synergic concordance:

1. Establish clear, observable expected *goals* for student learning
2. Ensure that students have sufficient *opportunities* to achieve those goals
3. Systematically gather, analyze, and interpret *evidence* of how well student learning meets those goals
4. Use the resulting information to understand and *improve* student learning (Suskie 8)

This sequence emphasizes teaching first, learning second, and then assessment third. All three components are necessary to obtain the outcomes. Another difficulty is assessing intangibles or process outcomes. The following model describes *guided collaboration* among students and faculty in relation to the four steps in this cycle of assessment and its impact beyond the classroom.

### II. Context and innovation

Graduate students designing pedagogical artifacts for undergraduates benefits faculty like me trained mainly in F2F classroom instruction. Since I have had to find methods and tools that may be compatible to the objectives of my F2F courses and convert them for my “new” mixed/blended online culture, the main objectives of the subjects intended for instruction and their components in modern languages and literatures have remained relevant aspects during this process. I find myself in the middle of traditional teaching in the classroom mixed with new online possibilities. Assigning students a specific *goal* that may contribute timeless information to the next generation has become a new dimension of discovery for me and my students. When I teach language or literature courses, one of

the main obstacles to overcome is sometimes the lack of self-incentive from the student population regardless their majors or area of specialization. This challenge has led me to search for viable possibilities. Producing outcomes that demonstrate a worthwhile skill developed by the students has become an ideal solution. Since our classes consist of *interdisciplinary* majors and minors, reading and writing components have become crucial areas of attention to obtain the necessary equilibrium in the assessment of the *four skills* that students may need to cultivate in language courses: understanding, reading, speech, and written outcomes. These four language skills prepare the students to succeed at the level of linguistic, cultural, and literate competence expected and required for educational and professional aims.

### III. Implementation and assessment

Since 2014, I have been working on collaborative online materials where graduate and undergraduate students have had the *opportunity* to collaborate and share their contributions for the benefit of their peers. Motivating graduate students in F2F courses to produce materials for undergraduate online platforms has encouraged interconnection among the student populations. Graduate students, many school teachers themselves, prepare and contribute a synopsis of each of the chapters that undergraduate students will read in their appropriate mixed courses. This assignment takes place with the guidance of the faculty member. The outcome became an efficient resource that could be used by undergraduate students in Web-courses. This product was also used for pedagogical purposes for the graduate students who are teaching in their respective school districts. It is important to note that this model is fully germane and compatible for interdisciplinary and study abroad purposes. I have applied this model in interdisciplinary projects and working with undergraduate students abroad in 2016 and 2017. The results have provided artifacts that they can share with their peers and keep with themselves like a tangible object of their learning commitment.

### IV. Outcomes and transferability

The following illustration represents a sample artifact and its pedagogical use in the online learning and teaching environment designed by college students and potentially suitable for high schoolers who are preparing themselves for the university journey experience.



The faculty member guides the graduate and undergraduate students throughout the entire process; however, the learners become more aware of the responsibility of acquiring knowledge and its dissemination. The outcome of this distinctive approach represents a product by graduate students, for undergraduates, and with the advanced or senior high schoolers in mind. An effective and enjoyable practice to *improve* with emphasis in *guided collaboration*.

## The Florida Prison Education Project

Keri Watson



Keri Watson is Assistant Professor of Art History in the School of Visual Arts & Design. The recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts Big Read grants, an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, and a Fulbright-Terra Foundation Award in the History of American Art, she teaches courses in modern art and the history of photography and specializes in twentieth-century American art.

**M**ass incarceration is among the most crucial issues of our time. Although the United States comprises only 5% of the world's population, we house more than 20% of its prisoners, and since 1978, the U.S. prison population has increased 408%. Florida's incarcerated population has risen

1000% over the last 40 years, and our state now has the nation's third largest prison system, with 100,000 people behind bars. Nearly 3 million people in Florida have a criminal record, and Orlando has one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation.

Each year 33,000 people are released from Florida prisons, and another 80,000 are released from community supervision. Approximately a third of these ex-offenders will be re-arrested within three years, but evidence shows that education increases the likelihood of post-release employment by 58%, reduces recidivism by 40%, and saves taxpayers money. Yet, until last year, Florida was one of only 12 states that did not offer any college courses to prisoners. To address the lack of higher education in Florida prisons, a team\* of UCF faculty and staff began the Florida Prison Education Project. The Project provides educational opportunities to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in Florida, researches the benefits of prison education, and integrates the study of justice into the University of Central Florida curriculum.

Recently designated one of UCF's Community Challenge Initiatives, the Florida Prison Education Project supports UCF's Mission and Strategic Plan in numerous ways. It expands educational access, serves at-risk populations, and offers students the opportunity to participate in internships, which are among the high impact practices that have been proven to increase retention and degree attainment. FPEP is also partnering with Digital Learning to leverage technology to enhance prisoner learning and with DirectConnect™ and SDES to support the educational success and degree attainment of prison-transfer students. FPEP\* also presents our new downtown campus with opportunities to offer reentry and transition services to men and women recently released from area prisons. Finally, the Florida Prison Education Project provides research, service, and mentoring opportunities to faculty, post-docs, and graduate students.

Prison education is at the forefront of the national conversation about criminal justice reform, and UCF, as a leader in partnerships, can leverage its scale and excellence to make a tremendous impact on our community. Nearly 100,000 people in Florida are behind bars. The Florida Prison Education Program could halve that number, save millions of dollars, and positively impact the lives of those incarcerated, as well as the lives of their children, families, and the wider community. Already over 50 UCF faculty and staff from across the university have volunteered to participate in the Florida Prison Education Program. Are you interested in learning more about the Florida Prison Education Project? Visit our website <[www.cah.ucf.edu/fpep/](http://www.cah.ucf.edu/fpep/)> or contact one of us to learn how you can help.

**\*Meet the Florida Prison Education Project team**

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## Contemplative Teaching Practices in ESL Classrooms

Meltem Oztan-Meli



Meltem Oztan-Meli is Lecturer at UCF Global. She earned her Ph.D. in the Literature, Cultural Theory, and Social Practice program in English at Kent State University. Concerns with diversity, equity, and inclusion have been central to Dr. Meli's research, teaching, and advising at UCF.

There is little doubt that the fast pace of college life is the leading cause of excessive amounts of negative stress affecting students. In response to the outside stress students bring into the classrooms, I developed an interest in contemplative and integrative teaching practices and decided to focus on non-traditional teaching modalities. Bell hooks (2013) encourages us to “build into our teaching vision a place where spirit matters, a place where our spirits can be renewed and our souls restored” (p. 183). It is this place, the wholeness that hooks urges all educators to cultivate in their classrooms. In a similar vein, Lewin believes that educational institutions “should do more to encourage quiet times, pauses, reflections, and silences, to create spaces or attention and contemplation” (357). My goal, then, was to encourage my students to discover this unique space for attention, contemplation and kindness. Fostering this contemplative environment within my classroom became an integral part of my pedagogy. To explore the benefits of contemplative pedagogy further and to observe its successful integration into our classrooms, I joined in a funded course innovation project in Spring 2018. Our cohort consisted of faculty from diverse disciplines such as departments of Philosophy, Theatre Studies, Art History, Psychology, Management and UCF Global. Inspired by practices presented and practiced in our special focus group, I decided to incorporate two particular contemplative practices into a communication skills class I was teaching. My intention was to observe the effects of the integration of contemplative ped-

agogy on development of interpersonal communication skills in an ESL class.

Central to contemplative pedagogy is the discovery of inner awareness as well as being present in the moment. Contemplative teaching practices ranging from deep listening practices to guided meditation, yoga, writing haikus, mindfulness, self-inquiry, contemplative journal writing and nature observations. These methodologies are used in classrooms to reduce negative feelings of stress, improve attentiveness and foster compassion and empathy. Fran Grace in "Learning as a Path, Not a Goal: Contemplative Pedagogy- Its Principles and Practices" emphasizes the benefits of utilizing contemplative methods in classrooms and explains the outcomes of these practices as increasing positive feeling states while decreasing stress hormones, aggression and hostility (p. 112). Teaching international students from various ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds, I sometimes experience fragmented classrooms in which some students are polarized and isolated. Some students experience hostility and discomfort, as some of their peers tend to be disrespectful according to their own cultural norms. In order to address these challenges in my classroom, my interest continually increased to explore the influence of contemplative strategies on student stress, and I decided to introduce my students to mindfulness meditation. As Grace contends, "When students learn meditative methods of self-regulation, they are able to shift swiftly from stressful states to positive states, and this has an immediate and long-lasting benefit to their physiological health, academic performance, and emotional well-being" (p.113). Before the mindfulness meditation exercise, I explained to my students the benefits of slowing down their minds and focusing solely on the present moment. I started my classes with a 5-minute mindful breathing meditation, followed by a deep listening practice. First, I guided students to close their eyes, pay attention to their breathing, and concentrate on the silence. Some students showed resistance and expressed their opposition, while others ridiculed the practice. Yet, after a minute, a peaceful silence filled the classroom.

After the opening meditation, students were more receptive to the next contemplative practice. I paired each student with a peer from a different linguistic and cultural background, and asked him or her to listen to the other for three uninterrupted minutes. The listener's focus was not to identify and correct the grammatical mistakes or pronunciation errors, but just to concentrate on the present moment, listen to the other mindfully and empathize with him or her. During the time of deep listening, the listener is discouraged from making any judgments, but to listen to the speaker with an open mind. At the end of the three minutes, the listener paraphrases what she/he heard from the speaker so that the speaker feels that his/her voice is heard. The overall purpose of this practice is not

only to overcome prejudices, but to also share this very moment with another who may have a different race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious identity, socio-economic class and sexual identity. As Zimmerman and Morgan comment (2012), this interaction enabled my students to be "caught up in the same experience," thus reaching a place of mutual understanding, compassion and kindness (403).

My analysis of the integration of contemplative practices into my classroom revealed two important observations. First, I encountered some difficulties with the incorporation of both of the practices as well as some resistance from certain individuals. Yet, in time we were able to maneuver through the challenges and address communication barriers. Second, in the deep listening practice, some interactions proved to be positive, while some students shut down dialogue and refused to talk. However, students who were self-conscious in the initial moments of the practice, started to move through their fear, embraced the moment and expressed their feelings with relative ease. Thus, my goal to achieve a contemplative space that would allow for multiple voices was accomplished. During the debriefing period, I asked students to share their experiences of this practice if they felt comfortable in doing so. While some students chose to share their experiences verbally, others expressed a desire to write them down as a self-reflective practice. With their newly discovered contemplative awareness, they reported feeling more positive towards their peers, being fully aware of and attentive to the moment, and increased concentration. They also expressed that listening deeply to these diverse voices made them appreciate differences. In the following classes, I observed a more engaged class and significant improvement in direct interactions. As the integration of these contemplative practices into an ESL communication skills class yielded positive results, my intention is to continue utilizing these practices and experiment with others as a pedagogical tool in second language classrooms.

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## ***Submissions***

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